Hermeneutic Understanding and the Liberal Aims of Education

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to adapt Hans-Georg Gadamer's conception of hermeneutic understanding such that it may be of service in the conceptualisation and promotion of liberal educational aims.

The thesis takes as its starting point an account of the liberal aims of education which can be summarised as an attempt to transpose the political liberalism of John Stuart Mill into practical educational aims. The argument is made that, in the context of late modernity, these aims are in need of renewal and reinterpretation.

In particular, traditional conceptions of the liberal educational aim of personal autonomy based on a model of informed desire satisfaction are argued to be inadequate. Whilst the model of informed desire satisfaction in general is endorsed, criticism is brought to bear on the attendant account of the cognitive requirements for living a liberally conceived flourishing life. Specifically it is argued that the information needed for living a flourishing life cannot be adequately understood as objective knowledge. Rather, knowledge of oneself, of others, and of the institutions and practices of one's society, is argued to be better described as a form of social scientific understanding. Furthermore, this understanding is argued to be hermeneutical in character.

Following from the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology pioneered by Heidegger and developed by Gadamer, an attempt is made to formulate a version of hermeneutic understanding that is philosophically acceptable and of potential practical value in the articulation and promotion of liberal aims of education. In response to the structures and processes associated with the practical and critical conception of hermeneutic understanding generated, some key liberal educational aims are rethought. Consideration is given to the means of promoting hermeneutic understanding in learners as a contribution to the fulfilment of these aims.

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Introduction

Aims and Objectives

The aim of the thesis is to explore how the liberal educational aim of the flourishing of the individual in late modern society might be better understood, and further usefully articulated and promoted, through consideration of insights derived from the tradition of hermeneutic understanding. With reference to the conceptual resources provided through hermeneutic phenomenology, positive suggestions are made for reinterpreting some key liberal educational aims, and for the modification of educational structures, processes, and practices, whose objective is to promote the liberal aims of education. To this end, the thesis attempts:

1. to conceptualise the aims of education in a manner appropriate to our particular socio-historical context.

2. to establish that the flourishing of the individual, as an educational aim, involves cognitive requirements which may benefit from rethinking, and development and modification, in response to the peculiar and changing nature of modernity.

3. to show that in re-articulating aims and their application in response to the changing context, it is useful to go beyond the current philosophical orthodoxy, and to draw upon other traditions of thought, in particular revealing the potential value of the conceptual resources of the tradition of philosophical hermeneutics.

4. to articulate a credible and practical version of hermeneutic understanding.

5. to examine how the insights derived from the tradition of hermeneutic understanding might help in thinking about some liberal educational aims.

6. to explore possibilities for promoting hermeneutic understanding on the part of learners as part of educating for good lives.

7. to reflect on the thesis as a late modern text in order to illuminate hermeneutical methodology.

8. to draw general conclusions as to the value of hermeneutic phenomenology to the articulation and promotion of liberal educational aims, and to raise questions for liberal educational research that arise out of the thesis.

Structure and Content

The structure of the thesis is straightforward and consists of seven chapters that follow in a traditional logical sequence. The first chapter sets the scene by introducing the idea of educational aims and by providing the social context in which they are played out. Chapters 2 and 3 are largely expository, but also critical. The critiques are there to identify a need to, and to create the linguistic space in which to, explore alternatives. Chapter 4 is an attempt to manufacture useful conceptual apparatus through a practical reconstruction of hermeneutic understanding. Chapters 5 and 6 employ the conceptual apparatus generated to help to rethink the conception and promotion of liberal educational aims. Chapter 7 is evaluative and reflective.

Chapter 1 The Aims of Education in Late Modernity

The first section of chapter one is devoted to a conceptual analysis of aims in education, an analysis which underscores the role and function of aims and 'aims talk'. The strategy employed involves firstly giving an introductory account of the relationship between the derivation of aims for education and the context of human relationships, ideas, social life, technology, and the social and political framework. It is argued that the character and purpose of aims for education are understood most usefully in the light of their sociological, cultural and economic historical specificity. Aims are presented as culturally and historically local phenomena, contextually generated and contextually relevant. Further to this, aims are described in their temporal context. Historically, the rethinking of the aims of education is associated with periods of social change. Hence the development of educational aims is presented in its temporal aspect as a response to questions raised by current concerns and with reference to the consideration of alternative possible futures. Aims are also considered with regard to their power within the field of education, and more widely. Overall, the section seeks to conceptualise aims in a manner which reveals their particular importance, role, and character. A conceptualisation which makes a claim that 'aims talk' needs to refer in particular ways to its 'sociological' context.

The second section presents the claim that we are now living through an unprecedented period of change. In its historical specificity, 'late modernity' is shown to exhibit unique features and characteristics, and to portend unique future possibilities and problems. The changes to the social, moral and epistemological context, thought to affect the generation and application of the aims of education, are described and analysed. From the analysis of the portrait of 'late modernity', a description is produced of some of the phenomena we might take account of in understanding educational aims in our late modern context. These are: increasing reflexivity, globalisation, and a changing epistemological environment. The characterisation of our era as 'late modern'

(contrasted with 'post-modern') reveals modifications to social institutions and practices, altered mechanisms for establishing personal identity, changed moral and experiential frameworks, and increasingly important dynamic interconnections between the personal, the social and global, mediated through information and its attendant technologies.

Chapter 2 Understanding in the Liberal Aims of Education in Late Modernity

The aim of the second chapter is to present a case which shows that concepts and practices derived from the tradition of phenomenological hermeneutics might be relevant, and potentially of value, to the articulation of the liberal aims for education in the period of late modernity.

The first section comprises a mostly expository account of the justifications and arguments supporting liberal educational aims. This exercise aims at providing a description of the characteristics and value of the liberal approach, which in turn can be analysed. An analysis of the assumptions underpinning the model, and a description of the requirements for its practical application, focuses on the sorts of knowledge needed to bring the aim of 'informed desire satisfaction' to fruition. These 'cognitive requirements' for the good life are unpacked to reveal the implied sociological and epistemological assumptions.

In the second section, the adequacy of existing accounts of these cognitive requirements, described in the liberal model, is critically assessed in the light of the analysis of late modernity. The argument is put that underpinning an adequate model of liberal educational aims in the late modern period is a related conception of understanding. An alternative, additional, and potentially fruitful source of the philosophical underpinning of understanding is indicated in the ontologically grounded phenomenological tradition of philosophical hermeneutics.

Chapter 3 Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics

Chapter 3 presents an interpretation of Gadamer's conception of hermeneutic understanding.

It begins with an introduction to the various strands or traditions which have emerged in the history of hermeneutical thought. These include biblical, romantic and interpretative hermeneutics. The exposition proceeds through a consideration of one specific path, tracing the development of hermeneutical understanding which begins in ancient Greek myth and develops via classical Greek thought and through the German tradition of philosophy and social science, and which feeds into some contemporary post-modern thought. The objective is to delineate the key ideas informing current hermeneutical philosophy.

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is examined and explained. Particular consideration is given to the use made of existential, ontological and phenomenological philosophy and the philosophy of language and communication in the construction of hermeneutic concepts. Specifically, attention is given to the input of Plato, Aristotle, Husserl and Heidegger. The key concepts, structure and processes of Gadamerian hermeneutic understanding are presented and discussed in an attempt to give a clear account of Gadamer's position. This position is described in terms of its positive political and educational potential, and with reference to its associated model of communicative action.

Chapter 4 Hermeneutic Understanding as Practical Philosophy

Chapter 4 aims to develop a version of hermeneutic understanding that is philosophically acceptable and of practical value in the field of education. In order to achieve this, some of the central objections to Gadamer's hermeneutic phenomenology are addressed, and alternative formulations of some hermeneutic ideas are discussed.

The first section deals with the concern that Gadamer's position is weak in its scope for generating criticism. The loss of objectivity as a basis for criticism, and the consequent relativistic implications for knowledge, are discussed. Alternative accounts of critical hermeneutics are put forward. An attempt is made to describe the character of criticism according to the hermeneutic approach.

The second section addresses the difficulties associated with any attempt to move hermeneutic phenomenology from a theoretical discourse to a practically useful way of understanding. In exploring the possibility of hermeneutic method, the idea of 'normative method', and the parallels between Gadamer's hermeneutics and Aristotle's conception of 'phronesis' are discussed.

The final section offers (through a reformulation of Gadamer's hermeneutics, and by drawing on Sean Gallagher's notion of 'moderate hermeneutics'), a 'practical-critical' version of hermeneutic understanding that might benefit the articulation and promotion of liberal aims.

Chapter 5 Hermeneutic Understanding and Liberal Aims of Education

Chapter 5 considers how some key liberal educational aims might be rethought with respect to the alternative cognitive structures, processes, and outcomes associated with hermeneutic understanding.

In the first section, the model of informed desire satisfaction is reinterpreted in light of the hermeneutic approach. Distinctions are drawn between self knowledge and self understanding, and the understanding relationships between persons and institutions and other persons are reconsidered.

Section two examines the liberal concept of personal autonomy from the hermeneutical perspective. In particular, the notion of 'critical distancing' is reconsidered and an alternative formulation is suggested.

Section three looks at the promotion of intellectual virtues as an educational aim. Specifically an hermeneutic virtue of 'openness' is suggested and is compared and contrasted with liberal notions of open-mindedness.

Section four looks at how the hermeneutic approach might encourage us to think again about the liberal aims of fostering good citizenship, good intercultural relations, and about education as initiation into cultural traditions.

Chapter 6 Promoting Hermeneutic Understanding

The sixth chapter speculates on the possibilities and means for promoting hermeneutic understanding on the part of learners as a contribution to the fulfilling of liberal educational aims.

The first section looks at the particular account of learning and at the idea of the educated person that might be associated with hermeneutic understanding. The notion of educating for 'effective historical consciousness' is explored.

In section two, the practicalities of educating for hermeneutic understanding are explored with reference to the curriculum. Different elements of the curriculum are discussed and assessed for their merit in fostering the skills, disposition, and cognition, associated with hermeneutic understanding.

The third section entails a consideration of the character and role of educational institutions that might contribute to the promotion of hermeneutic understanding.

Section four focuses on educational method. In particular, the forms of, and importance of, dialogue, in the process of hermeneutic understanding, are described and assessed.

Chapter 7 Reflections and Conclusions

The final chapter comprises two sections; the first reflecting on the thesis as a late modern text, and the second drawing conclusions relating to the liberal educational research project.

Reflections on the thesis are intended to reveal more about hermeneutic methodology by examining a diversity of perspectives on the meaning and significance of the text. The aim is to produce a hermeneutical understanding of the text.

The concluding section of the thesis attempts to evaluate the contribution of hermeneutic phenomenology to research into liberal aims of education. The chief purpose of this section, and of the thesis as a whole, is to stimulate questions pertinent to liberal educational research.

Chapter 1. The Aims of Education in the Context of Late Modernity

1.1 A Conceptualisation of the Aims of Education

The following account of the concept of aims in education has, in this thesis, the limited objective of illuminating the character and function of substantive aims as they appear in their practical context. The purpose of this exercise is to help to provide the conceptual apparatus necessary for the critical evaluation of existent aims of education and to prepare the ground for exploring the requirements for their practical application. To this end I will attempt to present a picture of the concept of aims as it is used in education and to focus on the complex relationship of aims with their educational and social context. Of course it is beyond the scope of this work (and not really desirable for my purposes) to give a full account of the history of the aims of education, or to consider in detail a representative selection of substantive claims made by those who have thought and written on the subject. I should in this vein lay down the disclaimer that comprehensiveness is not my intention here. Instead, I shall present a brief portrait of the aims of education, using examples for the purpose of illustration, in order to give a slant on a limited collection of features as is necessary for the task in hand. Hopefully by the end of the section, I will be in a position to present a useful, if contentious, working understanding of the concept of aims for education that will help to show why they are important, and what is involved in their development and their application.

An early question may be raised as to the suitability of considering aims as a starting point for practically oriented philosophy of education. One might wonder, like Richard Peters, whether educators need aims (Peters, 1959), and following from that, whether educational theorists are well employed in talking about aims. One response to this (and to other objections to 'aims talk') is to point out that to have aims is unavoidable given the purposive character of education, that those who deny their value or existence are either deceiving themselves or indulging in sophistry (see White, 1982, Ch.1). A second possible response is that the articulation of aims has positive value. In another text, Peters grants that aims talk has at least limited utility; 'We tend to ask about aims in contexts where we think it is important to get people to specify more precisely what they are trying to do.' (Peters, 1973). I would wish to sound a less cautious note and to make a positive claim for the importance of aims and their articulation in what we might call the wider 'social practice'[1] of education. That is, I want to argue that aims have a particular role to play in the development of educational practice, and that their importance should be judged in terms of their moment in this practice. This is to claim more than that aims are necessary insofar as they underpin practice as general clarificatory or even justificatory statements. What I want to say is that aims are involved integrally and may be uniquely pro-active and action guiding. In order to explain and sustain the bolder claim it will be useful to begin with some conceptual analysis.

Though the current scene is somewhat more complex than the following account may allow, contemporary philosophical work that takes as its focus the aims of education, can still be divided usefully into two aspects: the analytic and the substantive. Each of these may be represented according to its characteristic approach. In the first case, philosophers can view the aims of education from the perspective of formal inquiry, the object of their labours being the concept of aims. Here, the starting point may be an exposition of the way in which the term functions in our everyday language or an attempt to get to grips with its logical relation with associated terms. Such an approach concentrates the mind upon the meaningfulness or otherwise of terms like 'the aims of education' and attempts to bring clarity to bear in allied discourse. The practical purchase of this philosophical orientation is twofold. It can serve both to caution us about the real everyday dangers of conceptual misuse that can arise out of real everyday confusion, and it can place limits on what we can sensibly talk about. In the second case, philosophical accounts of the aims of education involve us in taking an active role in revealing and generating the content of claims about what our aims are, or could or should be. Seen in this way, the aims of education are understood as philosophically justified statements of belief that may be supported or attacked, acted upon or not. Their practical value is defined with reference to action.

In the present work I am concerned to make claims according to the latter mode, that is to put forward views and arguments about the substance of educational aims; to do practical philosophy. This implies going beyond philosophy conceived in the more restricted sense, as defined in the analytic tradition. The suggested divorce of the two traditions cannot however be absolute. Leaving behind conceptual analysis is not an option. In addition to gaining from the benefits of the analysis of concepts as outlined in the previous paragraph, there is a further important reason why it is necessary to look at the work on aims carried out from the perspective derived from the analytic tradition. Positively, the analysis of concepts can help in building our understanding of the nature of aims, via the clarification of the working definition of aims, such that new lines of criticism and new possibilities for suggestions about substantive aims are opened up. That is to say, conceptual analysis may provide insights into the notion of aims which are relevant to this piece of work not only in so far as it helps with the clarification of terms but also, more widely, in helping to think about the relation of actual aims to actual education and to actual society. In this practical vein, what is required is a conceptual account of the practical nature of aims. We need to examine things like their role, function, purpose and so on.

Richard Peters' work is of value again here as we try to get to grips with the concept of aims. In his essay; 'Aims of Education - A Conceptual inquiry' (ibid.), he articulates three key points about the usage of 'aims', the first of which has been quoted above. Referring back to the original home of the concept, he describes two further properties of the concept. These are (2.) that 'Aims suggest the concentration on and the

direction of effort towards an objective that is not too palpable or close to hand.', and (3.) that 'Aims suggests the possibility of failure or of falling short.' The latter two points are helpful in that they separate aims from goals, objectives and the like, whilst locating them in the same conceptual ballpark. There seems to be something intuitively lacking here though in that this account doesn't describe aims as anything conceptually very distinct from objectives. The sole difference appears to be one of degree, the degree of remoteness or vagueness. 'Aims' sound like long term or speculative objectives and as such don't appear to have the conceptual value of qualitative difference.

Perhaps more usefully, a distinction in kind rather than degree can be found in the work on delimiting the concept of aims in Colin Wringe's 'Understanding Educational Aims' (Wringe, 1988, Ch.1). Here Wringe distinguishes aims firstly from ideals and secondly from objectives. Unlike aims, ideals are unrealistic because they represent attempts to embody perfection. Objectives differ from aims in that they are finite, they can be finished (ibid. p.8). It is the contrast with objectives that is most useful here. 'For our purposes the essential logical feature of aims is that, by contrast with objectives, they are of an open-ended, on-going kind.' (ibid. P.14).

These two features, ongoingness and open-endedness, are seen by Wringe as providing the grounds for going beyond points 2 and 3 of Peters' formulation. Whereas, for Peters, the remoteness and non-achievement of ends may be an empirical or contingent fact, according to Wringe's formulation aims cannot be reached in principle. The stronger claim made by Wringe is argued with reference to the peculiarity of the 'objects' of aims, that is the particular kinds of things that aims are about. These 'objects', being always non-finite, on-going, and practical, have built into them the possibility of always doing more. Wringe's example is the aim of the promotion of scientific research. It would be unintelligible to claim that this aim had been accomplished. There are no imaginable circumstances in which this aim can be finished, there is no state of completion. Wringe's conception provides an explanation for the unachievability of aims by limiting what we can count as aims to those things that cannot in principle ever be finished. The essence of the contrast of aims with both ideals and objectives is then is that by nature of their object, aims provide the direction for a process, but not targets or end states.

However, on closer inspection, Wringe's account of the concept of aims may be revealed to be weakened by the stipulative character of its proper object. An example may serve as illustration. A fairly uncontroversial aim of liberal education is to promote the autonomy of the individual. This appears to fit with Wringe's criteria for an aim because autonomy appears to be clearly flexible and clearly in his terms neither an ideal nor an objective. Promoting autonomy is an ongoing, open-ended process. There is in principle always the possibility of becoming more autonomous. The problem for Wringe's account is that the autonomy of the individual as an aim has built into it standards related to the practices of persons in a particular society. We can judge the autonomy of a

person, we can describe those lacking autonomy. Although ill defined, autonomy does refer to a state as well as a direction or process in a way that 'scientific research' doesn't. Furthermore, autonomy is a cultural value or at least expresses a cultural value. In so far as values may conflict, our aim may not be ever increasing autonomy but rather at least enough to live well and not so much that it displaces other values. Autonomy of the individual as an aim then is unlike the promotion of scientific research as an aim as it seems to include both reference to a state of autonomy and has some describable limitations on its promotion.

While Wringe's belief in the incompletability of aims seems intuitively plausible, his conceptions of 'ongoingness' and 'open-endedness' require reformulation if they are to be so, and if they are to provide us with uniquely valuable conceptual apparatus. The limitation of Wringe's own position is further exposed through his example of a reason why aims are ongoing. 'In the nature of things the need for vigilance is bound to remain.' (ibid. p.14). On this conception we can call the aim of promoting the autonomy of the individual 'ongoing' in that each new generation requires further promotion of the aim. This is the sense of 'ongoing' we might use to describe for example human reproduction or food production. They are things that we will always need to do or to produce. To be ongoing in this sense may be a feature of aims then but it appears a relatively trivial one amounting to not much more than a way of describing a series of repeated objectives. We can produce a plausible account of 'ongoingness' then, but only at the cost of compromising the uniqueness and importance of the concept. It is more difficult to produce a plausible account of 'open-endedness'. We cannot call the aim of the autonomy of the individual 'open-ended' in the sense that it comprises an infinitely sliding scale because the actual autonomy of individuals is necessarily finite and necessarily includes reference to the ability or otherwise of a person to do particular things. Individuals may be always somewhat autonomous rather than absolutely autonomous, but the achievement of a state of autonomy is surely what we look towards in calling it an aim for education. In light of this critique, I would suggest some alternative possible reasons why aims for education are in principle unreachable and this will lead into a much richer conception of aims.

One way of reformulating Wringe's account is to agree that the objects of aims are peculiar but to add that this peculiarity is due to the qualitative character of aims. Autonomous well being, happiness, a good citizen and the like are all predicated in terms which are open to interpretation both in their specific constituents and in their relative fulfilment. Aims as such do not lend themselves to analysis on the lines of the model of straightforward satisfaction of extant desires. It is part of the character of aims to open up the possibility of going further. Aims, although sounding like they can be satisfied, actually generate dissatisfaction. The aim of autonomous well being serves as an example. The very movement towards the fulfilment of the aim brings into view new candidates for what counts as autonomous well being, and the possibility of new degrees

and domains of autonomous well being. These new candidates cannot be seen in advance. On this conception, aims change as a direct result of the attempt to achieve them. The openness of aims, in this sense, is a product of their interpretability whereby both contents and standards shift. The more we close in on aims, the higher our aspirations are raised and the further ahead they leap. Open-endedness on this account refers to the interpretability of the meaning, significance and content of the aim. Ongoingness is a feature of aims because by the time we get close to achieving them they will have changed and will continue to do so. Peters' reference to the possibility of failure or falling short is understood from this perspective not as a possibility, but as a structural necessity.

The ongoing generation of dissatisfaction can be seen as symptomatic of attempts at progress within the particular time frame in which aims have their application. Again contrasts with objectives and ideals is useful. Objectives can be achieved within the current temporal horizon, the means of their fulfilment are already available. Ideals can never be achieved by definition. In so far as they embody perfection they are timeless. Aims work in a different temporal space. They bridge the present and near future. What distinguishes aims is that in so doing they take on the texture of openness of the future. The open-endedness of aims can thus be seen as an authentic response to the underdeterminacy of the future. Aims understood in this way constitute attempts to colonise the future, whilst recognising the possibility of different futures and the necessary limitations on prediction. 'Ongoingness' on this interpretation reflects the knowledge that new future possibilities will continue to come into view. 'Open-endedness' reflects the impossibility of legislating in such a way that we foreclose on the future. Aims then act like provisional 'rolling' ends to work toward which will continue to appear and be articulated as long as we progress. It is in this sense of aims, as constituting practical responses to a partially open future, that aims can be said to be uniquely valuable. Whereas ideals may provide timeless principles, and objectives practical ways of achieving ends; aims provide a ratchet-like mechanism for pulling us towards particular valued futures.

A complicating factor in this story is that those who articulate aims for education tend to do so in the public sphere, in political and policy making contexts. The articulation of educational aims in a practical context involves more than trying to get clear about what we're trying to do. Firstly, aims talk projects valued possible futures with reference to present values. Secondly, educational aims do not simply describe a possible valued future, they are involved in bringing that future about. The articulation of aims opens up a future direction for action, and attempts to empower us to move in that direction. Articulation here is then to some extent a political and rhetorical act. Through articulation, those suggesting what the aims of education should be are doing more than simply describing how we should orientate towards the coming society. They are in the

business of influencing the character of that society. In stating aims for education, we reveal our intentionality to help to bring about desired states of affairs.

A second group of considerations about aims relevant here (and again reasons why aims remain unreachable) can be illustrated with reference to the attachment of aims to their specific cultural and historical context. A further clarification is however first needed. The aims of education may be thought of as either intrinsic to education or extrinsic. On the one hand, it may be argued that some aims, or indeed all strictly 'educational' aims, are 'purely' educational. That is to say that their supporting values are internal to the practice of education and may be generated and pursued without reference to their social context and consequences. On the other hand some aims commonly held to be aims of education, for example education for citizenship, reflect an orientation toward wider social, moral and political values and consequences. I see no good reason not to take the position of John White. That is, that we have no good reasons to believe either position to be exhaustive. In other words, we have no pressing need to choose between these two extremes of education for its own sake and education for external goods. In the practical 'lived world', things are more mixed. But to be clear here, in this particular work I am concerned to look at aims that go 'beyond' education conceived in the purest sense, and which connect with the social sphere. That is, I will perceive the educational enterprise as part of a wider social matrix. As such, education can only be understood, even as at its most protected, as 'semi'-autonomous. The kind of aims I am interested in will be aims broadly understood, and hence inescapably related to moral, social and political considerations.

From this starting point, the first sense in which educational aims are local to particular societies is in their production or generation. Which aims are chosen for education will always reflect an attempt to foster the moral, social and political values already held. As Aristotle puts it in the Politics; 'Education must be related to the particular constitution in each case, for it is the special character appropriate to each constitution that set it up at the start and commonly maintains it, e.g. the democratic character preserves a democracy, the oligarchic an oligarchy.' (Aristotle, 1981, p.452) In Aristotle's implicit aim of citizenship, the political is primary in the determination of aims. The relationship of the aim of autonomy to contemporary democratic society can be read in a similar way. Individual autonomy is promoted as a necessary aspect of democratic citizenship. (White, 1982) Furthermore, in so far as aims are practical, they must in application be culture bound. As Rousseau puts it in the preface to Emile; '...one education may be practicable in Switzerland and not in France; one may be for the bourgeois, and another for the noble.' (Rousseau, 1991, Preface). On reflection it is straightforwardly clear that in so far as aims are 'extrinsic', they must be both products of their society and find application in particular societies. Extrinsic educational aims are always and everywhere expressions of the values of a particular society or culture.

The fact that aims are socially embedded of course does not by itself affect their achievability. Again we have to bring in temporal considerations. In periods of social change the socially related aims of education must also change, that is, aims evolve as society evolves. This is true not only in major discontinuous social changes, but also, in more subtle ways, within the evolution of one political order. Autonomy may be an aim particular to liberal democratic society but the scope and acceptable degree of autonomy is related to cultural beliefs and expectations which constantly change over time. That autonomy is of significance may remain constant, the specific content and standards may vary. The aim of individual autonomy should be understood then not merely as a repeatable, renewable objective for each generation even in a relatively stable democracy. As an aim it acts something more like a constantly shifting objective. Wherever there is political and social change, the possibility, relative desirability, content, and acceptable level, of autonomy will be always on the move.

The relationship between the impetus towards 'aims talk' and the cultural context might indicate that 'aims talk' typically comes to the fore in periods of social upheaval where alternative potential futures are, as it were, up for grabs. That is, in general terms, 'aims talk' is a bedfellow of change. However, we might further argue that as change is an inescapable and chronic condition of late capitalist society, then 'aims talk' is here now needed, and will continue to be for the foreseeable future.

One further feature of 'aims talk' is that is normally optimistic. Optimism in regard to educational aims can be seen in an extreme form in Plato's ideal society. When Plato argues in the Republic for an aristocracy of intellect, or something close to it, he implicitly puts education, at least of the guardian class, in the strategic role of bringing to fruition the ideal society. 'So the order of our commonwealth will be perfectly regulated only when it is watched over by a Guardian who does possess this knowledge.' (Plato, 1941, part II) Although not talking of achieving perfection, rationalist and modernist writers on educational aims have been generally optimistic about the progressivist possibilities of education. Dewey for example writes 'As a society becomes more enlightened, it realises that it is responsible *not* to transmit and conserve the whole of its existing achievements, but only such as make for a better future society. (Dewey, 1944, p.24) Here optimism is confined to improvement rather than perfection, but does hold on to the idea that the future can be better than the present.

It seems to be the optimistic aspect of aims talk which fuels the prescriptive and proactive capacity of educational aims. Hence, optimism does some of the work in describing the uniqueness of aims. However, it might be argued that optimism for the perfection of society is a dangerous and untenable position. More importantly, one might argue that the idea of progress is not philosophically well grounded. Such arguments can be set aside for now. What is important to note is that aims talk can remain positively hopeful even if we were to drop the expectation of progress. The requirement for aims talk is not predicated on long historical vistas of linear progression, it is rather premised

on possible futures, some of which are more desirable than others. The optimism underpinning aims talk does not have to be strident, but should be a defensible optimism concerning both the openness of the future and the potential influence of aims talk. Aims do not need necessarily to be concerned with the bringing about of the best society, or even the betterment of society. They need to be concerned with actual changes and possible futures. They do need to keep in view that some futures appear better than others, and that intelligent human agency can play a part in aiming at the good.

To summarise then, I have presented an account of the aims of education which takes seriously the analytical work of both Wringe and Peters in defining and delimiting the concept. In accounting for the peculiarity of the concept of aims, I have attempted to flesh out their understanding of the concept through reference to the context of how educational aims are generated and in terms of their practical role. Aims have been presented as a specific form of action guiding expressions of values. As such, the articulation of aims represents an aspirational social response at the level of ideas, an attempt to speak of bringing to fruition specific cultural ambitions through education. Both aims and values change over time. These changes are constituted not solely through a 'dialectical' relationship between ideas and society, they represent more importantly an ever present exchange between present reality and alternative possible futures. As such, aims constitute unique, practically relevant components in the ongoing development of educational practice widely understood. The articulation of aims is one medium through which we negotiate between our current situation and the future, it is how in practice we address the openness of the future. This gives aims their provisional character, they are 'rolling' temporally local phenomena. In addition, the aims of education have been presented as inevitably socially enmeshed and culture-specific. Firstly because aims are determined in part by the social and political values of the day, secondly in so far as they address some strictly non-educational aspirations of education such as citizenship, and thirdly as aims are one form of intentional articulation which constitute an element in societal 'evolution' (e.g. by seeking to influence educational policy). Finally I have sought to argue that aims, even in the absence of the common notion of progress, are oriented toward valued future states of affairs.

The conclusions that I wish to draw from this section fall into two broad categories: those to do with the role and function of aims as part of the general enterprise of education, and those concerned with assessing, criticising and promoting substantive aims. According to the above, aims constitute an important moment within the practice of education. As ongoing justifications and clarifications, they have a role in guiding action, however their unique contribution should be understood in temporal terms where they stand as articulations of valued directions for development. Aims (in contrast to ideals or objectives) represent an orientation to the future which respects both our agency and the limits on our agency. In this case, not merely that there are other causal factors at work, but that in principle it is impossible (and undesirable) to colonise

the whole future from any point in time. Taking temporality and agency in social life seriously, aims are not simply signposts to the future, they are signposts which to some degree are involved in determining the direction in which they point, while at the same time being constrained by the horizon available to us. As such they represent ever renewed provisional articulations of provisionally good futures. They help to reconcile, in a manner appropriate to their function, present reality with the plurality of underdetermined possible futures. This underdeterminacy, or partial unpredictability, of human futures is reflected in the open-endedness of aims, giving aims their specific qualities of being both socio-historically local and unachievable within that locality (unlike either ideals or objectives). Aims are then a means for going beyond the present, for attending to problems and possibilities as they arise over time, for turning predictions about the future into practical understanding that informs the present, and for helping to shape the future according to present values (but never more than in a provisional sense and never for more than the near future).

This conception, which stresses the social function and social locatedness of aims, carries implications for the assessment, criticism and generation of the aims of education. These implications go beyond the simple claims that aims talk is worthwhile and that in periods of social change aims will require updating and modifying, or even that in a society characterised by ongoing, endemic change, aims will need to be open to continual critical modification. Unlike the timeless abstractions of ideals, recognition of aims as provisional and practical, and as evolving historically and culturally local phenomena, carries with it the need to understand present society if we are to formulate appropriate aims for education. The social understanding necessary to ground modifications to aims, or to enable the effective application of aims, will need to take seriously the current trends in social and political life as they create problems and possibilities for the future. Future oriented critical assessment and modification of aims requires, in addition to an understanding of aims and education themselves, a sociology of the present and more especially of current changes as they impinge upon the particular aims in question. Only through a sociologically grounded and temporally sensitive understanding of modernity can we put ourselves in a good position to make progress on aims. In hermeneutic terms, for practically effective aims talk, we need to develop an effective consciousness of the peculiarity of our time.

1.2 The Context of Late Modernity

I argued in the previous section that in generating aims for education, and in interpreting and applying aims in the practical domain, we ought to take account of the contexts in which educational innovation takes place. I argued also that consideration of the contexts should include features of present social reality which are novel and portentous. In this section I want to put forward an analysis of modernity that illustrates

the shifting contexts in which the generation and promotion of educational aims takes place. Hopefully this analysis will not only describe the environment in which aims are generated and promoted, but will help to illustrate further why and how contextual understanding is, in general, important for understanding liberal educational aims. More specifically, the analysis of modernity suggested in this section will inform our thinking about how liberal educational aims might be modified with respect to features that are peculiar to our time.

In general terms what I want to argue is that our age is significantly different from any previous age. Specifically, and importantly, the uniqueness of our age can be seen not only the realms of politics, economics, technology and communications, but also in the dynamics and interrelationships between social institutions and individuals, and in the surrounding epistemological, moral, and experiential frameworks. This is, as it were, a 'systemic', almost all-encompassing account of change in the contemporary world. It is an approach to understanding contemporary social change typified by Anthony Giddens both in 'Modernity and Self Identity' (Giddens, 1991) and in 'The Consequences of Modernity' (Giddens, 1990). In these works, Giddens identifies changes that portend novel parameters for moral life, novel forms of interconnection between personal and social life, novel relationships between knowledge and social institutions, novel relationships between human agents and their future under altered knowledge conditions, and novel mechanisms and opportunities for the establishing of self identity. In order to get clearer about these changes we need to look more specifically at the (broadly) sociological claims about change that underpin them.

Of the many features of modernity that seem to be changing or emerging, I want to pick out just three for the purpose in hand. For now, they can go under the headings of 'globalisation', 'reflexivity', and 'epistemological environment'. Each will be unpacked and elucidated shortly. The selection criteria is that these seem to me to be features of modernity that can most clearly and defensibly be seen as new or significantly changing, and which have the potential to impinge on the generation and promotion of liberal educational aims. That is to say, these are emergent features which can be seen as heralding significant changes for the range and character of moral and existential concerns, for the relationships between individual persons and social institutions and practices, and for knowledge and understanding.

Before moving on to look at globalisation, reflexivity, and the epistemological environment, however, we should clarify the notion of modernity in use here. The 'modernity' I have in mind here is that which has been termed 'high modernity', 'the late modern age' and so on.[2] Perhaps the best way of defining it is in contrast to other terms commonly used to describe the age we find ourselves in, such as 'post-modernism' and 'post-modernity', and also in contrast to the early modern period. 'Post-modernism', it seems, is a rogue term here. It has its primary application in artistic, literary and architectural styles which constitute reflections and comments on modernity. Thus

characterised, the term 'post-modernism' is reserved to refer to style and criticism, it is a phrase that seems most at home in discourses of aesthetic reflection.

In contrast, 'post-modernity' is used by some social theorists to describe an actual radical break with the past social order, and the development of a new order which has overcome or superseded the 'modern' phase. Within such a new order, novel social and political movements and agendas emerge which do not rely on what is seen as a problematical or indefensible notion of progress, nor on discredited epistemological 'foundations'. Post-modernity with its absence of telos, clear direction, and grounding, embraces as its political concerns, cultural diversity, ecology, lifestyle and the like This can be contrasted with the grand plans of social engineering and visions of utopia associated with a modernist outlook. Whilst it is undeniable that some such changes can be discerned in the politics of the current period, the picture is a decidedly mixed one. It remains an issue of considerable debate whether these changes constitute an overcoming of modernity or a further phase in modernity.

I am inclined towards the latter conception, that is that the best way to understand our age is as mature modernity, as modernity significantly altered and perhaps as coming to 'know itself' but modernity nonetheless. There are a number of ways in which one can defend this position. Here I shall look at three; one which logically undermines the claims to post-modernity, one (in two parts) which positively evidences our age as being 'modern' and one which owes its justification to a more hermeneutic or pragmatic perspective.

The first of these is increasingly familiar in debates about anything post-modern and may be summarised as follows. The claim that we have entered a distinct historical epoch called post-modernity is a strictly modernist claim, at odds with any post-modern position from which giving a coherent account of history and our place in it is impossible. In the words of Gianni Vattimo; 'Only modernity.....gives ontological weight to history and a determining sense to our position within it.....For if we say that we are at a later point than modernity, and if we treat this fact as in some way decisively important, then this presupposes an acceptance of what more specifically characterises the point of view of modernity itself, namely the idea of history with its two corollary notions of progress and overcoming.' (Vattimo, 1988, p.4) This argument, that the post-modern claim is self defeating, however formally correct, seems rather unconvincing and inconclusive. One reason why we may be inclined to treat this style of argument with caution is that it refers to knowledge conditions rather than empirical reality, and there may be some exploration to be done in the logical space between. Another is that in referring back to modernity, post-modernity may itself be defined wholly negatively (as 'not-modernity') simply by showing that the tenets of modernity no longer apply. If modernity is shown as it were to be dead, then it might be argued that we must be in 'post-modernity'.

There is another move that can be made in order to avoid the self defeating character of the post-modernity hypothesis. The claim that we are living in 'post-modernity' can avoid the paradoxical twist if it can be sustained by arguments that avoid the recourse to the modernist categories of 'new' and 'overcoming'. The most plausible move is to the position where the change to post-modernity entails, as part of the change, the dissolving of the categories of 'new' and of 'overcoming'. If we make this move however, it is difficult to see how we can any longer describe our era as a new phase of history, indeed we appear to have forsaken the conceptual apparatus necessary for underpinning any possible historiography. This is one argument put forward by those arguing not that we have entered a new historical phase, but rather are experiencing the end of history itself.[3] In avoiding the paradoxical conclusion of the post-modernity position then, we end up either making the grandest claim of them all, that which sees our own age as a final and enduring condition for mankind (as it were history has no future), or else, understanding the end of history in another sense, that in which we are rendered unable to give an adequate account of the major changes of the past because our tools for doing so have dissolved.

Having looked at some of the problems of describing our age as post-modern, I now want to put forward two descriptions that evidence our current condition as one of modernity. Each of these two positions stress the decisiveness of the continuities of the last hundred years or more over the discontinuities. One continuity is that of a particular form of political economy. From a Marxist perspective, we are fairly clearly not post-modern. To go beyond modernity for Marx is to leave behind a particular mode of production, to transcend the economic infrastructure with its particular social relations of production, and to enter into a new socialistic form of existence. Capitalism however, has not been superseded. Relations of production have not been transformed, controllers of capital continue to follow the imperative to rationally maximise profits, inequitable labour and commodity market relations persist and global capitalist expansion continues. The positive programme of Marxism may be philosophically somewhat undermined and practically somewhat discredited, but although we may talk of the 'post-industrial society'[4] few could argue cogently that we are post-capitalist. From this viewpoint, we may plausibly understand our historical position in Weberian terms, as a continuation of the modern capitalistic drive towards ever more internally rational (*zweckrational*) and means-end efficient activity, as so vividly alluded to through the metaphor of 'The Iron Cage'[5]. This Weberian understanding of modernity as the progressive 'rationalising' of human behaviour according to the imperatives of 'rational capitalism' is that which informs Charles Taylor's account of the dangers of modernity as set out in his 'Ethics of Authenticity'. Here, under the heading of 'The Primacy of Instrumental Reason' (the second of three malaises of modern life) he writes; 'The fear is that things that ought to be determined by other criteria will be decided in terms of efficiency or "cost-benefit" analysis, that the independent ends that ought to be guiding our lives will be eclipsed by

the demand to maximise output.' (Taylor, 1992, p.5) Such considerations are not addressed to any post-modern condition, but to the enduring threats to meaningful human life posed under conditions of further extended modernity.

Another continuity can be explicated in terms of the connectedness of current beliefs about knowledge and reasons with the enlightenment tradition. One argument in favour of claiming a decisive break with the past is that whereas according to enlightenment thought, knowledge was believed to have firm foundations, to build progressively, and to entail the certainty associated with sound reasoning, the current understanding of knowledge and reasoning is quite the reverse. It is characterised by anti-foundationalism, circularities, and paradoxes. However this may be countered by the argument that doubts about the certainty of, and foundations for, knowledge, and the recognition of the circularity of reasoning, were themselves each rooted over a hundred years ago. In opposing dogma, enlightenment thinking embraced scepticism and hence always rendered vulnerable its most cherished foundational claims, it always contained the concepts and conceptual schema necessary for revealing the provisionality of all claims to truth. As far back as the nineteenth century, Nietzsche revealed the self referentiality of reasoning and the problems of trying to rationally ground values, and he managed this through an exploration from within of the fundamental presuppositions of the orthodoxy. (e.g. Nietzsche, 1973). The so called 'post-modern condition' then can be seen as intellectually continuous with the past, the current state of play constituting a more widespread consciousness of the limitations, presuppositions and inherent reflexivity of modernity rather than an intellectual revolution. Understood thus, we may describe our age as modernity coming to understand itself rather than as a new but as yet ill defined order.[6]

The final argument that I would put forward in favour of the 'late modernity' stance, as against the description of our age as post-modern, to some extent draws on each of the previous three points. It is that seeing our age as mature modernity, as modernity becoming transparent to itself, is the more practically relevant conception. The enabling feature of this conception is that it is the one that can connect us with our cultural and intellectual sources and as such provides a platform for self understanding and criticism. I do not mean by this that we need enlightenment conceptions of truth and progress, or a detached viewpoint, to get criticism off the ground. Rather we need consciousness of, and attachment to, our traditions as a necessary condition for genuine and critical self understanding. In one sense this is a point made by Taylor both in his 'Sources of the Self' and in 'The Ethics of Authenticity'. In his attempt to articulate the moral sources and qualitative frameworks needed in order to ground and to empower meaningful and moral human agency, Taylor demonstrates that we have to make 'contact' with historically conceived ideas. The intelligibility of human life is made possible only through a conception of history which allows access to a past which is, in the crucial

sense, continuous with our present.[7] (For further discussion on this hermeneutical point about the relationship between intelligibility and historical continuity see chapter three.)

The context in which I want to present new and newly significant features for this study then is that of 'late modernity'. A period related to early modernity through a complex combination of both continuity and difference. Late modernity displays vital economic, intellectual and cultural continuities with the early modern era which was chiefly characterised by capitalism, industrialism, and enlightenment thought and which had the nation state as its prime socio-political unit. However, whilst late modernity can, and must, be seen in its connectedness to the past, it incorporates both quantitative shifts, such as sharply increasing dynamism and the more thorough undercutting of tradition, and exhibits changing, new, and radically transformed, technologies, institutions, and frameworks of experience. It is to the latter that I shall now turn in an effort to highlight some of the special problems and possibilities for the generating and promoting of liberal educational aims in late-modernity.

Perhaps the most immediately apparent of the emergent features of late modernity is 'globalisation'. This term is used to denote a variety of aspects and consequences of the phenomenon referred to in common parlance as the world 'getting smaller'. Globalisation may appear to us through the changing social relations between people inhabiting locations geographically very distant from one another. These have become, and increasingly continue to become, more frequent, more widespread, and more consequential, indicating a vastly increased range and power of human interaction. What we are experiencing is '..the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.' (Giddens, 1990, p.64) This global interactional milieu is significantly different from that of the international relations typical of early modernity in that the institutions and media of transaction are truly global, whilst the human activity causally connected to a distant locality will itself be typically local rather than national. Thus, neighbourhoods are causally connected to one another in distanciated relationships such that events in one rapidly and directly engender effects in many others. Furthermore, each of these localities is to a degree shaped by global systems, for example world financial and commodity markets, and through global media, for example satellite communications. This explains why there has been a marked shift in social science toward understanding social change in terms of the dialectical relations of the local and the global rather than at the level of the discreet society or the nation state. Indeed, much has been made of the inadequacies of not only the explanatory power of the unit of the nation state, but also of its inadequacy as a political unit, '...too small for big problems, too large for small problems.' (ibid.)

Another significant sense in which the term 'globalisation' has resonance is with regard to the dominant environmental concerns of the late modern period. It is relatively recently that western industrial nations have begun to recognise the biosphere as a single

global ecological system which may be damaged or destroyed through the unintended consequences of economic activity. Further global considerations include the invention, development, and deployment of nuclear weapons capable of destroying the whole planet, satellite communications which can in principle broadcast television into, and conduct surveillance over, almost all neighbourhoods in the world, and the emergence of super-national organisations aimed at global co-ordination and control. The late modern period is then one in which we see a rapid growth of concerns, events, processes, institutions and arenas of action which not only transcend traditional national and cultural boundaries, but actually constitute a new global sphere.

The consequences of the globalising tendencies of late modernity which have significance for the present study can be described in terms of experience, morality, and action. One residual part of our everyday perceptions has reference to our relation to the whole planet. In late modernity, we experience threats to our well-being, indeed to our very existence, as having global magnitude. Nuclear Armageddon and global environmental catastrophe are real possible futures for human kind. Climatic change and a lack of ozone are currently experienced realities. This experience is not simply one of our connectedness to global systems such as that of ecology or finance, but is also coloured by the understanding of the pervasiveness of these systems. No-one who is to survive can have an opt-out, the experience of globalisation is that of a 'given'. This experience is also increasingly global in that more than ever the people of the world commonly share in a unitary time/space framework of experience. Globalisation then constitutes one of the key existential parameters for individuals in late modernity. Our experience of others is also global in that it comprises direct and indirect encounters with a multitude of individuals and peoples with varied cultures, lifestyles, artistic expression, and so on. Our own cultural awareness is now of our place within one culture amongst others and where it is increasingly commonplace to live with, and to befriend, persons with very different cultural backgrounds to our own. Our moral concerns likewise, at one level, centre around global problems. Even when our influence is perceived as weak and only indirectly linked to the planets' global level, if we are to take morality seriously, we cannot avoid the imperative to 'think globally while acting locally'. Caring for the environment, demands for universal rights, saving the whale as a species, and so on, all share in the global rather than merely international dimension. Consequently, some action may also be global in that at least one intentional component in decision making will be aimed at, or in recognition of, perceived global consequences. In summary, for the late modern individual, one existential, moral and political horizon is that of the whole planet.

Many of the above considerations stress the role of knowledge in the determination of experience and action, which brings us on to the second aspect of late modernity that I want to consider here, that of reflexivity. More strictly, what I want to bring out is the regularisation of reflexivity in late modernity. A phenomenon which has been aptly described thus; 'The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that

social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character.' (Giddens, 1990, p.38)

This notion builds on the basic supposition that much (or in stronger formulations all) human behaviour, contexts, and responses, are objects of continual subjective monitoring by the agent. The recognition of the inherent reflexivity of human social life was given an airing in Erving Goffman's 'The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life'.(Goffman 1969) Here, Goffman reveals the fact of the reflexively monitored performance of human interaction in face to face encounters, through close observation and the extensive use of the dramatic metaphor or perspective of 'dramaturgy'. Goffman illustrates how the reflexive monitoring of a performance in this sense is presented as a necessary condition success of a great deal of communicative action. The reflexive adjustment of one's 'presentation of self' according to the perceptions and reactions of others, is achieved by introducing information collected about one's performance into one's performance.

At the social level the same can be said for social practices which are scrutinised and modified in the light of information about those practices. As an illustration we might use the example of formal education. Sociological research indicating a correlation between the under-achievement of children and their class, ethnic, or cultural background, feeds into practice in the form of critical reflection on, and (hopefully) the subsequent modification of, the practice. If we see the system of education as contributing to the perpetuation of social injustice, then we may take steps to try to rectify the position, perhaps by a move to mixed ability classes. This account of the reflexivity inherent in the practice of education sheds further light on the account of the aims of education put forward in the previous section. Understood in this thoroughly reflexive way, aims can be seen as in part determined by the knowledge about aims which informs those responsible for their articulation. This means that 'aims talk' goes beyond the basic hermeneutic activity of making sense of what one is doing. The knowledge referred to includes that about the political and rhetorical uses of 'aims talk' and the potential audience, that is, it becomes information partially constitutive of the practice. Hence if we are to understand educational aims aright, we should take into account that the meaning and usage of the term is constantly shifting, and that our articulation of aims is one factor in this process of modifying the practice. The public articulation of aims is then clearly a causally connected moment in the ongoing restructuring and reorienteering of the practice of education.

This idea, that social practices, institutions, processes, relationships and the like are to some degree constituted by information about them, is itself not new. Presumably in all cultures, including 'pre-modern' cultures, discoveries have influenced and led to the modification of action. What is new is the saturation of late modern life with reflexivity. This is made possible through the vast outpouring of information associated with the

'democratisation' of typically sociological and psychological material, and through the deliberate use of information for purposes of persuasion and profit. Through the mass media, self-help guides, government information, pressure group advice, literature, advertising and so on, we receive information about almost all areas of human activity including health, politics, morality, economics, education and the family. It includes not only descriptions but material on what possibilities are open to us, what problems we should expect, and how we might cope. This everyday relationship between discourses and the actions to which they refer is habitual and unremarkable in the late twentieth century where sociological findings routinely enter into and restructure their subject matter (which is itself increasingly sociological in outlook). Hence the reflexivity of modernity is correctly described as; 'the *regularised* use of knowledge about circumstances of social life as a constitutive element in its organisation and transformation.' (Giddens, 1991, p.20 my italics) Furthermore, the notion of reflexivity is increasingly well documented as a phenomenon. An extra layer of complexity is added through awareness of reflexivity, that is that, at least in some areas like academic social science, and increasingly in the media (take the case of television advertising), reflexivity is itself the object of reflection. The fact of reflexivity is becoming ever more well known and this knowledge of the dynamic relation between knowledge and practice is becoming part of everyday life. This 'meta-consideration' of the reflexive character of knowledge-activity brings us on to the third feature of modernity that I want to bring out here, that which I have called the epistemological environment.

The thoroughgoing reflexivity of late modernity is one contributor to an alteration in the context of knowledge claims in our age; what I have termed the epistemological environment. Because knowledge pertaining to the social world circulates in a 'double hermeneutic' whereby 'knowledge reflexively applied to the conditions of system reproduction intrinsically alters the circumstances to which it originally referred', (ibid. p.54) our knowledge about social life is inherently unstable, it is in a state of constant mutation. As soon as the knowledge about a practice becomes constitutive information for that practice, the resulting change in the practice makes the original knowledge out of date. Thus, the fact of institutionalised reflexivity, and the existence of increasingly efficient feedback mechanisms operating within the knowledge-practice system, ensures that almost all practical knowledge in the social sciences is provisional. Our knowledge of the social world is 'true for now'. This feature of knowledge in modernity is not catastrophic for understanding, partly because changes tend to take place in 'evolutionary' incremental steps, partly because we are able to cope with the pace of the changes and partly because through experience and by reflecting on the nature of reflexivity we can to some degree predict, control and militate against the consequences. It does mean that in attempting to gain some control over the future, we need to understand knowledge in its modern, dynamic aspect.

The fact that knowledge about the social world in late modernity is, along with the conventions it describes, open to chronic revision, aids the process whereby traditional forms of authority and traditional conventions are undermined, modified and replaced. There may be a sense here in which government ministers are right in claiming that sociological information, perhaps about sexual practices or institutions like the family, is a factor in bringing about a decline in adherence to particular traditional forms of that particular practice or institution. Perhaps the same ministers are rather slow to recognise the need for such knowledge in the development of workable replacements. Statistical knowledge, about the failure of the institution of marriage to regulate relationships and conduct, may be seen as a factor in undermining traditional marriage, but it surely also has the effect of helping to positively restructure the institution. The main point here is that reflexive knowledge is both a response to, and is involved in, the process of the undercutting of appeals to tradition and convention. If this diagnosis is correct, then we are moving away from a world of traditional forms and sources of authority, and into a world increasingly containing multiple sources of authority and contested expertise. A recognisable example that might stand up to empirical scrutiny would be that of health-care. The dominant western medical model of health-care is, in Britain, losing its dominance. Increasingly we turn to other medical paradigms, and increasingly we take health-care on a trial basis. The general point here is that each item of (broadly) sociological knowledge in circulation is increasingly hypothetical and provisional and that it tends to displace knowledge that was thought stable and long lasting.

I can think of at least three ways in which the sorts of changes outlined here might have a bearing on the development and application of substantive educational aims. Firstly, in developing a practically adequate account of what we are aiming at, we need to bear in mind the consequences of globalising tendencies. The effect that these changes have on our considerations concerning educational aims come about through their effect in creating new frameworks of experience and action. These new frameworks augment rather than displace those already in existence, adding, as it were, another level of concern to our day to day life. This concern is felt by all individuals, either directly or indirectly, because of the pervasiveness of global systems of communication, which attach to global financial systems and global problems and possibilities. As global concerns become routinely internalised, they impact on personal existential questions, moral sensibilities and self understanding. They provide new sources of anxiety, new considerations for our structuring of values, and new shared realities. There is no escape from new global features which affect the individual, the family, the nation and international relations. Consequently there is no possibility of excluding global concerns from personal, moral and social concerns in an adequate account of educational aims.

Secondly, the thoroughgoing reflexivity of our time extends to personal development and identity, and to the structuring and character of social institutions.

More than ever before, the self, in late modernity, becomes a reflexive project. Control over one's future, as revealed through the phenomenon of life-planning, becomes more dominant as we become more responsible for building our personal identity. Knowledge about self development, being responsible for our character, social successfulness and so on, is regularly internalised as information by everyone who reads self-help guides, magazine articles and the like. In principle we have more control over the social relations and contexts surrounding the establishing of personal identity, but the criteria for decision making are internally rather than externally referential. In making decisions about our own future lives, who we want to be, there is no recourse to a single overarching value and no given best route. Similarly, we should account for the institutional reflexivity that is increasingly apparent in for example marriage and family life, and not least in the development of educational institutions. Increased reflexivity resulting from the changing role and character of information has, like any new technology, potential positive and negative effects. What is clear is that if the 'late modernity thesis' carries some truth, we cannot ignore reflexivity as a phenomenon. If we are to benefit from the institutionalisation of reflexivity as it impinges on the self and on social institutions, then we need to get to grips with the particular skills, attributes and outlooks for its practical mastery. Those concerned with the aims of education should therefore, on this account, take on board the role of information in the constitution of personal and social life, and recognise and allow for the phenomenon whereby the aims themselves are 'informational events' in the reflexive story.

Thirdly, on this conception, the social context in which personal and institutional development occurs is not adequately understood as an external environment. Rather it is better characterised as a constantly changing context, actively constructed and reconstructed by individuals as they struggle with the difficulties of daily life. The shifting context means that we come up against constantly changing knowledge. The knowledge environment is therefore one of insecurity and uncertainty. A further prerequisite for adequately generating and applying aims in the late modern age then is consideration of the consequences of the incorporation of ungrounded, shifting knowledge. In practical terms, what is needed then is a mechanism or mechanisms for dealing with this insecurity and uncertainty about knowledge. The provisionality of knowledge about the social world is liberating in that the future resists closure and full blown predictability, but is daunting because of the complexity it brings to planning. In dealing with futurity, the context is dominated by provisional orientations and attitudes such as doubt, risk and trust. The future thus conceived is one of 'counterfactual possibility' where individuals have to live with the consequences, intended or unintended, of their and others' actions and expectations. Moreover, the concepts and information employed by individuals in their self understanding, in our understanding of other individuals and social institutions, and for the purposes of 'aims talk', are open to unending and ongoing modification and change.

In summary; I have put forward some key points of one sociological interpretation of the modern environment. According to this account, although not fully divorced from earlier modernity, 'late modernity' can be distinguished in terms of its temporal and institutional frameworks of development and experience, its information or knowledge-practice relationships, and its open-futured, uncertain character. These developments result chiefly from the rapid and increasingly rapid generation, availability, and subsequent power of information, and from the allied technological developments in the field of communications. Though not fully 'post-modern', this account does show definite novelties when compared with what might crudely be called the sociology of modernity. This interpretation of our (broadly) sociological environment as 'late modern' can of course, according to its own thesis, be no more than a provisional and uncertain way of describing the conditions in which we find ourselves. As such it is open to much dispute and criticism, and the criteria for judging its accuracy or merit may need some thought. However, if we are to be true to the conception of aims ventured in the previous section, then in looking at the development and application of aims, we need to consider that which is changing and open to interpretation. Uncertainty and provisionality are going to go with the territory.

Chapter 2. Understanding in the Liberal Aims of Education in Late Modernity

2.1 The Liberal Educational Aims of Informed Desire Satisfaction and Personal Autonomy

I suggested in the previous chapter that if we take seriously the 'late modernity' thesis: the effects of globalisation, the changing character of the knowledge environment, and the role of information and altered relationships in the constitution of social institutions, then we should be prompted to question the adequacy of our aims of education and perhaps reinterpret and modify them for the new context. In order to explore the adequacy of liberal educational aims, and to see if they stand up to the possibilities and problems presented by the late modern challenge, we need to get clear about what these aims are. We might benefit here from examining the justification for liberal educational aims, by thinking about the assumptions or presuppositions that support them, by questioning how and why they developed, and by examining what the requirements are for their application. When we have a picture of liberal educational aims, then we can hold it up against our late modern context in order to assess its adequacy.

A question arises as to which liberal educational aims should be taken to represent the current state of play. Several interpretations of traditional liberal values can be made and the different interpretations can lead to rather different views about liberal educational aims. However, if my arguments hold, then they will apply to the majority of liberal educational aims whatever the nuances and emphases. For my purposes then I will develop an account of aims that in the important senses reflects both what is held to be of value and importance in a liberal democratic society, and what is mainstream in liberal philosophy of education.

In order to represent the mainstream of the sort of values espoused in education in a liberal democratic society we can look at what goes on in school education, particularly in Personal and Social Education. Here, great emphasis is placed on the need for children to learn to make informed choices and to learn to structure desires according to values. Hence, PSE activities might include work on for example moral problems, or the negotiation of value conflicts, as well as learning about rights and responsibilities. For further examples of the application of such an approach we may turn to the 1990 National Curriculum Council Curriculum Guidance series. In the guidance on health education we are told that; 'The emphasis in most health education curricula is on encouraging individual responsibility, awareness and informed decision making.' and that one stated objective of health education is '...to help pupils make informed choices, establish a healthy lifestyle and build up a system of values...' (National Curriculum Council Curriculum Guidance, 1990, No.5, p.2) The model of informed decision making

as an aim of education also spills over into the political sphere in document number 8, which contains guidance on Education for Citizenship. Quoting again; 'Education for citizenship develops the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for exploring, making informed decisions about, and exercising responsibilities and rights in a democratic society.' (National Curriculum Council Curriculum Guidance, 1990, No.8, p.2) Informed decision making then is a current guiding notion for classroom practice.

The notion of informed decision making as a liberal aim of education is close to the model of 'informed desire satisfaction' that occupies a central place within philosophy of education. In order to derive a working conception of the liberal aims of education then, I will represent the liberal approach to education for individual flourishing by looking at the aim of informed desire satisfaction, including its sources, justification and application. My objective will be to put forward a strong account of a sophisticated version of this liberal educational aim, drawing on the traditional liberalism of John Stuart Mill, and on more contemporary work, particularly that of John White. The first section of this chapter then consists in articulating the liberal aim of educating for individual well being, or 'the good life'. In the second section I shall examine the assumptions upon which the liberal sorts of aims rest, specifically in terms of the conception of knowledge and understanding, the dynamic of development and the position of the individual agent.

The most basic principle of the liberal conception of the good life is that it consists in the flourishing of the individual. One source of this sort of approach can be identified in J.S. Mill's attempt to state and defend a liberal democratic position in 'On Liberty'. (Mill, 1972). In this work Mill outlines the principles of the rights of individuals to freedom of thought, expression and action, and articulates a response to the spectre of the political threat to liberty as it arises out of different sorts of tyranny. The position taken by Mill is grounded in a commitment to a political individualism whereby each person is ideally maximally sovereign over her or his own thoughts and actions. This position draws on a tradition of political thinking which can be traced back to the works of Locke and Paine. In this tradition, a high value is attached to individuality in its uniqueness and diverse forms. Persons are seen as the primary moral and ontological units, with the state relegated to a politically subservient position. From this perspective, moral activity is ideally the exercise or expression of individual conscience. Hence the individual is comprehended as a moral and political choice maker. The practical promotion of this value of free individual thought, expression and action, with its associated personal responsibility, can be seen as the point of embarkation for the development of the practical educational aim of individual flourishing.

In the recent tradition of the liberally constituted philosophy of education, and in contrast to some previous 'rationalist' accounts', individual flourishing has been presented as grounded in desire. The desire based conception of well being represents a response both to the weakness of arguments aimed at grounding well being in knowledge

acquisition and to the psychological implausibility of the rationalist doctrine. According to the desire based position, individual liberty is expressed through the activity of choosing such that the individual achieves satisfaction. The individual freedom of the choice is guaranteed in so far as the individual concerned is the agent or 'owner' of the choice. These two faces of the good life of the free individual translate into the twin educational aims of desire satisfaction and personal autonomy. Desire satisfaction as an account of human well being generates complex aims for education, generally along the lines of what has been called 'post-reflective desire satisfaction' (White, 1982) or, more recently, 'informed desire satisfaction' (White 1990). According to these models, individuals make rational, informed choices about their own lives in terms of the satisfaction of their most urgent or important desires. The composition of the phrases 'post-reflective desire satisfaction' and 'informed desire satisfaction' stress explicitly the necessity of each of two conditions to an adequate account of the liberal educational aim. That of fulfilling one's desires and that of making choices from an enlightened position.

From this perspective, a primary educational objective might be that of informing pupils as to the variety of ends available, helping them to establish their own preferences, and going some way towards enabling them in terms of the means of their fulfilment. Thus conceived, education is seen as fundamentally concerned with the promotion or maximisation of desire satisfaction. Put as baldly as this however, the aim sounds like it could be a recipe for selfish and destructive short-term hedonism (with no doubt associated ills for society if reflected in an unmodified form in practice). In forging a practical educational aim from the desire centred conception, significant sophistication and moderation is required. The major fears and shortcomings associated with the desire based conception can be largely assuaged when a few reasonable practical considerations are born in mind. One is that desire satisfaction does not necessarily equate with hedonism in its common meaning. One can desire things which give satisfaction that wouldn't satisfactorily be described as simply pleasure giving (White, 1982, pp.37-38). A second is that the maximisation of desire satisfaction might best be understood as occurring over a whole life rather than simply at the present moment. This allows for the inclusion of notions like sacrifice and deferred gratification (ibid. pp.38-39). A third is Mill's principle of harm prevention whereby the satisfaction of one individual's desires is limited by those of others (Mill, 1972, Ch.'s 1 and 5). Whilst remaining faithful to this sort of conception of desire satisfaction as the basis of the good life, it is further possible, by taking on board a more sociably inclined version of a person, to derive a formulation with an altruistic component. This is the approach of John White who attempts to write in the happiness of others to the happiness of each individual, in his words a conception which sees '...well being as embracing a concern for others' (White, 1990, p.9). By adding these sorts of conditions, we can ascend to an increasingly attractive and civilised conception of the liberal 'good life' from the base-camp of the satisfaction of subjective desires.

This description of the aim of informed desire satisfaction constitutes a simple articulation of one fundamental strand in the liberal conception of individual freedom. Complexity enters into the picture when we are prompted to look more closely at specific types of desires and the relationships between desires as they appear in the world. This prompting may arise as a result of the occurrence of conflicts between desires or in response to the question as to the relative worth of desires. It certainly arises for educators in their relationships with pupils. There are occasions when conflicts resulting from competition between desires within one individual may be resolved only through the development of criteria for ranking one desire over another. Such a consideration pushes us in the direction of conceiving desires as elements within a structure which is hierarchical. The hierarchy may be shifting and flexible, but at any one time it can act as a guide for deciding on which desire to act. One example of this kind of thinking is found in the work of Harry Frankfurt (Frankfurt, 1988). Here, desires are organised into different levels or 'orders' where first order, more immediate desires, are judged according to second order preferences. The hackneyed example is where an individual has a first order desire to smoke tobacco but a conflicting second order desire not to smoke. In effect, the structuring provides a means of deliberating between those desires we want to desire and those we don't. Ideally, the will is identified with the second order desire and this is the one acted upon. Although such a position is not without its problems, it does give us a way of thinking about desire conflicts and their resolution. It can be used as part of the educational aim of desire satisfaction in that children could be brought up to live as far as possible according to the dictates of the second order preferences. It is worth noting here that the need for structure implies related needs for the incorporation of both information and values into the story. In the smoking example one has to have both knowledge about the consequences of smoking and to value long term health above a nicotine high. A further consideration is that the practical regulation of lower level desires by higher also assumes or demands a particular set of character traits.

So far however, in this increasingly complex story about desires and their satisfaction, whereby attempts are made to enable individuals to clarify and structure desires, relatively little attention has been paid to the complexity of the question of the agency of the individual involved. Consideration of agency brings us on to another requirement for an adequate account of desire satisfaction as the basis for an educational aim. According to the liberal approach, the one crucial question which must be answered, in order to ensure that individual freedom is real rather than illusory, is over the origin of the desires. Put crudely, we need a way of making sure that a person's desires are, in a significant sense, her or his own. In the informed desire satisfaction model, this requirement is fulfilled through the incorporation of the criterion of autonomy, where autonomy basically means 'self rule' and hence where personal autonomy refers to an individual's self determination. Typically the autonomous person is

characterised as making his or her own choices rather than being directed by tradition, religious decree or dogma, craving for a fix or the like, and under conditions which allow for a degree of free personal action. The kinds of threat to freedom that this criterion seeks to deal with are primarily those raised in for example Brave New World or by the spectre of contented slaves. The two unacceptable choosing scenarios for liberalism are those where heteronomous choices masquerade as autonomous, or where heteronomy is accepted as a basis of the good life.

The educational aim of autonomy on this account is justified either by seeing autonomy as a universal good or as a necessary condition for flourishing in an autonomy supporting or generating society such as our own. I think the latter view is the more defensible and that we can go further, extending the point in the direction of making direct links between the aim of individual autonomy and states with democratic political arrangements. This relationship is brought out in for example Keith Graham's majoritarian democratic position; a response to Wolff's argument that autonomy is maximised under conditions of anarchy. (Graham, 1982, pp.113-139) Graham's view echoes that of Richard Lindley who sees autonomy as the political and moral justification of liberal democracy. In his book 'Autonomy', Lindley states that; 'Liberal Democracy is premised on the assumption that people should have equal rights to run their own lives.' (Lindley, 1986, p.9). Although not definitive, Lindley's account seems to provide a reasonable starting point for understanding autonomy. According to Lindley, autonomy comprises two necessary components. The first is what might be termed 'self-mastery'. This is equated by Lindley with Isaiah Berlin's concept of 'positive freedom'. In describing 'positive freedom' Berlin asserts; '...it is my reason that distinguishes me as a human being from the rest of the world. I wish, above all, to be conscious of myself as a thinking, willing, active being, bearing responsibility for my choices and able to explain them by references to my own ideas and purposes.' (Berlin, 1969, p.131) Those partially lacking this component of autonomy might include persons addicted to particular drugs, those suffering from certain kinds of severe mental illness and so on. In each case reasons can be given why the actions of a person are uncontrolled in the sense of the rational will not governing. The second component of autonomy for Lindley is freedom from constraint or coercion. This rather neatly corresponds to Berlin's notion of 'negative freedom'. In this case, to be free requires an absence of external factors which may prevent one from carrying out one's desired actions. These may be military, political, economic, physical and so on. Together the two sorts of freedom add up to a conception of the autonomous person as one whose choices are effected and are, in the significant sense, the agent's own.

Fleshing out the notion of genuinely autonomous individual agency, (variously described in terms of consent, authorship or ownership), becomes then an important occupation of those attempting to promote the liberal conception of well being. There is a need to distinguish between heteronomous and autonomous actions and to give

practical description to autonomy. One way in which this problematic can be articulated is by raising the question of the degree of critical reflection engaged in by the individual chooser. This is the approach taken by Benn in his influential paper 'Freedom, Autonomy and the Concept of a Person'. Here, an attempt is made to ensure that the standards employed in choosing are in some sense one's own. As Benn puts it; 'To be a chooser is not enough for autonomy, for a competent chooser may still be a slave to convention, choosing by standards he has accepted quite uncritically from his milieu.' (Benn, 1975) On this account, 'post-reflective' can be seen to mean something like 'after critical reflection'. This important distinction between, on the one hand, the chooser who has critically reflected upon and personally accepted or rejected principles, and on the other, the chooser who has uncritically chosen (although enjoying negative freedom and deliberating rationally) is described as the difference between the 'autonomous' person and the 'autarchic' person. Autonomy is the more demanding concept in that to be autonomous a person must '...have distanced himself in some measure from the conventions of his social environment and from the people surrounding him.' (Gray, 1983, p.74, quoted in White, 1990, p.97).

This requirement of critical distancing is necessary in the formulation of the strong sense of autonomy defended in White's account, where strong autonomy is seen as a necessary condition for flourishing in our autonomy generating and supporting society. (White, 1990, pp. 98-103) Autonomous choice after critical reflection is wide in scope, extending to responsibility for character. 'We make choices not only between types of car, or between buying a computer and having a holiday in America; we can also choose to *be* a certain sort of person rather than another: to be self controlled, generous, committed to scholarship or family life, confident.' (White, ibid. p.31).

The degree of reflection and hence critical distancing is however, for White, another matter. Fully radical reflection is neither possible nor desirable in the good life. 'Human beings cannot make themselves into whatever they like.....' (ibid.) The problem addressed here by White is that the radically autonomous self who chooses to jettison too many or all extant desires and dispositions, endangers her or his own personal identity. 'This is not only a curiously unattractive ideal of life, amounting to a kind of wilful self-destruction in the name of self-creation; it also seems logically incoherent, since the agent in question is left with one firm disposition when all others have been weakened, namely vigilance in monitoring all other dispositions.' (ibid.) If we accept this argument; that persons need some relative stability and relatively permanent values and dispositions, we accept at the same time that there are limitations on the amount of autonomy that may be enjoyed by any particular individual. On this formulation, autonomy is a good to be promoted but not beyond the point where it undermines other goods which are constitutive of well-being.

To summarise; the liberal educational aim of autonomous informed desire satisfaction seeks to articulate and promote the good life where the good life is

conceived as the satisfaction of desires. These desires must be self structured and can be determined in detail only by the particular individual agent. The choices open to the individual might typically include the type of work one does, one's relationships, sexual orientation, political beliefs and activities, lifestyle and so on. According to the educational aim, personal choice should extend to the major ends of the individual, including taking responsibility for one's own character. The good life consists in the achieving of these self chosen ends which carries with it an implication of ability and opportunity. This crude aim is refined in a number of important ways in an attempt to generate a satisfactory version which can have practical application as a modern educational aim. Firstly, hedonism and short-termism are argued out of the picture; at least in so far as they could be claimed to supply a complete account of the good life. Secondly, other people are fitted into the frame either negatively in that one person's freedom shouldn't encroach on another, or more positively, as in White's account, where the happiness of others is made a condition of a person's individual happiness. Thirdly, desires are structured, and degrees of importance and urgency attached, according to values. Fourthly, mechanisms are incorporated to ensure personal agency in choice making. This move brings in consideration of a need for a criterion of 'critical distancing', a sophistication which reveals describable limits to individual autonomy in the formula for individual well being.

Having sketched what is hopefully a plausible account of the sort of arguments involved in generating the liberal educator's aim of informed desire satisfaction, I want now to turn to consider the role of knowledge or understanding in this story. Of course, on this account, the pursuit of knowledge is no longer the self justifying aim of education that it was on the more 'rationalist' approach of the early Hirst and Peters, where we were presented with the now somewhat discredited 'transcendental' justification[1]. However, knowledge or understanding is a necessary condition for flourishing. The necessary role of knowledge or understanding in an adequate conception of informed desire satisfaction can be illustrated by considering examples where failures or absences of knowledge or understanding undermine the satisfaction of the agent's most important desires.

One route to an unsatisfying life begins from the agent having false beliefs or a lack of knowledge about her or his own most important desires. Two kinds of problem can be identified immediately. The first concerns the relative importance of desires, the second the desires themselves. In terms of desire structure, a lack of knowledge may result in the sort of error whereby a person may act upon a desire which leads to the achievement of ends which turn out to be unfulfilling. Examples might include situations where a person chooses to spend money in the short term, frustrating longer term higher order desires which demand careful budgeting. This is the sort of danger addressed by Frankfurt. However, while Frankfurt stresses the need for something akin to will power, it is also clear that correct identification of the desire structure is also a necessary

condition of successful desire satisfaction, that is, being clear about which desires really are relatively more important. In the second case, a danger that may arise from a lack of knowledge would be that of arriving at unwanted outcomes as a result of self deception or a lack of self awareness. Examples might include cases in which individuals misapprehend their sources of happiness, such as the person who undergoes repeated cosmetic surgery mistakenly believing that her or his appearance is the most important source of unhappiness and hence the key to happiness. This is perhaps the kind of danger highlighted and treated (in severe cases where agents act against their own interests) through cognitive therapy or psychotherapy. Here, work at the cognitive level is directed at differentiating subjectively real desires from bogus desires such as those of others, or those which misrepresent or mask more 'real' desires.

A second route to an unsatisfying life begins from a position of ignorance or mistaken beliefs pertaining to the agent's society. Again, two types of failure can be identified. The first relates to the agent's desire formation, the second to the practical satisfaction of desires in the social world. A lack of accurate sociological knowledge can undermine autonomous well-being because one condition of the agent's knowing about her or his desires is the awareness of where the desires came from, or, perhaps more accurately, how they were acquired. In John White's words 'Part of one's becoming aware of a desire is attaining insight into how one came to possess it.' (White, 1990, p.91) Locating the sources and processes of one's desires' formation may lead one to consider the influences of natural impulses, earlier childhood experiences, parental influences and, significantly here, one's social and cultural background. These components of self-knowledge, perhaps accessible only through genealogical inquiry, are necessary to inform the reflective process in order that the agent can recognise the possible origins of her or his desires, dispositions and beliefs. Only through finding out whence and how these come about is an individual in a position to not only recognise them but also to judge and change them if required. The second role of sociological knowledge is that it informs the agent as to the possibilities which are available, or which can be forged. This option directed and option opening function of sociological knowledge is necessary to informed desire satisfaction not only in that it informs as to the sorts of possible satisfactions, but also in that it underscores the ability to make plans that are realistic. In completing this outline of the role of knowledge in the good life, we might add that knowledge of the physical world functions in a similar way to that of the social world. It is important both for identifying the sources of desires, and in determining possible satisfactions and the possibility of achievement.

One necessary condition then of education for the good life is that the individual agent is enabled to develop knowledge and understanding of her or his own desires and their structure and formation, of the social or cultural environment, and of the natural world. Reason, knowledge and understanding are in general terms seen as having an instrumental role in well being; 'They have the instrumental function of helping us to

discern, develop and order coherently those basically given elements of wants and satisfactions from which the good life is to be composed.' (Hirst, 1993, p.188) In Education and the Good Life, White, although retaining the position that knowledge is not an end in itself, makes a further fine distinction between on the one hand 'instrumental' knowledge, that is, means-end knowledge which is helpful in realising a valued desire, and on the other 'constitutive' knowledge, which is that knowledge necessary to the process of coming to value something in the first place.

The character of knowledge and understanding in this approach is wholly practical, justified as it is only insofar as it is needed for informing the process of satisfying desire. At this level, while the objects of knowledge are differently located, either 'internally' in the case of self-knowledge, or 'externally' in the case of knowledge about nature and culture, the function and justification appears identical. However, self-knowledge may be distinguished in terms of the internal relatedness of the 'subject' and the 'object'. One internal relation that our understanding of self knowledge must take account of is that of care and concern. Practical self knowledge as it is used here then may be equated with what Hamlyn terms 'self-knowledge proper'. The point made by Hamlyn is that while it is possible to have propositional knowledge about oneself, self-knowledge proper is distinguished in that it is both practically enabling and involves concern for oneself. (Hamlyn, 1983, pp.240-260) A further, and here more important, distinguishing characteristic of self knowledge can be expressed in terms of the specific internal dynamic relationships of self-knowledge. It concerns the cognitive relationships pertinent to personal change and development. White grounds the distinctive quality of self-knowledge on its developmental potential; 'Self understanding is different from understanding the physical world in that it changes what it reveals. Reflection on one's desires and the priorities among them can lead to the elimination of a desire or its promotion or demotion vis a vis others.' (White, 1990, p.91). Hence, self understanding is accorded a direct role in the formation of the agent's desire structure. The use of the term understanding, rather than knowledge, is probably more appropriate here because 'understanding' better captures the idea that formative self understanding incorporates judgements about the subjective significance of the different desires within the structure.

On this account then, reflection on, and evaluation of, one's own desires and their structure is a constitutive factor in the ongoing production of one's emergent desire structure. It is also the point at which self determination comes to the fore, where the reflecting individual becomes the agent responsible for her or his own character. Thus, reflective self understanding is crucial to the account of autonomous desire satisfaction because it constitutes the principle educational moment in self-determined desire structure development. It is through reflective self understanding that the agent both clarifies her or his real desires (through discovery and creation) and makes formative progress in determining what constitutes her or his own well being. The motivation to undergo reflective self understanding on this account lies in its utilitarian function of

aiding the maximisation of desire satisfaction over one's whole life. The motivation to reflect is therefore explained with reference to desire satisfaction. The motivation to satisfy desires in the first place is not in need of explanation or justification. Desires gain their diversity and sophistication through their satisfaction in different ways according to context and individual preference, but can in the last analysis be understood in terms of naturalistic psychology, where more primitive drives are converted or sublimated into complex socialised desires.

Formative reflection as an account of educational progress implies a basically scientific structure of understanding whereby the agent as subject is able to observe her or his own desires as objects. That is to say, scientific detachment remains the ideal position from which to judge ones own desires and to re-order them if that would increase overall satisfaction. Another way of putting this is to say that the extant desires as objects are subjectively judged according to affectively generated values. The mechanics of the educational process of reflective formative self understanding take the form of asking questions of oneself about one's own desires, perhaps prompted through experience or in the light of perceived incoherence in the desire structure. This point is picked up explicitly by Charles Taylor who identifies self questioning as the route to making one's life one's own. The primary question is 'Do I really want to be what I now am? (i.e. have the desires and goals I now have)'. The possibility of asking this question of oneself, the potential to answer 'no', and the ability to change, is the mark of a potentially flourishing person, it is specific to being human. In Taylor's words '...a person is a subject who can pose the *de jure* question: is this the kind of being I ought to be, or really want to be?' (Taylor, 1976, p.281). It is through answering such a question that the individual becomes, to a degree, the author of her or his own life.

One final point to be made about the assumptions of this model of well being concerns the conception of the relationship of individual and society. As one might expect of a liberal doctrine, methodological holism, whereby society may be imbued with interests, desires, health or agency is ruled out. Society has no ontological status, rather it is viewed as an association of individuals. Social constructions such as language and institutions function to serve in the satisfaction of individual subjective desires. This atomistic account of the individual renders all collective interests and movements reducible, in the final analysis, to the personal well being of individual members. Each individual is a separate, relatively self contained, reflecting creature and is exempted from the deterministic influences of social construction.

Collecting together the assumptions then, the educational aim of informed desire satisfaction is seen to rest on an individualistic and subjectivist conception of human being. Individual desire satisfaction is the primary human good and all other considerations are subordinate to this end. Individuals are conceived of as subjects capable of objectifying not only the outside world of nature and society, but also to some degree their own desires and desire structure. The unique internal relation of self

conscious persons means that we not only care for ourselves, but are also in a position to change ourselves if we feel it desirable. This process of self determination is carried out through the introspective questioning activity of reflective self understanding. Understanding or knowledge is practical in that it is a necessary condition for conceiving desired ends, or is a necessary means for their satisfaction, and is structured according to the subject - object dichotomy.

With this account in mind, I want now to turn in the final section of chapter two to consider some questions raised for this position which are prompted by the analysis of late modernity, and, whilst accepting the necessity of understanding (including self understanding) in the good life, to put forward the case for modifying and developing the account of understanding.

2.2 Understanding in Informed Desire Satisfaction

In articulating the necessary cognitive requirements of the desire based conception of the good life, we were drawn into a characterisation where knowledge was presented in its practical aspect. Practical self knowledge, and practical knowledge of society, along with practical knowledge of the physical world were justified as educationally relevant in terms of their contribution to human flourishing in a liberal democratic society. In this section, I want to think critically about the character of practical knowledge in an attempt to derive an account of the requirements of a practically adequate conception of practical knowledge pertinent to the liberal good life. The thrust of the analysis will be provided by addressing the good life as necessarily contextualised by the sociology of information and communication which comprises the 'late modernity' thesis. In the broadest terms, three initial and important questions are begged by the general list of 'knowledges' presented as the necessary cognitive conditions for the good life. Firstly, is the list adequate or complete? Secondly, are the objects of knowledge and modes of knowing different from one another in the different domains? Thirdly, what is the correct or best way to characterise this practical knowledge or these practical 'knowledges' bearing in mind that we are aiming at informing educational theory and practice? Through a critical exploration of these questions, my aim is to achieve a position from which we can begin to put some flesh on the bones of 'practical knowledge' according to its domains, objects, and modes, such that it is relevant to the liberal good life in late modernity.

If we accept White's account of the good life, then we can make a quite forceful argument for answering the first of these three questions in the negative. One item that appears notable by its absence from the list of 'knowledges' necessary for the good life is knowledge of others. It is at least prima facie arguable that if the happiness of others is a constituent of the good life, then we need to know something about those others so that we may address their needs and discharge our responsibilities toward them. Determining

who these others are, finding out about their needs and requirements for flourishing, and how we affect them, are points to which I will return in due course. The initial point to be made here however is a different one; a simple methodological reminder. The inclusion of knowledge of others in the formulation of the good life makes us sharply aware of the 'social-scientific' content of practical knowledge. That is, in investigating the cognitive requirements of the good life, we have to confront the methodological questions of how we appropriate knowledge (which may be anthropological, sociological, psychological and so on). Of course, this observation also holds to some degree for self knowledge and knowledge about society. In attempting to provide an initial response to the first of the three questions set then, we begin to reveal the complexities of addressing the second. Put another way, amending the list of cognitive requirements for the good life reminds us of, and highlights, the methodological complexities associated with the disclosure or generation of knowledge in particular 'domains'. These complexities may include not merely differences between the modes of knowing the physical world in contrast to those of the social human world, but also of differences between modes of knowing the social human world. Prior to making any further progress along the lines of the threefold task set then, we need to take a preliminary dip into methodology. Specifically the methodology of the social sciences.

It is a commonplace, and hopefully is unarguably accepted by now, that attempts by social scientists to adopt the 'positivistic' methods of the natural sciences results in an inadequate explanation of human social phenomena. That is, reliance on the Enlightenment ideal of detached scientific objectivity leading to the development of positive knowledge of the social world, is potentially misleading and at best methodologically and ethically impoverished.[2] An adequate account of how we come to practical knowledge needs to overcome the weaknesses of natural science methods. In the most elementary and commonsensical way, the weakness can be portrayed in terms of the object of study. Human actions are intensional and meaningful to those carrying out the actions and to those affected by them. To comprehend them otherwise is to oversimplify grossly. This irreducibility of the subjectivity of human action, and its perceived necessity to adequate accounts in the social sciences, has prompted much activity in the development of the social sciences at the methodological level. Perhaps most famously with Max Weber's attempts to show not only that it is necessary to explicate human social activity in terms of the social actors' beliefs, but also through his practical work in developing the conceptual apparatus aimed at accessing the subjectivity of others.[3] This revolutionary move in the western social science tradition, with its increased sensitivity to the particularities of its objects of study, can be traced through subsequent developments. Well known examples would include Alfred Schutz' attempts to rework Weberian *'verstehende'* sociology via phenomenological refinement (Schutz, 1972), and the growth of 'ethnomethodology'[4] Each of these approaches aimed at providing increasingly authentic access to the subjective world of social actors and their

social products. What these developments heralded was a decisive dislocation between the methods of the natural and the social sciences, and the development of a conceptual apparatus and descriptive language particular to the human understanding of the human world.

Within this tradition, the term 'understanding' (*verstehen*), as contrasted with 'knowledge' or 'explanation', is used to display a commitment to this methodological shift. Hence, in the post-Weberian methodology of the social sciences, the distinction between 'knowledge' and 'understanding' has become of crucial significance. 'Understanding' (*verstehen*) carries with it two connotations not attached to 'knowledge', one about the object and one about the appropriation. Firstly, understanding is concerned to include the intensional subjectivity of the other, and secondly, insofar as it attempts to reconstruct meaning and attach significance, it accepts that it constitutes only one interpretation of the phenomena. This contrastive distinction between knowledge and understanding in the methodology of the social sciences contrasts with their often ambiguous use in the philosophy of education. Here the terms are commonly used more or less as interchangeable synonyms. White, for example seems to be relatively ambivalent over their usage, sometimes speaking of knowledge but then contrasting 'self understanding' with 'understanding the physical world' (White, 1990, p.91) From the social science perspective however the distinction is seen as a differentiation of methodology. The question raised then is whether the adoption of the language of 'knowledge' or that of 'understanding' is more appropriate, useful and empowering when describing and conceptualising the information requirements of living the good life in late modernity.

The traditional distinction between the objects and hence methods of the natural sciences and those of the social sciences, supplies us, I believe, with some good grounds for coming down on the side of 'understanding' as the more appropriate description of what is necessary in an adequate account of the good life. In addition to incorporating the appropriation of subjectivity through an interpretive method, and hence being methodologically capable of dealing with meanings and beliefs, understanding as method has also been argued to score over knowledge in its potential power for finding out about ourselves, our society, and others, in the following ways. Understanding admits degrees, understanding can take account of the relationships of the understanding 'subject' with the 'object' of understanding, and, understanding is conceptually flexible enough to meet the methodologically problems thrown up by 'perspectivalism'. The purchase of the latter two points will be addressed in due course. The first point about understanding admitting of degrees is an appeal to ordinary language and as such may not carry much weight, especially as while it may be the case that understanding differs from propositional knowledge in this characteristic, it is not clear that it differs positively from what we might call knowledge by acquaintance.

At the philosophical level, employing the language of 'understanding' might help in that it provides linguistic and conceptual resources which allow us to reframe our three original questions, viewing them from a conceptual and linguistic context which might also allow fresh questions to be asked. Sticking to this move then we can restate the questions about the nature of the practical knowledge necessary for the good life from within the tradition of social science in terms of understanding. That is, we can ask about the specificity of the objects to be understood, about the methods of understanding, and about the relationship between the two. For now then, leaving aside for the present the knowledge or understanding of the natural world, the revised threefold task is to explore the objects and methods of the domains of: self understanding, the understanding of society, and the understanding of others as it relates to living the good life in the context of late modernity.

The major point arising out of the 'late modernity' thesis concerning self understanding, is that rather than being a *reflective* process, self understanding is more aptly and usefully described as *reflexive*. The reflexivity of self understanding is evidenced in Giddens' account with reference to the rapidly increasing use of guides to self help, self therapy, self realisation, life planning and the like, brought to the fore to an hitherto unprecedented extent in late modernity. Put crudely, the processes here involve persons acting as agents to change themselves. The distinction between reflection and reflexivity is implicitly recognised by White when he talks about what is special about self understanding; 'Self understanding is different from understanding the physical world in that it changes what it reveals.' (White, 1990, p.91) Information about one's desire structure is understood as a constituent element of the formation of that desire structure. The phenomenon of reflexivity can thus be identified (in Enlightenment terms) as changed objects of knowledge arising out of the process of observing the object of knowledge. It is this dynamic internal relation that allows us to refer to self understanding as being a moment of both 'discovery and creation'. In the same area, the specificity of human self understanding, Charles Taylor pushes further in his attempts to articulate the complexity of the internal relationship of self understanding. In his essay 'Self Interpreting Animals', Taylor argues for the ineliminability of the 'subjectivity' of the experience of oneself. In his words; '...the claim is that our interpretation of ourselves and our experience is constitutive of what we are, and therefore cannot be considered as merely a view on reality, separable from reality, nor as an epiphenomenon, which can be by-passed in our understanding of reality.' (Taylor, 1985, p.47) Taylor then regards the subjective perspective as interpretive as well as constitutive. This position goes beyond that of White in that Taylor takes on board the methodological point that self understanding is achieved interpretively. The objects of understanding are open to different interpretations, and understanding is achieved from a value laden position, that is, we are presented with a subjective perspective with predispositions and criteria for importance and significance.

Taylor's second point, although not in his terminology, is that the 'self as subject' is necessarily involved with, and inseparable from, the 'self as object'. The involvement of the 'self as subject' with the 'self as object', opens up the possibility of conceiving self understanding as more thoroughly reflexive. That is, not only is the information about the 'self as object' constitutive of the 'self as object', but it is also constitutive of the subjective perspective from which the 'self as object' is observed. To extend White's terminology, self understanding changes both what it reveals, and in the process, inescapably alters the values and interests which prompt and guide self understanding. (Or again, in enlightenment terms, in the activity of knowing myself, both the knowledge and the knower are involved in a process of mutual change.) With both 'objects' and 'perspectives' changing in the process of self understanding, a person who succeeds in becoming 'self-controlled, generous and committed to scholarship' may view and evaluate her or his desires quite differently in comparison to previous interpretations. Alternatively, someone who has become a cad may, because of this fact, not see him or herself as a cad. Self understanding on this thoroughly reflexive account is rendered as an ongoing dynamic interplay between subjective perspective and object. Self discovery and self creation are mutually influencing characteristics of development over time.

To move from conceiving self understanding as a reflective process to conceiving it instead as not merely a reflexive process, but a thoroughly reflexive process, would perhaps enable us to say something about how we formulate our account of the possibilities for and limits to personal autonomy in late modernity. On the positive side, the reflexive story enables us to conceive of further possible extensions to the scope of autonomous action. That is, a thoroughly reflexive version of self understanding throws up the possibility of enhancing self determination. The potential enhancement of autonomy is made possible to the extent to which changes in one's subjective perspective, as well as one's own desires, might be considered as potentially being brought under one's own control. This would occur where the development of an individual's perspective, through reflexive self understanding, could be understood as an intensional act. Some complexity enters into the story in that the further control of one's own future self understanding may be apriori possible, but that this extension of control would require an understanding of the developmental processes of understanding at work. Hence a further degree of methodological transparency would be needed.

Conceiving self understanding as thoroughly reflexive does have the merit of providing alternative language for talking about 'self transformation'. White's encounter with the idea of radical Sartrean self transformation (ibid.) throws up the logical conundrum of self creation whereby a person, in the name of what Cooper calls the 'dadaist' interpretation of authenticity (Cooper, 1983) makes a radical break with the past. One logical difficulty with such a move is that such a radical break would become part of one's new history, but the break itself could hardly be explained ahistorically, and thus could never really escape that which went before. Another is that there seems to be

something logically awry in the possibility of distancing the self as subject from the self as object such that the former could obliterate the latter. The advantage of the reflexive account here is that it can further explain this logical difficulty. The reflexive story replaces the model of the self as subject changing the self as object with that of the reflexively configured 'understanding self' changing over time through the ongoing creation of ever new objects and perspectives. Thus the 'self as subject' and 'self as object' are no longer disassociated, rather they change together over time. In practical terms, self understanding conceived as thoroughly reflexive would impose limits on 'self creation'. Partly because of the necessary uncertainty incurred in self change, and partly because of the circularity involved in self understanding.

The second domain to be addressed in the investigation of the objects and methods of understanding pertinent to flourishing in late modernity concerns the understanding of society. According to the liberal model, one requirement for the good life is practical knowledge about, or understanding of, the institutions and practices of one's culture insofar as they provide the options for choice and opportunities for activity in accordance with one's desires. According to the 'late modernity thesis', the institutions and practices are themselves reflexively configured. That is, the institutions and practices of late modernity are in part constituted by the social scientific information generated about them, information which routinely plays a role in their ongoing reconstruction. Our understanding of the sociological varieties and realities of for example marriage, alters our expectations and actions associated with that institution, and hence changes the institution. Sociological understanding as it pertains to the good life can then be seen as having an object with a peculiar reflexivity. It is this reflexivity which renders the information gained intrinsically volatile and unstable. It also implies that our understanding, if it is to be adequate, must take account not merely of objects, but of the dynamics of the generative processes at work, and perhaps the evolution of these generative processes. Again, to the extent that meaning and significance is part of the story, our understanding will be interpretive and perhaps contentious. In order that autonomy be retained, the requirement of transparency will have implications both for our need for understanding of the generative processes at work in the construction of the institutions, and for our understanding of our method of understanding. In addition, if we accept that institutions are constructed and routinely reconstructed through the actions of persons (reacting to information), we cannot fully escape our own involvement in the generative processes of that construction. This puts us in a position of weak involvement with them.

The third domain I want to address in questioning the character of knowledge or understanding necessary for the liberal good life is that of understanding others. The requirement to understand others raises the prior question of who the others are. According to the 'late modernity thesis', the others in question include not only those living in close proximity within our community, which may itself include a degree of

cultural plurality, but increasingly those inhabiting different cultures in other countries and continents. The people of other countries and continents becoming increasingly visible, and increasingly having a voice, largely due to the power of modern information technology. The same information technology helps makes apparent the causal links between our actions and their consequences in far off places. These alterations in the perceived parameters of responsibility in tandem with our communications with those with quite different cultures from our own, make it more than ever necessary to understand those with different cultures from our own. In order to maintain the moral justification underpinning the liberal version of the good life, these others must be understood in their difference. That is, we need a conception of understanding that is capable of embracing cultural diversity rather than proceeding through cultural 'imperialism' or homogenisation.

The need to communicate successfully with persons belonging to cultures very different from our own may provide a further justification for employing the social scientific methodological language of 'understanding' rather than the 'knowledge' of natural science with its enlightenment epistemology. However, these two conceptions clearly do not exhaust the field. In philosophy we may ordinarily look to Aristotle's conception of 'phronesis', particularly as it appears in the Nicomachean Ethics, (Aristotle, 1976, Book 6) when trying to articulate practical knowledge. Indeed, 'phronesis', as a description of a domain of, and methodological orientation to, practical knowledge of the human world, appears to be well suited to our task in hand. Firstly, in that phronesis is concerned with; 'what is conducive to the good life generally' (ibid. p.209) Secondly, in that phronesis recognises the internal relation of means and ends in the determination of action. (ibid.) Thirdly, in that phronesis refers to the domain of making practical judgements which are sensitive to both object and context, 'action in the sphere of human goods.....involves knowledge of particular facts' (ibid. p.210-215).

Phronesis then makes reference to a practical domain with particular sorts of objects and purposes, and confronts the methodological questions therein. As such, it may stand as a prime contender for helping to describe the cognitive requirements of the liberal good life. However, phronesis might be seen as limited in two ways. Firstly, its associated methods for making judgements (principally through experience and the development of good disposition and the cultivation of virtues) may not be as well suited to finding out about others as they are to deliberating about political action. Secondly, when we come to understanding those inhabiting a culture with a significantly different conceptual framework from our own, experience is not always a reliable guide. Experience of western scientific methods may not be particularly helpful for understanding those of non-western cultures.[5] Whilst phronesis then provides an indication of the kind of conception required, i.e. articulation about the specificity of domain, objects and method (rather than an attempt to supply a method without adequate reflection), it may be limited as a guide to method in our particular period.

Before moving on to pull together some of the requirements of an adequate account of understanding, one further point should be made which may both illuminate further our task in hand, and indicate a further possible limitation of phronesis. This concerns the relationships between the different fields of understanding. The 'late modernity thesis' carries an implication of the inter-relatedness of the different understanding domains, and this might have some input into the methodological question. Firstly, the relationship of self understanding and the understanding of society. Self understanding and the understanding of society are related insofar as the concepts, values and categories employed in self understanding are culturally derived, and also in that changes in one's own values resulting from self understanding may also alter the way social institutions are interpreted. Secondly, the relationship of self understanding and the understanding of others. These domains are related in that comprehending the values of others may have an effect on our own values, and also in that the values and interests which guide our attempts at understanding others spring from ourselves. Thirdly the relationship of understanding others and understanding society. These domains are related in that the values and interests which guide our attempts at understanding others spring from our society. In moving toward an adequate model of understanding for living the good life in late modernity then, one feature of late modernity that needs to be taken into account is that understanding does not take place within isolated domains. Rather, it is achieved, or generated, within something more like a web whereby understanding in one domain affects that in other domains. The interconnectedness of the different domains of understanding reflects the mutual influence of the construction of social institutions and practices with our understanding of them, and our own awareness of our perspective and agency. In particular, self understanding is implicated in all other forms of social understanding and in general terms, understanding in any one domain needs to make reference to others.

The need for self understanding in the understanding of others, along with the need to deal with other cultures, highlights weakness and limitations in some traditional models of understanding used in education (even the more progressive accounts which accept that the subjectivity of the other is ineliminable from adequate understanding). Empathy, for example, taken in its modern sense, to mean projecting into the other and thus fully comprehending the feelings of the other, not only lacks any easy test for verification of accuracy, but, if we allow that different cultures experience the world in different ways, would seem plainly impossible.[6] Furthermore, if we accept that experience is always to some degree subjective and interpretive, then empathy could only be achieved fully by actually becoming the person understood empathetically. Sympathy, taken to mean sharing the emotions of another, falls into a similar trap. Taken to mean the showing of appropriate emotional responses to the emotional behaviour of another, sympathy may have a moral or therapeutic role, but is limited in its generation of genuine understanding because of its behaviourist basis. It would be possible to extend this

critique of *'verstehende'* accounts of understanding, those which seek to access the subjectivity of the other, to take in the phenomenological tradition in sociology exemplified by Schutz and by some ethnomethodological studies, but a full blown account of the history of psychological and sociological attempts to develop a coherent and convincing version of intersubjectivity is neither warranted nor possible here. The single major point to be made is that if we accept that understanding is executed from different perspectives with different values, truth criteria and so on, then to be tenable, the understanding of others should include some way of incorporating methodological consideration of one's own perspective. A short way of saying this is that in understanding others in a moral and adequate way, scientific objectification, value neutrality and simplistic accounts of intersubjectivity are ruled out, and perspectivalism and its consequences is ruled in.

We are now in a position to summarise the significant claims made so far. The first positive claim is that the cognitive requirements for the good life can be usefully understood as (in addition to natural) intrapersonal, sociological, and interpersonal. The case put is that the social-scientific character, the ethical demands, and the methodological complexity of the cognitive requirements for living the good life in late modernity, make it worth exploring the methodology of 'understanding' as defined within the tradition of interpretive social science, but with a recognition of the Aristotelian account of 'phronesis' as a guide, as we try to articulate usefully 'practical knowledge'. Drawing on this tradition of 'understanding' (contrasted with that of natural science or analytic philosophy), helps us to ask different and further questions, to focus on specific relationships and processes, and to engage fruitfully the question of methodology. In addition, the 'late modernity thesis' draws our attention to the types and peculiarities of the objects to be understood, and to the implied differences in the modes of understanding that are appropriate to each domain. Self understanding is reflexive in the strongest sense, but understanding the construction of institutions and practices is also weakly reflexive. In each case the perspective of the 'understander', the involvement of the 'understander', and the generative processes at work, may be of significance. The understanding of others in late modernity highlights some of the difficulties of intersubjectivity associated with *'verstehende'* methods where others need to be understood through and within a different cultural context. The reflexivity, the involvement of 'subjects' with their 'objects', and the communications between different cultural frameworks, raise serious difficulties for methods of inquiry. Difficulties which need to be addressed at the methodological level.

The need to address, at the methodological level, the character of understanding that would underpin an adequate conception of the cognitive requirements for the good life in late modernity can be seen in the light of attempts to articulate the character of the methods of inquiry in each of the three domains presented. Put another way, the need for methodological work is revealed when we try to establish the prerequisites or criteria for

adequacy for methods of understanding. In the domain of self understanding, the thoroughgoing reflexivity calls for a method where the dynamic interconnectedness and mutual determination of subject and object can be accounted for. Consideration of the object and method in this domain problematises the traditional epistemology of subject and object itself as conceived in Enlightenment terms. In the domain of the sociological understanding of institutions and practices, an adequate method, in addition to coping with interpretivistic and probabilistic information conditions, needs to take account of the dynamic constitutive relations between information pertaining to institutions and practices, and the institutions and practices themselves. Here the chronically changing information and reflexivity mean that the method of inquiry must allow for the incorporation of descriptions of the complex processes at work as well as the institutional and informational products, (perhaps genealogy as well as sociology). In the domain of the understanding of others, the method must be capable of addressing the perspectives of others' cultures, and, moreover, accounting for the parochiality of its own perspective. For achieving strong autonomy, the method of understanding, including the relationships, processes, structures and dynamics of understanding, should itself be rendered transparent. That is to say that the strongly autonomous person will have what Taylor calls 'framework awareness'. (Taylor, 1985a)

These sorts of requirements of an adequate account of understanding relevant to living the good life in late modernity point us in the direction of philosophical hermeneutics as one potential source of progress. Derived largely from the characterisation of late modernity, several clues as to the hermeneutic character of the task of deriving a description of the cognitive requirements of have been gleaned, and may be worth following up. For example, the circularity of reflexive self understanding, the straining of the traditional subject-object dichotomy, and the interpretability of meaning. Each of these points finds strong echoes in philosophical hermeneutics, particularly in the ontologically grounded hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer. In the next chapter then I will turn to examine Gadamer's understanding of understanding. An exposition of Gadamer's ideas will hopefully not only help as a step in the process of the practical development of language and conceptual apparatus with potential for describing the possibilities for, and methods of, understanding in late modernity, but also, through extended methodological exegesis, will provide further, philosophical, arguments in favour of 'perspectivalism' and 'interpretivism' and against traditional epistemology and *'verstehende'* methodology.

Chapter 3. Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics

It is from the premise then, that one requirement for living the good life in late modernity is an adequate understanding of oneself, one's society, and others, that we are drawn into considering the methodology of understanding, and into casting around for appropriate and useful sources that might inform the practical development of methods of understanding appropriate to our time. It is in this spirit that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, understood as a study of the interpretation of meaning in the social world, is to be considered. For the purposes of the task in hand, I will select therefore those features of philosophical hermeneutics which appear to carry most promise in the attempt to develop an account of understanding with practical relevance to the promotion of liberal educational aims. Having said this, two tasks are needed in the service of clarity: one, to contextualise philosophical hermeneutics in something like a recent history of thought, and two, to begin to delineate the particularities of Gadamer's account of understanding. Accordingly, a very brief introduction to hermeneutics will be followed by a more full account of what I feel are the relevant moments in the Gadamerian position. These will include; the ontological 'grounding' influenced by Heidegger's conception of '*dasein*', the historicality of understanding and the related roles of tradition and 'prejudice', the role and character of language, the idea of conversation taken from Platonic dialogues, the structure and processes associated with the 'fusion of horizons', and reflections on the importance of the Aristotelian conception of 'phronesis' to this account. By the end of the chapter I would hope to have presented a version of Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics that could act as a starting point for criticism and as a springboard for the development of methods of practical understanding relevant to contemporary education.

3.1The Hermeneutical Tradition

'Hermeneutics can loosely be defined as the theory or philosophy of the interpretation of meaning. It has recently emerged as a central topic in the philosophy of the social sciences.....even though its modern origin points back to the early nineteenth century.' This is how Joseph Bleicher begins his synoptic book; 'Contemporary Hermeneutics'. (Bleicher, 1980, p.1) Bleicher is justified in his reference to the 'modern origin' of hermeneutics, a point to which we will return, but he recognises also the ancient roots of this form of understanding. These ancient roots help to illustrate the problematic which prompted, and, although in new guises, continues to prompt the development of philosophical and practical hermeneutics. The problem is based on the idea that understanding takes meaning as its object, whether it be meaningful action, meaningful text, meaningful speech or whatever. The problem arises because meaning is subject to interpretation. Hence, in Greek mythology, Hermes was not merely the

messenger of the Gods, he was their interpreter. Only via interpretation could he make their messages intelligible to mortals. Another site of Ancient Greek interpretation can be found in poetry education. Educators had the task, not of producing poetry or poets, but of granting wisdom through the interpreting of the poets. It was to this tradition that interpreters of the Renaissance looked in their attempts to formulate rules and methods for establishing the meaning of texts through interpretation. The most pressing need being that of the interpretation of religious texts. This impetus continued with the Reformation and hence in our tradition we saw the development of both Catholic and Protestant Hermeneutics.

This problem of interpreting sacred texts is by no means confined to our own tradition. It is widespread enough to be arguable that generating methods of textual interpretation can be seen as a general feature of religions of literate cultures. Bleicher writes; '...practically all religions relying on a sacred text have developed systems of rules of interpretation.' (ibid. p.12). The spur to such theoretical development comes from the need to 'translate authoritative literature under conditions that did not allow direct access to it, owing either to distance in space and time or to differences in language. In both cases, the original meaning of a text was either disputed or remained hidden, necessitating interpretive explication in order to render it transparent.' (ibid. p. 11) Hence the origins of both classical and nineteenth century hermeneutic theory lie in the difficulties and possibilities encountered because of the desire to expose, recover, or reconstruct the meaning of an important text.

The significance of nineteenth century developments in hermeneutics (the 'modern origins') to the present day, is, in part, that in this period, bold attempts were made to systematise and generalise hermeneutic principles of interpretation. Schleiermacher, commonly cited as the most important theorist of hermeneutics of his time, constructed a list of forty four grammatical 'canons' of interpretation, and in addition produced canons of psychological interpretation, which he believed applicable to the reading of any text.[1] This scientific approach to interpretation enabled a broadening out of the paradigm from that of specifically religious texts to the building of a general methodology for textual exegesis. To characterise Schleiermacher's contribution to the tradition of philosophical hermeneutics as a formalising process would, however, be to underestimate grossly the subtlety of his theorising and the impact of his work. Schleiermacher made two vital theoretical contributions that need to be understood if we are to follow the development of the hermeneutic tradition.

The first important strand in Schleiermacher's conceptualisation of hermeneutics was the elucidation of the psychological component that is a condition of understanding according to the 'verstehende' tradition. If an adequate understanding of others must inescapably refer to the subjective intentions of those others, then arguably the same is true of understanding a text. The subjectivity involved in the understanding of a text is taken to be that of the author. Hence an adequate understanding of the text will be one

which represents the author's intentions accurately. In order to access these intentions it may be necessary to consider the linguistic and interactional context of the author. Here the psychological aspect interweaves with the first grammatical canon; 'Everything that needs a fuller determination in a given text may only be determined in reference to the field of language shared by the author and his original public.' (Bleicher, 1980, p.14) Meaning is then for Schleiermacher, as with biblical hermeneutics, equated with literal authority. The question of meaning is about what the author wished to convey to us. The psychological work comes in as we attempt to recreate the original act of production, to perhaps empathise with the author. Indeed (as Dilthey argued), because some of the active thoughts in the mind of the author remain unconscious, it is arguable that we have the possibility of understanding the author better than he understands himself. The stress on psychology indicates that the context in which a text was produced is used as a source for providing clues as to the intended meaning of the text. The unquestioning assumption, that the meaning of a text is ascertained through reference to the author's intentions, reflects the legacy of religious hermeneutics.

Schleiermacher's second canon is also of foundational significance to the development of modern hermeneutics, but only when understood in the light of further assumptions. He states; 'The meaning of every word in a given passage has to be determined in reference to its coexistence with the words surrounding it.' (Quoted in Bleicher, 1980, p.15). Such a statement is open to more than one interpretation, but in the tradition of hermeneutic theory has been taken as a starting point for deriving the circularity of hermeneutic understanding. Betti, in his exposition of Schleiermacher, puts it thus; 'The meaning of the whole has to be derived from its individual elements, and an individual element has to be understood by reference to the comprehensive, penetrating whole of which it is a part.' (Betti, 1962) What Betti has done is to make explicit, and to elaborate the consequences of, the implicit assumption that to be intelligible a text must form a meaningful whole. From this conception we derive the much used idea that hermeneutical understanding proceeds through mediation between the parts and the whole. Put more simply, words and sentences are understood only in the context of the meaning of the whole text. Conversely, the meaning of the text as a whole is derived from the meaning of its constituent parts.

It is from Schleiermacher then that we derive the characteristic structure of modern textual hermeneutics. The key points in the theory of understanding are that: understanding is achieved through the interpretation of meaning, and that understanding proceeds in a circular fashion, moving between the parts and the whole as ever greater understanding is attained. The goal on Schleiermacher's account is the reproduction of the original meaning. Hence perfect reproduction can be held up as the regulative ideal which leads us to valid interpretation. This conception of hermeneutic understanding, in which the aim is to reproduce or reconstruct an original meaning, is classified by Gallagher as 'conservative hermeneutics'. A label attached to the work of Betti and, in

the educational field, to E.D. Hirsch. (Gallagher, 1992, Ch.6). The assumption of unitary original meaning grants a scientific possibility of objectivity, where objectivity is taken to denote the probability of reproducing the meaning defined by the original authorial intention.

This hermeneutic paradigm, with its emphasis on close scholarly textual examination and the refining of methods for accessing authors' intentions, has dominated the English speaking world's idea of interpretation for most of the last century. In the 1960's however, the influence of continental philosophy and social theory began to open up new and potentially fruitful area of cross fertilisation. In hermeneutics the major changes came partly through the translating of the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. (for example Husserl, 1970) It was Husserl who pioneered the critique of objectivism and the return to an ontological grounding for understanding. The possibility of displacing the orthodox epistemology of interpretation by an ontology of understanding was thus opened up. This was indeed a radical departure, what Ricoeur would later refer to as a revolution in thought. (Ricoeur, 1981). This grafting of hermeneutics onto phenomenology met its most celebrated expression in Heidegger's Being and Time. A text to which we should now turn in order to grasp the significance of the philosophical turnaround for contemporary hermeneutics, for it is this shift from epistemology to ontology that marks off twentieth century hermeneutics from its predecessor and which provides the radical grounds upon which Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is constructed.

3.2 The Legacy of Heidegger

In developing his conception of understanding in the social sciences, the substituting of a human ontology for the epistemology of the enlightenment tradition constitutes an important philosophical step for Gadamer. One stage in this process is the critique of the ideal of detached scientific objectivity associated with the enlightenment. Gadamer follows both Husserl and Heidegger in illuminating the unacceptable presuppositions underpinning this tradition of thought which seeks to ground knowledge on certainty and logical proof, and which separates subject and object as a condition of coming to know reality. In general terms, Gadamer reiterates Heidegger's description of understanding as a mode of being rather than an epistemological relation between a subject and an object. The existential origin of understanding is discovered using a phenomenological method, and in the alternative positive description of how understanding is possible, and why it gets off the ground at all, lies the promise of a different way of thinking about the structure and processes of understanding. This we need to unpack.

Gadamer's sympathies lie with Heidegger (and Husserl) in the attack on rationalistic method which takes Descartes as its representative focus. In the

Meditations, Descartes argues for the deduction of 'what is' from the foundational 'first principle of philosophy', the 'cogito', 'I think therefore I am' (Descartes, 1968, Meditation 4). Here, existence of the 'I' is guaranteed by the fact of thinking, and from this Descartes can make the argument that the essence of the 'I' is to think. 'I thereby concluded that I was a substance, of which the whole essence or nature consists in thinking, and which in order to exist, needs no place and depends on no material thing; so that this 'I', that is to say the mind, by which I am what I am, is entirely different from the body...' (ibid. p.53) It is the experience of certainty of a self, systematically abstracted from its context by the method of radical doubt, that forms the basis of knowledge. It is this most basic presupposition of the 'cogito', the reliance on the experience of certainty, which grounds the self as a subject. This self-positing subject in turn becomes the basis of the scientific division of the world into subject and object. To what extent we should take it as given that Descartes is seriously arguing that all knowledge is built on certainty, or that the 'cogito' is necessary to the intellectual foundations of enlightenment thought, is disputable. However, it is the presupposed dualism of subject and object, and the faith in the logical priority of the 'I' that forms the target of Heidegger's attack.

This positing of the logical possibility of the abstract 'I' is seen by Heidegger as making sense only insofar as one is engaged in the search for certainty and not insofar as one is describing reality. For Heidegger, the self, 'Dasein', is necessarily situated. 'The 'Dasein' is considered in concrete, embodied in existence, and not as a bare thinking subject. Heidegger does not waste time trying to prove that there is a real external world. Such a proof would be required only if one began from the erroneous idea that man is primarily a thinking object. But man is inconceivable without a world in which he already stands in relation. The 'Dasein' is from the beginning 'Being-in-the-world.' (McQuarrie, 1968, p.14) 'Being-in-the-world' is natural as contrasted with the artificiality of the Cartesian position. For Heidegger, the 'Being' of the self is inherently and inescapably relational. 'Being-in-the-world' is from the outset organically and irretrievably being-with. It is an illusion, fuelled by misleading abstractions, to suppose that it has to be first 'proved' that this may be so, or brought about by the application of special, technologically sophisticated exertions. This conception of existence as inescapably tied to a mode of being and, further, a mode of being within a world, opens up the relational character of existence in two ways. Firstly, the Heideggerian self has a relation of care, mood and understanding with the other types of 'Being in the world'. These include things 'at hand' (those which we use), those which are 'merely there', and persons who are 'there with me'. Secondly this conception of existence implies the possibility of the self investigating the relation between its own existence and its 'Being'. That is, it is as a result of the structure of human existence that existential questions are possible.

It is in terms of these relations that understanding is both possible and necessary for 'Dasein's' 'Being'. Understanding is not a property of the 'res cogitans', rather it springs from the existential self's 'Being-in-the-world'. For Heidegger there are two

modes of being-in-the-world; the 'normal' or pre-reflective, and the 'abnormal' which includes reflection. Whereas 'moving around', that is, acting normally, requires no reflection, when things go wrong reflective understanding is called into play. The need for understanding results from the recognition that things may be other than they are, where possibilities are revealed as such due to a lack of fit between actuality and possibility. For example, we are forced into understanding when a familiar object goes missing. In this experience we recognise both the possibility that things may be other than they are, and we are forced to reflect on the relevant properties of the object when seeking a substitute. In Heidegger's schema then, understanding arises out of practical human concerns and actions. Furthermore, understanding emerges in the movement from the pre-reflective condition to the reflective. No such movement is available to the Cartesian 'I'.

In the first instance then the 'I am' is confronted by her or his own 'facticity' or 'thrownness' and proceeds to exhibit a capacity to understand. Furthermore, in becoming an enquirer, the 'I am' is drawn into a consideration of her or his own being. That is, we are enabled to think of ourselves as 'ontologically distinctive'. (Heidegger, 1962, pp.26-27) This, for Heidegger, is a second level of understanding, where the inquiring self confronts the relation between existence and 'Being'. It is in asking the question of the meaning of its own 'Being' that the self makes possible the comprehension of its own existential condition. A condition which can only be revealed through working in the context of the world of 'things' and 'others' which have meaning. 'We know from Heraclitus and Parmenides that the unconcealment of being is not simply given. Unconcealment occurs only when it is achieved by work: the work of the word in poetry, the work of the stone in temple and statue, the work of the word in thought. the work of the polis as the historical place in which all this is grounded and preserved.' (Heidegger, 1953, p.191). The process of self understanding therefore involves thinking in the form of question and answer by the self located and acting reflectively in the world. This thinking about one's existential condition, on this account, does not centre on the 'I', rather it is the realisation of the relationship of the 'I am' and its 'Being'. The cogito is thus reversed. For Heidegger the equation would be more like; 'I am and have Being therefore I think and reflect'.

Understanding turns out, in Heidegger's terms, to be a mode of Being rather than a mode of knowledge, or, put another way, the mystery of understanding is ontological rather than epistemological. This position which sees 'man' as fundamentally a questioning being, and understanding as a basic category of human existence, is however not without its problems. One potential difficulty is that of the inherent circularity of the understanding of 'Being'. This can be articulated in terms of method. The concealed structure of existence is uncovered through the phenomenological method, and it is the consideration of the phenomenological conditions for understanding which reveal the ontological foundations for understanding. Hence we discover that human beings are

understanding creatures through our understanding. 'Understanding is the existential Being of Dasein's own potentiality-for Being: and it is so in such a way that this Being discloses in itself what its Being is capable of.' (Heidegger, 1962, section 31). In this conception of self understanding, neither existence nor Being is prior. Each term can only be understood in the light of the other and understanding can only be achieved as a consequence of their relationship. In Macquarrie's words; 'The understanding of Being which is already given with human existence, as itself a kind of Being, allows the inquiry to get started; but finally existence itself can be understood only in the light of Being.' (Macquarrie, 1968, p.9) Understanding then takes prior understanding as a presupposition. The circularity looks like the kind of logical problem articulated in, for example, Plato's Theaetetus. Here the dialogue reveals that, in orthodox epistemology, the answer to the question; 'What is knowledge?' must always refer to some kind of knowledge. (Plato, 1973) Such arguments are deemed regressive in logical terms in that the same term appears in both question and answer.

Heidegger is aware of the pejorative connotations associated with 'circular reasoning' in scientific discourse, and the general acceptance that circularity undermines the value and acceptability of argument. 'In a scientific proof, we may not presuppose what it is our task to provide grounds for. But if interpretation must in any case already operate in that which is understood, and if it must draw its nurture from this, how is it to bring any scientific results to maturity without moving in a circle...?' (Heidegger, 1962, section 32). Heidegger recognises the implications of this hermeneutic circle for the scientific study of history and in particular the ideal of detached objective experience. As he says; 'But even in the opinion of the historian himself, it would admittedly be more ideal if the circle could be avoided and if there remained the hope of creating some time a historiology which would be as independent of the standpoint of the observer as our knowledge of nature is supposed to be.' (ibid.) However, this hope for escape from the circle is used by Heidegger only to reveal the sense in which this form of circularity may be commonly misunderstood; '*But if we see this circle as a vicious one and look out for ways of avoiding it, even if we just 'sense' it as an inevitable imperfection, then the act of understanding has, been misunderstood from the ground up.*' (ibid.) The hermeneutic circle is, for Heidegger, virtuous. It possesses an 'ontologically positive significance'. (ibid. p.236) This positive connotation is made possible because the act of understanding is interpretive. The circularity refers not to regressive 'question begging', but to the motion 'backward and forward' between understanding and interpretation. This is a lively, dynamic and creative movement, in which our original understandings are enhanced and altered as we learn more about our Being. Hence Heidegger can make the claim that 'In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing.' (ibid. section 32). Getting outside or beyond the hermeneutic circle is as undesirable as it is impossible. Human understanding needs no transcendental realm, it is generated from within the human perspective.

According to this approach, understanding, which proceeds through productive circular motion, is possible only for social creatures with a high degree of reflexive consciousness. That is, it is part of the specifically human condition. 'The "circle" in understanding belongs to the structure of meaning, and the latter phenomenon is rooted in the existential constitution of Dasein...' (ibid.) As far as Heidegger is concerned, this understanding is something which fundamentally helps to define the human existential condition. 'The fundamental existentalia which constitute the Being of the "there", the disclosedness of the Being-in the world, are states-of-mind and understanding.' (ibid. section 34). It is important however not to fall into the trap of thinking that understanding is the only defining quality of humans. Understanding is a practical response to the purposefulness of human life. This purpose implies a moment of appropriation and application and it is in recognition of this that we confront the interpretive nature of hermeneutic understanding. Understanding is grounded in 'fore-sight', it is never a presuppositionless apprehension of the meaning of anything. Rather, understanding proceeds as interpretation on the basis of what we are already prepared to comprehend. In Heidegger's words; 'In every case interpretation is grounded in "something we see in advance" - in a fore-sight. This fore-sight 'takes the first cut' out of what has been taken into our fore-having, and it does so with a view to a definite way in which this can be interpreted.' (ibid. p.191) It is the interpretation 'as something' which allows for the appropriation of what is understood, and this implies prior interest and beliefs. All interpretation, whether at the informal level, which enables us to make sense of our environment, or at the formal level of explicit interpretation of texts, takes place within this fore-structuring.

One further contribution of Heidegger to the development of philosophical hermeneutics which is appropriated by Gadamer is the claim to the primacy of discourse as a method for revealing the world. 'Discourse is essentially equiprimordial with states-of-mind and understanding'. (ibid. section 34). Heidegger's point here is that whatever is intelligible to 'Dasein' can be put into words. 'The intelligibility of Being-in-the-world - an intelligibility which goes with a state-of-mind - expresses itself as discourse. The totality-of-significations of intelligibility is put into words.' (ibid.) It is the belief in the need for discursive exchange in the process of understanding that leads to Heidegger's consideration of linguistic activity. 'Discoursing or talking is the way in which we articulate 'significantly' with the intelligibility of Being-in-the-world. Being-with belongs to Being-in-the-world, which in every case maintains itself in some definite way of concernful Being-with-one-another. Such Being-with-one-another is discursive as assenting or refusing, as demanding or warning, as pronouncing, consulting or interceding, as 'making assertions' and as talking in the way of 'giving a talk'.' (ibid.). Within this discursive relation with others, Heidegger emphasises the role of listening with respect to what he sees as the primary linguistic activity of argumentation; the 'question - listen - reflect - appropriate' process.

I have tried here to sketch, albeit briefly, the principal ideas, developed by Heidegger, which feed into Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. In this approach, Heidegger side-steps the charge of idealism by his employment of a phenomenological method which locates the origin of human understanding in the practical demands encountered in the social and physical environment. Self understanding, as insight into the human existential condition, arises out of this practical understanding, and understanding in general both reveals and constitutes a defining particularity of human existence. The location of the origin of understanding in the nature of human existence allows for the positing of an alternative to the human essence argued by Descartes. The claim that every act of understanding is grounded in a practical need to render something intelligible prompts the argument that everything intelligible is understood hermeneutically, and hence to the claim for the universality of hermeneutics. The arguments for the 'shift' to ontology, and for the circularity of understanding (along with the associated assertions about the role of language, the necessity of interpretation, and the primacy of discourse in understanding) are primarily presented by Heidegger as a phenomenological account of the human existential condition, rather than as a method for understanding the world. That is, Heidegger provides one description of the structures and processes which make understanding possible and not a methodology or practical methods for understanding as such. As John Macquarrie puts it; 'If anyone goes to Heidegger looking for a ready-made 'hermeneutic method' that can be applied, he is going to be disappointed. But if he goes to Heidegger to find something of what interpretation involves, in all its complexity as both science and art, then I think he can learn a great deal.' (MacQuarrie, 1968, p.167) Some criticisms of Heidegger's assumptions and arguments will be met in the following chapter, however first it is necessary to consider how Gadamer appropriates these ideas in the development of his account of the actuality of understanding, and the way in which the concepts are refined and augmented when historically and culturally contextualised.

3.3 History, Prejudice and Tradition

Gadamer's account of the historicality of understanding extends Heidegger's critique of enlightenment rationalism, and in the process rehabilitates the notion of prejudice in understanding in a way that lends itself to employment in the consideration of social science methodology. For Gadamer, the enlightenment project sought to raise reason and scientific methodology to the position of a universal judge of truth. This 'conquest of mythos by logos' is portrayed by Gadamer as a failure of Enlightenment thinking to recognise the prejudicial character of its own understanding. It is a vain attempt to transcend the historical situatedness that characterises all thought. Faith in atemporal and impersonal reason rather than in the authority of tradition is itself just one more prejudice. In his words; 'The overcoming of all prejudice, this global demand of the

enlightenment, will prove to be itself a prejudice, the removal of which opens the way to an appropriate understanding of our finitude, which dominates not only our humanity, but also our historical consciousness.' (Gadamer, 1989, p.276) There is for Gadamer no sense in which one could take an ahistorical view, free from the contamination of the prejudices of one's own tradition. In effect then the Enlightenment project constitutes a prejudice against prejudice, concealing its own failings only through its built in obscuring of its own prejudiced foundations. For Gadamer, this amounts to a lack of self awareness on the part of science. Gadamer then is making two claims about the role of prejudice in understanding. First that it is inescapable and second that it is positive.

In order to make intelligible Gadamer's arguments for the necessary and positive role of prejudice in understanding, it will be helpful to first get clear just what is meant by 'prejudice' as it is used by Gadamer. It is apparent, even from the most superficial reading, that Gadamer's employment of the concept translated as 'prejudice' differs significantly from the manner it is used in ordinary English. In English, an important connotation of the word is that of bias, hence the pejorative use in connection with, for example, judicial matters. In this context 'prejudice' might describe the sort of situation where opinions are formed prior to, or in the face of, the evidence presented. In such a case, judgement is impaired in that it actually reflects a particular set of prior beliefs or feelings rather than a balanced judgement of the truth of the matter. Prejudice is rightly condemned in this setting of legal and moral judgements on the grounds that it is a root of inequality and injustice. Such prejudice can also be seen as limiting the possibilities for hearing the voice of the other. We therefore ordinarily hold that fairness and openness demands that we act in a non-prejudicial manner.

Gadamer is quite aware of the negative connotations attached to the notion of prejudice, but argues that whilst in one sense, and in one particular context, prejudice may be inappropriate and wrong, this is not the end of the story. To bolster the positive account which involves a much richer and more varied sense of the term, Gadamer initially reveals the contingency of the belief that prejudice is a wholly bad thing. 'The history of ideas shows that not until the Enlightenment does *the concept of prejudice* acquire the negative connotation familiar today.' (Gadamer, 1989, p.270) In drawing on earlier sources of the concept of prejudice, Gadamer is not simply arguing that the concept has changed its meaning, rather he is putting forward the view that the concept in its present form is impoverished. Within the paradigm of enlightenment epistemology, the previous usefulness of the concept has been forgotten as the background theoretical framework has been unable to support its positive application. It is in this sense that Gadamer can talk of the 'rehabilitation' of prejudice as part of the project of coming to terms with the problems of modernity. However, if prejudice is to be rehabilitated as a concept which means something different to bias, then we need to know this meaning.

Prejudice for Gadamer refers to what Heidegger terms 'fore-structuring'. For Gadamer, experience (exemplified by social science) is always gained from a position

where particular questions are raised and particular interests attended to. '...in the human sciences the particular research questions concerning tradition that we are interested in pursuing are motivated in a special way by the present and its interests. The theme and object of research are actually constituted by the motivation of the inquiry' (ibid. p.284) Even in selecting our topic of investigation, we are, in Gadamer's terms, already 'within' a prejudice. Prejudice for Gadamer, as for Heidegger, is then a necessary prerequisite of the process of understanding. Necessary insofar as it is a universal and inescapable condition of experience. 'In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience.' (ibid.) Having particular beliefs, concepts, interests, environment, and tradition, grants us: a location from which to ask questions, the impetus to ask them, and the choice of which questions to ask. Understanding in the social sciences is therefore made possible through prejudice.

In Gadamer's contextualised hermeneutic, the source and content of the prejudice is governed by one's situation. More accurately, it is in the first instance produced through the particularity of the historical situation in which we find ourselves. The interpreter cannot escape this situatedness and cannot avoid the conditioning effects on her or his consciousness. The force of tradition is 'already operative in the choice of the right question to ask.' (ibid. section 32). Not only are our interests and concerns historically located, but our basic categories, conceptual maps and tools for understanding are historically conditioned. Gadamer emphasises the degree to which we are shaped by our cultural heritage. 'History does not belong to us, we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitute the historical reality of his being.*' (ibid. p.276). Prejudice, in the form of 'fore-conceptions', is necessary to this account of understanding in that it furnishes us with a schemata in which to try to fit new experiences of the world.

Gadamer is making two points here. Firstly, that when we try to understand anything we are inescapably already prejudiced. As long as we grow up in a culture, we unavoidably have prejudices. Secondly, that prejudice is a necessary condition for understanding. In the absence of prejudice, understanding never gets off the ground. The combination of the two is important in that it faces head on the Enlightenment attack on prejudice. A supporter of enlightenment doctrine could agree with the first statement but see the initial developing of prejudices within a specific culture as something to be overcome in the fullness of life. The second statement might then jar more with the Enlightenment thinker who surely would wish to claim that if truth in the form of accurate representation of the world is our goal, then a disinterested and detached

scientific approach would be the ideal. The dislocation of the pursuit of truth and the pursuit of interests is of tremendous importance for the enlightenment scientific ideal, indeed a cornerstone of the ethics of research (although as we have seen through the works of Kuhn and Feyerabend, scientists have rarely lived up to the ideal). Gadamer, however is claiming that the ideal itself is untenable. Whatever we research must always be motivated from our own interests.

Gadamer goes beyond this latter claim to argue not only that prejudice is a necessary condition for understanding, but that it is a positive force in the disclosure of the world. Whereas in Enlightenment thinking even prejudice in Gadamer's sense is seen pejoratively, in Gadamer's hermeneutics prejudice enables increased understanding by opening avenues of enquiry and creating new problematics. In the paradigmatic case of historical research, new perspectives arising out of new interests furnish us with new ways of seeing the past. Thus we now have women's history, labour history, black history and so on. According to these different interests, different selections are made, events are differently interpreted, and different meanings are conferred. Within this historiographical tradition a culturally specific context elicits the questions asked, and supplies the concepts of understanding and direction for research.[2]

Understanding on this account is 'perspectivalist'. The rejection of enlightenment epistemology involves the rejection of the 'view from nowhere' and the embracing of views, as it were, from particular places. Such views are historically and practically contextualised. The multiplicity of perspectives from which understanding can proceed reflects the many possible interpretations of the meaning and significance of human actions, events and communications. 'We accept the fact that the subject presents itself historically under different aspects at different times or from a different standpoint' (Gadamer, 1989, p.284) The view that there are no objects out there to be discovered in history appeals to a distinction between physical reality and meaningful social reality. It is the basis of Gadamer's distinction between the natural sciences and the '*Geistwissenschaften*'. 'Whereas the object of the natural sciences can be described idealiter as what would be known in the perfect knowledge of nature, it is senseless to speak of a perfect knowledge of history, and for this reason it is not possible to speak of an "object in itself" towards which its research is directed.' (ibid. p.285) The claims of these different perspectives may be complementary, helping to cross fertilise and further promote alternative understanding. They may on the other hand compete as claims to being the better or more appropriate account. In the absence of an overarching set of rules or applicable criteria for adjudicating as to which represents the correct account, we are faced with the spectre of relativism. Each account of the phenomena being seemingly neither more nor less acceptable than any other. Both Heidegger and Gadamer are aware of the consequences of the easy slide from perspectivalism to relativism and seek to retain the former whilst rejecting the latter.

Having put the case for the rehabilitation of prejudice, Gadamer is then immediately open to the charge that, according to his schema, prejudices of the worst and most pernicious sort might be countenanced. Even if we accept that prejudice, in the sense of 'fore-structuring', has a role to play in practical understanding, we cannot deny that some prejudices are detrimental. In rehabilitating the concept of prejudice, Heidegger and Gadamer need to confront the question of how we are able to distinguish between good and bad prejudices. For now, only a brief preliminary consideration of this distinction is possible, more can be said when we turn to reflect critically on Gadamer's position in the next chapter. However, it is worth giving a general description of the way in which the distinction is brought out because it reveals a difference between the position held by Heidegger and that held by Gadamer.

In general terms, the distinction is predicated on the power of a prejudice to aid understanding as it occurs through dialogue in practice. In the words of Heidegger; dialogue '...not only lets those prejudices that are of a particular and limited nature die away, but causes those that bring about genuine understanding to emerge clearly as such.' (Heidegger, 1962, section 34). Heidegger is concerned to show that general and unlimited prejudices are preferable to those which are particular and limited. Gadamer's response is slightly different. He employs the concept of 'legitimacy', arguing that legitimate prejudices are those which enable us to seek after understanding by asking new questions, rather than foreclosing on the questioning process. The illegitimate prejudices for Gadamer are those which are limiting rather than limited, and dogmatic as contrasted to those which allow for new possibilities. Gadamer's position is more specific in that not only is it describing the sorts of prejudice necessary for rendering the world intelligible, it also leaves the door open to the particularity and limitedness of prejudice, and explicitly rules out any possibility of retaining the aim of finality or completedness as the aim of understanding. In both cases, the prejudices that should be rejected are isolated via a judgement which takes as its criteria the consequences for the future of the understanding process. Gadamer frequently refers to legitimate prejudices as 'productive'; 'The prejudices and fore-meanings that occupy the interpreter's consciousness are not at his free disposal. He cannot separate in advance the productive prejudices that enable understanding from the prejudices that hinder it and lead to misunderstandings. (Gadamer, 1989, p.301)

In procedural terms, the priority in dealing with a world in which understanding proceeds through prejudice is to make the prejudice explicit, thus evading the dangers of lapsing into dogma. This is the first condition of Gadamer's understanding of 'effective history'. It involves in the first instance, learning about our prejudices and knowing them as such. This heightened awareness that needs to be developed is what Gadamer calls 'effective-historical consciousness'. It is what Heidegger describes in relation to the reading of texts as follows; 'But this kind of sensitivity involves neither 'neutrality' in the matter of the object nor the extinction of one's self, but the conscious assimilation of

one's own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text may present itself in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings.' (Heidegger, 1962, section 34). The upshot of the point about the necessity of prejudice, coupled with that concerning the requirement of the awareness of one's own prejudice as such, is that understanding of any kind, as contrasted with misunderstanding, always involves a more or less explicit understanding of oneself and one's own socio-historical situation. This need for rendering explicit one's own prejudices in the process of understanding helps to illustrate one aspect of the circularity inherent in Gadamer's hermeneutic understanding. The awareness that one is prejudiced, and the making explicit of those prejudices requires self understanding. However, this self understanding is itself made possible only via a set of prejudices. Hence, in coming to understand through the exercise of prejudice, we are working within the hermeneutic circle. The 'hermeneutically trained mind' is one which is aware of the historicality of understanding, and of our own position within the process. 'We are not saying, then, that history of effect must be developed as a new independent discipline ancillary to the human sciences, but that we should learn to understand ourselves better and recognise that in all understanding, whether we are aware of it or not, the efficacy of history is at work.' (Gadamer, 1993, p.301)

The source of the prejudice involved in Gadamerian hermeneutic understanding is one's tradition. Hence the rehabilitation of prejudice in turn raises the status of tradition in the methodology of understanding. It is traditional (rather than purely rational), more or less consciously acquired, linguistic, conceptual, and moral and aesthetic categories that enable us to make sense of the world. Tradition (even when it is masquerading as pure reason) conditions the possible ways in which we understand the world. It is in this sense that it is possible for Gadamer to argue that before we make history, it makes us, and that our tradition goes before us and is projected into the way we see the future. This role of tradition in human understanding is at the same time both enabling and constraining. Without traditionally derived apparatus of understanding we cannot experience intelligibly because we lack a 'prejudice', but by its nature any tradition is limited and parochial, granting us only a particular and partial view. Part of the story of how we understand then involves a conception of tradition. For Gadamer all traditions are 'live' evolving phenomena. They are temporary human achievements, and as such, are flexible and subject to constant renewal and renovation. 'Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated.' (ibid. p.281). No tradition is utterly stable and hence no perspective fully fixed. Whilst on Gadamer's account there is no possibility of achieving the enlightenment fantasy of escaping into an atraditional realm of pure reason, there is equally no chance of complete fixity of a particular traditional viewpoint either. A constant possibility is the making of changes to the tradition itself in the light of ever new experience. How we come to use and understand tradition effectively, or put another

way, the means for overcoming our parochiality of perspective from within a particular tradition, will be a question to which we will return later in this chapter, and in subsequent chapters. What is apparent is that it will in Gadamer's terms involve a heightened consciousness of the role and nature of tradition in understanding.

3.4 Language as the Medium of Experience

In addition to the necessity of historicality in understanding, Gadamer further posits the necessary linguisticality of all understanding. In fact the two are closely linked, as is shown by the claim that tradition itself is linguistic. 'The relation between language and understanding is seen primarily in the fact that it is the nature of tradition to exist in the medium of language, so that the preferred object of interpretation is a linguistic one' (ibid. p.351). Language is, for Gadamer, the medium through which not only historical experiences, but all meaningful experiences occur. 'All understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of a language which would allow the object to come into words and yet is at the same time the interpreter's own language.' (ibid. p.350). Gadamer stresses the mediating role of language in our experiences. 'Since the romantic period we can no longer hold the view that, should there be no direct understanding, interpretive ideas are drawn on, as needed, out of a linguistic store-room in which they are lying ready. Rather, language is the universal medium in which understanding itself is realised.' (ibid.). In order to get at the radical sense in which Gadamer is arguing that all understanding is linguistic, we need to get clearer about what is meant by his claim that understanding is realised through language, and this implies gaining an understanding of his account of the relation between language, ourselves and the world.

Language for Gadamer is not conceived of as a series of signs intended to mirror events or to externalise our thoughts. There is no prelinguistic thought waiting to be externalised. 'The experience is not wordless to begin with and then an object of reflection by being named, by being subsumed under the universality of the word. Rather, it is part of experience itself that it seeks and finds words that express it.' (ibid.). Language is for Gadamer all embracing, the fundamental mode of operation of our Being-in-the-world. As a necessary structural moment of interpretation, language is presumed in all that we recognise and address as beings. This link between language and understanding forms, for Gadamer, the basis of all inter-subjective experience, outside of which there is no world of human existence. The 'unconcealment' of the world is thus a function of language; '... we follow the trail of language, in which the structure of being is not simply reflected; rather, in language the order and structure of our experience itself is originally formed and constantly changed.' (Gadamer, 1989, p.457) Experience is then in the significant sense structured by language. Language use is part of a creative rather than reflective process. An illustration of Gadamer's commitment to this position can be

found in his account of the role of language in the development of tradition. 'In as much as the tradition is newly expressed in language, something comes into being that had not existed before and that exists from now on.' (ibid. p.462).

This conception of the mediating position of language in the disclosure of the world draws on what Gadamer refers to as a Greek ontology, and is reflected in Humboldt's belief that the world is a world of language. It is, for Humboldt, the linguisticality of the experience of the world that marks off human experience from that of other animals. This is echoed by Gadamer; 'For man the world exists as world in a way that no other being in the world experiences.' (ibid. p.401). And again, 'Whoever has language 'has' the world.' (ibid. p. 411). The ontological claim refers to the human capacity for sense-making, or in Greek terminology for supplying a logos. Making the world intelligible is seen as the specific mode of human existence. We should be careful however amid this talk of Greek ontology. The ontology Gadamer has in mind is not that of Plato with his commitment to the ontological status of the Forms. Rather it is human ontology, it refers to what is real for us. On this conception, the world we inhabit, that is the intelligible world, only comes into being through linguistic mediation. It is language that gives birth, so to speak, to that which is capable of being understood, rather than intelligibility existing 'out there' to be discovered. To repeat, 'The experience is not wordless to begin with and then an object of reflection by being named, by being subsumed under the universality of the word.' (ibid. p. 377). Ourselves, our language, and the world we understand are not separable, they form an integrated unbreakable whole. This account of the linguisticality of being underpins Gadamer's bold assertion that; 'What the world is is not different from the views in which it presents itself.' (ibid. p.406). Language is not then like a pair of glasses which we put on in order to see this world, it is rather the case that the meaningful world is constructed as language itself is constructed. The form and content of experience cannot be separated. What is under challenge here is the belief that language is a piece of apparatus with which the human subject understands the world as an object. 'The fundamental relation of language and world does not, then, mean that the world becomes the object of language. Rather the object of knowledge and of statements is already enclosed within the world horizon of language. The linguistic nature of the human experience of the world does not include making the world into an object. (ibid. p.426).

On this view then experience is enabled through language as a medium. 'It is from *language as a medium* that our whole experiences of the world, and especially hermeneutical experience, unfolds.' (ibid. part III, section I). However, language, especially when we consider its necessary historicality, is also a constraint on what can be experienced. In the absence of the possibility of direct experience, the limits of experience are described by the limits of the medium. Humans, unlike Gods, are finite beings. Human language therefore discloses the world in a way which is proportionate to our finitude. In contrast to understanding language as instrumental or reflective,

Gadamer describes a language that '...related to the totality of beings, mediates the finite, historical nature of man to himself and to the world.' (ibid. p.457). If the sort of experience typical for humans is always linguistically constituted, then there are implications for what humans can and cannot understand.

One sense in which we are constrained by the essential linguisticality of understanding is that we cannot 'escape' from language. There can exist no vantage point 'above' or 'beyond' language from which we may 'look down' on it to survey or judge it. No perspective from which language can be made into an object. Thus the universality of the interpretive and hence hermeneutical nature of our understanding constrains the possibilities for critical reflection on language. A point to which we will return when considering the criticisms brought to bear by Apel and Habermas in the next chapter. According to Gadamer, the possibility of passing judgement on language as an object is at odds with the belief that our necessary immersion in language means that we cannot be anything but involved. 'Language is not the ultimate anonymous subject, discovered at last, in which all social-historical processes and actions are grounded, and which presents itself and the totality of its activities, its objectifications, to the gaze of the detached observer: rather, it is the game in which we are all participants.....Each of us is "it" and it is always our turn.' (ibid. p.284). Linguisticality is always enmeshed with the constraining historicality and sociality of human life, even in the special cases of linguists, or philosophers of language, who explicitly take language as their object. Such a move does not escape the hermeneutic relation, does not detach them from the linguistic tradition that they study.

A further consequence of adopting the position that language is the medium of experience is that it follows that it is possible that people with different languages see the world in different ways. Put more boldly, one's linguistic tradition can be said to partially determine the world which one inhabits. Within the constraints of language then it is arguably possible to experience different worlds according to the perspective provided by tradition. 'It is true that those who are brought up in a particular linguistic and cultural tradition see the world in a different way from those who belong to different traditions. It is true that the historical 'worlds' that succeed one another in the course of history are different from one another and from the world of today; but it is always, on whatever tradition we consider it, a human, i.e. a linguistically constituted world that presents itself to us.' (ibid. p.405). This however does not mean that we are trapped within one particular 'world view'. Language is always potentially open to extension and inclusion. 'Every such world, as linguistically constituted, is always open, of itself, to every possible insight and hence for every expansion of its own world-picture, and accordingly available to others.' (ibid.). Of course it is not possible, even theoretically, to achieve a culturally neutral 'world view'; '...whatever language we use, we never achieve anything but an ever more extended aspect, a 'view' of the world. '(ibid.). But, progressive expansion of linguistic resources through the incorporation of others' outlooks is a desirable

possibility. On Gadamer's account, the taking on of a different culture's language, and hence view of the world, is a relationship of gain rather than exchange. 'If, by entering into foreign linguistic worlds, we overcome the prejudices and limitations of our previous experience of the world, this does not mean that we leave and negate our own world.' (ibid. p.406). And again, 'By learning foreign languages men do not alter their relationship to the world, like an aquatic mammal that has become a land animal but, while preserving their own relationship to the world, they extend and enrich it by the world of the foreign language.' (ibid. p.411).

The final point I want to make in this excursion into Gadamer's thoughts about language as the medium of experience, is the distinction made between the presentation of language as word and as text. The distinction is worth noting because of the partial shift in hermeneutic paradigm away from that of text towards that of conversation heralded by Gadamer's work. Gadamer sees the writing of text as indicating a willingness to hand things down, to make something permanent and public. 'It is the ideality of the word, which raises linguistic objects beyond the finiteness and transience of other remnants of past existence.' (ibid. p.352). 'In actual fact, writing is central to the hermeneutical phenomenon, insofar as its detachment both from the writer or author and from a specifically addressed recipient or reader has given it a life of its own. What is fixed in writing has raised itself publicly into a sphere of meaning in which everyone who can read has a equal share.' (ibid. p.353). In becoming public property, texts detach themselves from their historical role and the lives of their authors and become more widely interpretable abstractions. 'In writing, this meaning of what is spoken exists purely for itself, detached from all emotional elements of expression and communication. A text is not to be understood as an expression of life, but in what it says. Writing is the abstract ideality of language.' (ibid. p.354).

The detachment of writing from the psychological dimension has consequences for the possibilities for how the text is read. 'What is fixed in writing has detached itself from the contingency of its origin and its author and made itself free for new relationships.' (ibid. p.357). These new relationships may open up the possibility of understanding a text in ways which go beyond the actual or even possible intentions of the original author or reader. 'The horizon of understanding cannot be limited either by what the writer had originally in mind, or by the horizon of the person to whom the text was originally addressed' (ibid. p.356). Gadamer's argument here is borrowed from Plato. Texts, unlike spoken words, are subject to interpretation from contexts other than their own. Unlike speech where misunderstandings of the author's intentions can be corrected, the absence of the author of a text means that the meaning of the text is a matter for the relationship between the reader and the text. Texts from the past are interpreted in terms of present prejudices which enables ever new meanings to be derived. 'To interpret means precisely to use one's own preconceptions so that the meaning of the text can

really be made to speak to us.' (ibid. p.358). Meaning is then not equated with authorial intentions

There are many points at which we may wish to take issue with Gadamer's account of the role and character of language as it relates to human understanding, however the objections can wait for the moment. For now it is enough to bear in mind that what Gadamer is proposing is a model of understanding which has linguisticality as a central concern. Language is the medium through which the world is revealed to humans. In the absence of language, meaningful experience is not possible. Disclosure of what humans understand as reality is generated via linguistic activity, and this has repercussions for our understanding of understanding in its different modes. Different types of language use reveal the world in different ways. Written language is the most abstract, idealised, form, in that it is public and open to ongoing interpretation and reinterpretation. A more common form of linguistic activity however is discourse, and it is discourse, in the form of conversation, that provides the model for the paradigm case of human understanding.

3.5 'Genuine Conversation'

The notion of 'genuine conversation' developed by Gadamer is modelled on the linguistic interactions exemplified in the Platonic dialogues. This classical interlocutionary ideal is somewhat adapted in Gadamer's attempt to articulate the qualities of conversation that enable hermeneutic understanding, but is certainly useful in shedding light on what Gadamer has in mind. Perhaps the most basic relevant feature of Platonic dialogue is that it is a discourse in which the interlocuters are engaged in the rational pursuit of truth. The contrast here is with speech used in sophistical ways, where the aim is to win arguments, or with rhetoric which has persuasion as its end. Typically the path taken in Socratic dialogue is one which takes the conversational partners on a journey from 'false knowledge' through the state of Socratic confusion, into comprehension of their own ignorance. From the state of ignorance they can embark, through a process of questioning and answering, on the journey towards truth and reach a point of agreement. This process may not equate particularly well with what actually goes on in the Socratic dialogues, but the ideal of conversation used in the spirit of free inquiry after truth is fairly clear. There is a difference between on the one hand finding out together and on the other trying to convince ones conversational partner.

A second feature of Platonic dialogue that may be of relevance here is the relative independence from the interlocuters of the direction of the flow of the conversation, and hence the understanding gained. In the dialogues, Plato frequently reiterates that we should 'follow' or 'pursue' an argument wherever it may lead, and respond in turn to the claims it makes on us. (see for example Plato, 1941). In Gadamer's terms, this 'following' where the argument takes us is expressed in the language of law. The 'law of the subject

matter'. 'When one enters into a dialogue with another person and then is carried further by the dialogue, it is no longer the will of the individual person, holding itself back or exposing itself, that is determinative. Rather, the law of the subject matter is at issue in the dialogue and elicits statement and counter-statement and in the end plays them into each other.' (Gadamer, 1976, p.61). The genuine conversation has then general aims such as truth, wisdom and edification, along with its more apparent practical dimension of addressing important questions. The particular outcome, in the sense of the understanding gained or the areas of enquiry covered, is however not circumscribed by those engaged in the dialogue.

Another way of looking at the independence of understanding in the ideal of Platonic dialogue is to characterise conversation as productive. The understanding achieved in the collaborative process goes beyond the possibilities present to either partner alone or prior to the conversation. In Platonic terms there is the potential to achieve a level of understanding not held previously by either partner. This means in effect raising the level of abstraction as understanding moves closer to the 'Form of the Good'.[3] While Gadamer would not accept the metaphysical presuppositions of the theory of the Forms, he endorses the belief that in genuine conversation, understanding that is new to us may arise. Such understanding may surprise or even dismay us. This generative possibility of dialogue is appropriated by Gadamer in the formation of the concept of genuine conversation. 'What steps out in its truth is the logos, which is neither mine nor yours and therefore so far supersedes the subjective opinions of the discussion partners that even the leader of the discussion always remains the ignorant one.' (Gadamer, 1989, p.331).

A prerequisite for genuine dialogue is an attitude of openness which begins with the Socratic 'elenchus' or, in Heideggerian terms, with the realisation that something is other than I believed it to be. This attitude must be preserved unconditionally in the ideal of the genuine conversation. In order that the subject matter be allowed to develop itself, participants in the dialogue must remain utterly anti-dogmatic and prepared to give up on firmly held opinions. Indeed, the skill of dispelling and avoiding dogma lies at the heart of the process of hermeneutic understanding. In keeping with the ancient Greek roots of this process of questioning and listening, where questions are really allowed to raise a challenge, this process is termed 'dialectic' by Gadamer. 'Dialectic, as the art of asking questions, proves itself only because the person who knows how to ask questions is able to persist in his questioning, which involves being able to preserve his orientation towards openness. The art of questioning is that of being able to go on asking questions, i.e. the art of thinking. It is called "dialectic" for it is the art of conducting real conversation.' (ibid. p.325). This style of discourse is then both co-operative and risky. Not only must the partners have a willingness to change, they need also to express themselves, testing their own opinions in the arena of argumentative discourse. The situational model for hermeneutic understanding is then quite unlike that of scientific

endeavour. The experimental observer is replaced by committed, interested partners, possibly from very different backgrounds, who are prepared to risk their strongly held beliefs in the argumentative arena.

3.6 The 'Fusion of Horizons'

Having looked at the philosophical lineage and conceptual sources utilised by Gadamer, we are now in a position to describe Gadamer's particular brand of hermeneutic understanding, and its realisation. In order to do this we need to consider more particularly the structures, processes, and aims of this form of understanding. The basic conceptual apparatus has been described already, we need now to illustrate the particular refinements brought about by Gadamer.

One such refinement is that to the concept of 'perspective'. Gadamer endorses 'perspectivalism' as a necessary and positive moment in understanding. He locates the source of one's perspective in one's particular cultural background, or tradition. This is what enables the understanding process to get moving. It constitutes our initial set of prejudices. Gadamer however wishes to extend the ocular metaphor along lines first investigated by Husserl. (ibid. p.302f). His point being that one's vision is enabled by the vantage point granted by one's culturally specific concepts of understanding, but that this vantage point also limits what can be seen. 'Every finite present has its limitations. We define the concept of "situation" by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence essential to the concept of situation is the concept of "*horizon*". The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point.' (ibid. p.302) What we gain from a specific cultural context then enables us to understand a limited amount. It both enables and constrains understanding. This metaphor of 'horizon' is intended to illustrate the finitude of human understanding, but at the same time it provides a potent educational metaphor. Broadening or going beyond one's current horizons lies at the centre of Gadamer's conception of learning.

A question arises here as to the extent to which cultural horizons are closed and distinct. Gadamer uses our understanding of history in order to give the answer that horizons are never wholly closed and only partially distinct. In understanding the past we need to take into account that the perspective available to us may not coincide with that of the period under scrutiny. However, it is also the case that all horizons are linked through historical continuity. Horizons are constantly moving or evolving such that they are characterised by both continuity and change. 'Just as the individual is never simply an individual because he is always in understanding with others, so too the closed horizon that is supposed to enclose a culture is an abstraction. The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we

move and that moves with us.....When our historical consciousness transposes itself into historical horizons, this does not entail passing into alien worlds unconnected in any way with our own; instead they together constitute the one great horizon...' (ibid. p.304). The dynamics of the development of horizons reflects the belief that culture is a human achievement. We are born into a culture, but we also take an active part in shaping traditions from within. 'Tradition is not simply a precondition into which we come, but we produce it ourselves, in as much as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition and hence further determine it ourselves.' (ibid. p.253) Thus for Gadamer, each generation, and each culture that meets meaningfully with another, can be said to have relative cultural autonomy.

It is the possibility of changing cultural horizons that brings the promise of extending the powers and range of understanding. The flexibility of vantage point thus becomes the prime concern of Gadamer in articulating his account of progressive understanding, and hence is of great import for our educational reflection. With flexibility, an horizon is something which may be surpassed, parochiality something to be overcome. 'A horizon is not a rigid boundary but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further.' (ibid. p.245). This potential change to one's horizon is at the heart of Gadamer's account of learning. It occurs in the process which he terms the 'fusion of horizons'. 'Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. *Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves.*' (Gadamer, 1989, p.306). This term 'fusion of horizons' helps to dispel any idea that what Gadamer is talking about is some sort of self contained expansion of consciousness. Rather what he is getting at is the productive potential of the meeting of those with different horizons.

Here we can see how the concept of dialectic, taken from Plato, is contextualised and thus shifted from being an article of faith to a description of a definite concrete process. The idea that, out of an interaction, new insights not previously available to either conversational partner may be spawned, is made plausible in that through the interaction of perspectives it is possible to create new perspectives. This getting beyond one's own perspective comes about in the circular process of hermeneutic understanding. In order to render the actions or utterances of the other intelligible to ourselves, we have to stretch our conceptual abilities. This grants us a new perspective from which to seek again to make sense, and so on. Not only are our beliefs or knowledge about the world changed then, but moreover our vantage points come together in a more inclusive horizon. As Bleicher puts it; '...understanding can be successful only in the constant revision of one's standpoint which allows the subject matter to emerge.' (Bleicher, 1980, p.122). It is through the interplay of interpretation, that occurs as we attempt to make sense of that which at first appears not to make sense, that novel ways of seeing are invented. The immediate goal of the understanding process then is the overcoming of the

parochiality of one's perspective through the dialogic encounter with that which is different enough from oneself to raise challenging questions. This may be text, person event or whatever. The 'fusing of horizons' involves going beyond one's current possibilities for understanding by meeting with another perspective. However, it would be mistaken to think that the alternative perspective is substituted for our own, or even that it is straightforwardly incorporated. Rather, a fresh perspective is attained that overcomes not only your own parochiality, but also that of the other.

In locating perspectives within specific and different cultures, Gadamer's account of 'genuine conversation' parts company with Plato's 'dialogue'. Whereas for Plato the interlocuters in the dialogue can be said to share roughly similar conceptual apparatus, for Gadamer, difference of context, and hence conceptual framework, has positive significance in the understanding process. It is typically through encounters with those with different prejudices, that genuine dialogue occurs.

3.7 The Rehabilitation of Praxis

Perhaps the single most important departure from previous versions of philosophical hermeneutics comes with Gadamer's insistence that the phenomenon of understanding needs to be comprehended as both a complex and a situated practical event. The sense in which the act of understanding is complex is that it necessarily comprises inseparable moments of intention, interpretation and application. The situatedness refers back to the argument that understanding is inescapably context specific. In explaining these claims about practical understanding, Gadamer draws on the legacy of Aristotle, specifically on his ethical and political writings. Gadamer's principle justification for this being that there is significant commonality between his account of the object and methods of hermeneutic understanding and those of Aristotelian 'phronesis'. Gadamer thus embarks on an interpretation of Aristotelian concepts and distinctions in order to reveal the subtleties and complexities of hermeneutic understanding. Gadamer is aware that he is using an Aristotelian approach in a way that Aristotle himself may not have recognised. 'It is true that Aristotle is not concerned with the hermeneutical problem and certainly not with its historical dimension, but with the right estimation of the role that reason has to play in moral action. But what interests us here is precisely that he is concerned with reason and with knowledge, not detached from a being that is becoming, but determined by it and determinative of it.' (Gadamer, 1989, p.312).

Although we are concerned here with describing, in a fairly technical manner, the derivation of a particular account of practical understanding, we should bear in mind that Gadamer, like Taylor, Habermas, and others, sees this as a central moral and political concern of late modernity. In Gadamer's terms, the retrieval of the lost and deformed concept of 'praxis' constitutes a prime task for philosophers in late modernity. It is the

revitalisation of 'praxis' that is seen as having the potential to counter the perceived dominance of 'techne' or what Max Weber might call the '*zweckrationalitat*', the instrumental rationality that seeks to match efficiently means to given ends. Given the post-Weberian view that the dominance (either overtly or covertly) of technical rationality in the modern period endangers liberty and undermines genuine democracy, it is unsurprising that Gadamer's reflections lead him into a critique of this sort of reasoning. It is against this background, as part of the search for a more humanistic form of understanding that Gadamer turns to Aristotle. It is in the distinguishing of 'phronesis' from 'techne' that an affinity between 'phronesis' and Gadamerian hermeneutic understanding is revealed such that 'phronesis' can act as an informative model for hermeneutic understanding.

In his interpretation of Aristotle, Gadamer elucidates three ways in which 'phronesis' can be distinguished from 'techne'. Each of the three stem from the view of the particularity of the object of 'phronesis'. That is that 'moral knowledge' or 'moral reasoning', is concerned with a particular sort of action. As Aristotle puts it, 'But prudence is concerned with human goods, i.e. things about which deliberation is possible; for we hold that it is the function of the prudent man to deliberate well; and nobody deliberates about things that cannot be otherwise, or that are not means to an end, and that end a practical good.' (Aristotle, 1976, p.213). Gadamer, in the same vein writes, 'An active being, rather, is concerned with what is not always the same but can also be different. In it he can discover the point at which he has to act. The purpose of his knowledge is to govern his action.' (Gadamer, 1989, p.314). It is this concern with what might broadly be termed moral or political action that enables Gadamer to interpret the concept of 'phronesis' as a form of knowing or reasoning closely related to that which he recommends for the human sciences. This is because the application of knowledge and the forms of reasoning relevant to a hermeneutically informed human science share with 'phronesis' the same structural and procedural features. Each has as a central theoretical problematic the articulation of the complexities of the structure and processes of application. 'Admittedly, hermeneutical consciousness is involved neither with technical nor moral knowledge, but these two types of knowledge still include *the same task of application* that we have recognised as the central problem of hermeneutics. (ibid. p.315).

The first relevant feature of 'phronesis' described by Gadamer is put forward in terms of the involvement of the moral or political 'actor'. Gadamer's point here is that unlike scientific or technical reasoning, phronesis describes the knowledge or reasoning appertaining to situations one finds oneself in rather than situations observed. 'For moral knowledge, as Aristotle describes it, is clearly not objective knowledge - i.e., the knower is not standing over against a situation that he merely observes; he is directly confronted with what he sees. It is something that he has to do.' (ibid. p.314) This active involvement of the subject, which places her or him in the arena rather than in the

audience, is not only a characteristic of the human sciences, but has important consequences for the knowing subject. In both the human sciences, and in phronesis, the subject's involvement leads to a requirement for a level of self awareness not normally associated with the technical knowing of techne, nor the theoretical knowledge of 'episteme'. 'The human sciences stand closer to moral knowledge than to that kind of "theoretical" knowledge. They are "moral sciences". Their object is man and what he knows of himself. But he knows himself as an acting being, and this kind of knowledge of himself does not seek to establish what is.' (ibid.).

The second point picked up by Gadamer is the necessary contextuality of phronesis. Moral knowledge or reasoning always proceeds within a particular context. Aristotle's account makes it clear that the exercise of phronesis must be sensitive to that context. 'Again, prudence is not concerned with universals only; it must also take cognisance of particulars, because it is concerned with conduct, and conduct has its sphere in particular circumstances.' (Aristotle, 1976, p.212). For Gadamer, this feature of phronesis implies that the question of how to act can only be determined in actual concrete situations. 'What is right, for example, cannot be fully determined independently of the situation that requires a right action from me, whereas the eidos of what a craftsman wants to make is fully determined by the use for which it is intended.' (Gadamer, 1989, p.317). Moral knowledge is therefore distanced from technical knowledge in that its application cannot be understood merely as the application of a rule or the exercise of a specific skill. '...the subject of ethical reason, of 'phronesis', man always finds himself in an 'acting situation' and he is always obliged to use the ethical knowledge and apply it according to the exigencies of his concrete situation.' (Gadamer, 1976, p.140)

Nor can moral action on this schema be the result of aiming at a wholly predetermined end. This brings us on to the third feature of phronesis relevant to hermerneutic understanding. As Gadamer somewhat cryptically says; 'Moral knowledge is really knowledge of a special kind. In a curious way it embraces both means and end, and hence differs from technical knowledge.' (Gadamer, 1993, p.322) What Gadamer has in mind here is that sense of 'ongoingness' referred to in the opening chapter of this thesis. Bernstein fleshes out the argument in 'From Hermeneutics to Praxis' (Bernstein, 1986a, chapter 3). 'Even more important, while technical activity does not require that the means which allow it to arrive at an end be weighed anew on each occasion, that is what is required in moral knowledge. In moral knowledge there can be no prior knowledge of the right means by which we realise the end. For the end itself is only concretely specified in deliberating about the means appropriate to *this* particular situation.' (ibid. p.100) Contextualisation of moral knowledge then precludes the separation of means and ends, leaving each as a partial codeterminant of the other within the complex of situated moral action.

Through his interpretation of Aristotle's conception of phronesis, Gadamer has sought to offer us a model of the hermeneutical problem of application. The form of understanding that is characteristic of the hermeneutical human sciences does not conform to scientific principles because its object is different. It is different in such a way that the sort of reasoning, and the complex considerations made necessary for adequate understanding, render it much more akin to moral understanding as described by Aristotle. Application is thus understood not as the using of a skill previously acquired, nor as an option that may or may not be exercised. Rather, the practical application of hermeneutic understanding is one necessary aspect of, or moment in, a complex act which incorporates self awareness, contextual sensitivity, and the codetermination of means and ends. Gadamer sums up succinctly the philosophical import of Aristotelian phronesis to the question of application at the end of his section in Truth and Method entitled 'The Hermeneutic Relevance Of Aristotle'. He writes 'We too determined that application is neither a subsequent nor merely an occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding, but codetermines it as a whole from the beginning. Here too application did not consist in relating some pregiven universal to the particular situation.' (Gadamer, 1993, p.324).

3.8 Some Concluding Remarks

In rounding off this largely expository chapter, I would like to give a brief description and characterisation of Gadamer's model of understanding, as it relates to the political, moral and educational domains. In so doing, my intention is to uncover some of the assumptions, and to reveal some of the potential benefits for thinking about educating for the good life in late modernity, that go with the conceptual territory.

In the attempt to reveal the limiting and prejudiced character of enlightenment epistemology, Gadamer attacks the conceptual framework which divides the world scientifically into subjects and objects. Such a stark division is shown to be demonstrably naive when applied to the study of history, or human achievement in general. Whilst rejecting these foundations for human understanding, specifically the certainties of the cogito, Gadamer finds an alternative source to ground human understanding. This is the 'Dasein', the Heideggerian description of the human condition which sees understanding as a basic part of a human life. Gadamerian hermeneutics begins not from the abstraction of the Cartesian 'I' with its ideal of perfect, certain knowledge, nor from an imagined 'uncontaminated' perspective of science, but rather from where we find ourselves in the lived world. Although revealing the endeavours of the Enlightenment as prejudiced rather than as a neutral description of reality, Gadamer resists the urge to provide an alternative neutral description himself. Instead he accepts the argument that all understanding is prejudiced in Heidegger's sense of the term, including his own. Such prejudice is necessary and positive, limiting and enabling. Gadamer is here already

donning a somewhat Aristotelian mantle, seeking only the sort of accuracy appropriate to the particular domain of understanding. The finitude entailed in this form of understanding is something appropriate both to its 'object', human social reality, and to our situation as limited and involved participant observers. Gadamer's hermeneutics then constitutes a human account of specifically human understanding. Hermeneutic understanding is, in a dual sense, a human science.

In the derivation of the conceptual apparatus of understanding, this model stresses the role of culture or tradition in the determination of the possibilities of what can be understood. However it allows room for personal achievement in that social institutions, language, and concepts, are seen as human achievements. The methodological holism assumed in the description of cultural products is always tempered by an understanding of the role played by individuals in the continual affirmation and reconstruction of such social goods. This commitment to the active role of individuals, in the construction of both social reality and the perspective from which reality is viewed, can be illustrated with reference to the place of self-understanding in the Gadamerian scheme. Individual self understanding is always justified with reference to moral and political action. As Habermas says in his review of Gadamer's Truth and Method, 'I find Gadamer's real achievement in the demonstration that hermeneutic understanding is linked with action orienting self-understanding' (Habermas, 1977, p.351). The individualism exhibited in Gadamer's account should not however be confused with any atomistic conception. Self understanding is not only always linked to action, but is possible only in and through understanding relations with others. As Ricouer puts it, 'It is thus the growth of [the interpreter's] own understanding of himself that he pursues through his understanding of the other. Every hermeneutic [interpretation] is thus, explicitly or implicitly, self understanding by means of understanding others.' (Ricoeur, 1974, p.17) This necessary connectedness of self understanding and other understanding, and the codetermination of individual and society proceeds, for Gadamer, according to the logic of something like an organic relation and must be understood as such.

In at least one sense then, Gadamer's account goes some way towards addressing the question of individual freedom. Individuals are socially constructed but, through their relationships and actions, they actively participate in critical and constructive work. For hermeneutic understanding to get off the ground, a degree of liberty is required, but equally importantly, the development of a critical faculty is imperative. Criticality may, in this approach, be characterised as the judging of the worth of values and institutions, or in the distinguishing between good and bad conversations, or between better and worse descriptions, or legitimate and illegitimate prejudices. Such judgement though must take place within the hermeneutic circle. In order to criticise, one must employ critical concepts, however, the critical conceptual resources available are themselves social products and may themselves be in need of critical appraisal. In the absence of external

criteria, some steps toward criticism are available. The first is the development of understanding of the framework of prejudiced inquiry, thus rendering transparent the understanding process. The second is the understanding of the particularity and parochiality of one's perspective, that is the seeing of one's own prejudice as such. Such critical moves get under way as responses to arising problems and possibilities, and as a result of meeting with alternative perspectives. Overall, the main point is that Gadamerian hermeneutics, as a form of understanding, has to be framed in a critical apparatus whereby those trying to understand can, at once, question the phenomena to be understood, the framework of understanding, and their own self understanding.

Also crucial to Gadamer's account of understanding is the conception of the relation of the means and ends of action. The relation is articulated in terms of the sort of reasoning that goes on in the sphere of practical affairs. Gadamer compares the sort of reasoning appropriate to hermeneutic understanding with that of Aristotelian 'phronesis'. For Gadamer, practical understanding demands mediation between ends and means, each being partly determined by the other. The problem of modernity is then not seen in terms of 'disenchantment'[4], whereby we can be said to have suffered a loss of the discourses characterised by that form of reasoning which gives expression to our ultimate ends, our human values. Rather, the problem is that the domain of practical reason has been usurped by forms of abstract and technical reasoning that are inappropriate for the generation and practical application of the values of our cultural heritage.

A further consequence of Gadamer's use of Aristotelian 'phronesis' in the determination of the model of understanding, is that understanding is conceived as bound to definite contexts, it relies on 'thick' descriptions. Gadamer's hermeneutic understanding makes reference to context inescapable in the determination of an interpretation. One might contrast this position with the rule governed form of interpretation put forward by Schleiermacher. While Schleiermacher's model of interpretation takes into account the context of the author, or, after Dilthey, that of the social 'actor', Gadamer's model also calls for the inclusion of cognition of the history and sociology of the perspective from which interpretation proceeds. Such cognition cannot go in advance of understanding in the manner of a rule, it is only worked out in the application of understanding in concrete particular instances.

Further assumptions underlying Gadamer's position will be brought out as an aid to criticism in the next chapter. For now it is interesting to note the lack of a certain sort of assumptions. By this I mean to bring attention to the absence of metaphysics that results from the phenomenological method employed in Gadamer's work, and to indicate some of its consequences. Although Gadamer has at least at some times talked of his Christian faith, he has always maintained that understanding is a secular activity. Indeed Gadamer shuns transcendentalism as it arises in for example the work of Husserl. In the absence of a God, a human telos or a neo-Hegelian conception of progress, Gadamer is resigned to the humble acceptance of the imperfectability of man and the inevitable

partiality of all understanding. Understanding is seen as a never-ending task, open-ended and ongoing, as befits our existential constitution. Hence the task of those involved in the 'conversation of mankind' is to keep the conversation going, to prevent foreclosure. The concerns of mankind are not with the everlasting Forms, rather they are spurred by the ever new problems and possibilities thrown up in life at is lived. On this reading, Gadamer's conception of understanding is at once practical and humanistic.

Thus far the account of understanding has been pitched at the meta-methodological level. That is, we have been chiefly concerned with the theoretical description of the possibilities of understanding rather than with the actuality of substantive understanding. In order to pursue the latter we need to concern ourselves with method. The next task is therefore to attempt to develop a practical account of understanding out of the conceptual legacy of Gadamer's hermeneutical model. In the attempt to operationalise hermeneutic understanding, as a form of practical understanding that is relevant to thinking about, and educating for, the liberal aims of education, we need to flesh out the associated conceptions of liberty and criticality, and to determine some sort of criteria that would indicate successful criticism. Such a move implies thinking about the relevant conception of truth, and how it is ascertained. We also need to formulate a practical conception of 'horizon' in order to show how 'productive dialogue' could be enabled. In trying to develop a practical version of hermeneutic understanding, we will, in the next chapter, confront some of the chief political and philosophical objections.

Chapter 4. Hermeneutic Understanding as Practical Understanding

The value of introducing the conceptual apparatus of Gadamerian hermeneutic phenomenology to the questions raised for liberal aims of education in late modernity has been couched here in terms of its merit in providing a grounding for, and conceptualisation of, understanding. In effect, it is put forward as a candidate of some promise in the search for a complement, or alternative, to the enlightenment account of knowledge as it constitutes a necessary component of the liberal educational aim of autonomous well-being. The hermeneutical approach furnishes us with a conceptualisation of understanding that accounts for the interconnected, context related, dynamic, and reflexive, nature of the activity of practical understanding; as contrasted with the more 'static' or scientific 'mirroring' associated with the familiar subject-object model. It is not the case however that the insights of Gadamerian hermeneutic understanding may be applied in a straightforward manner to our account of educating for the good life. Indeed, the introduction of the tradition of hermeneutic understanding into the liberal educational research programme is clearly problematic. The task of this chapter is to meet some of the objections to the hermeneutical approach, and, in so doing, to develop an acceptable and practical account of hermeneutic understanding.

Introducing hermeneutic understanding into the liberal educational research programme is problematic firstly because this form of understanding proceeds in the absence of the epistemological apparatus which makes possible the sort of objectivity thought necessary for grounding criticism. The adoption of hermeneutic understanding for the promotion of liberal aims threatens therefore to be self defeating insofar as criticism is thought to constitute a central requirement of the liberal model. A second problematic concerns the attempt to translate philosophical hermeneutics into a practical form of understanding. This latter problematic reflects the peculiar hermeneutic difficulty of shifting from a discourse about methodology to the generation of actual method.

The addressing of each of these problems invites us to clarify, to extend, and perhaps to modify the conceptual resources provided by phenomenological hermeneutics. To enable this process, this chapter takes the form of objections and responses: objections to philosophical hermeneutics as an account of understanding relevant to the liberal aims of education in late modernity, and responses aimed at clearing a space for the development of a practical and critical hermeneutics which might serve the liberal educational research programme.

4.1 The problem of Criticism

From the perspective of liberal democratic theory, one fundamental problem of hermeneutical forms of understanding is the danger that it may involve the relativisation of truth. The objection made is that the adoption of the tenets of hermeneutic

understanding in the describing of social reality, brings with it a denial of the possibility of objectivity as it is understood in the idealised epistemology of the enlightenment. If we accept hermeneutics then we must also accept perspectivalism, and this puts us on a course whereby we sail close to relativistic winds. The notion that, for any question in the human sciences, there is one determinate and correct answer, cannot be given up without causing consternation. The consternation can be described in a number of ways, but each description clusters around the problem of how we provide a grounding on which to base criteria for judgement of truth. The removal from the conceptual tool kit of the principle of objective truth is seen as leaving us ill prepared for the rational adjudication between truth and falsity. In the absence of the possibility of an objectively correct description of social reality, the critical engagement with what are perceived to be misrepresentations is threatened. The charge laid at Gadamer's door then is that whilst undermining the sort of epistemological framework that enabled rational critique, Gadamer has failed to provide an adequate alternative. As such, the hermeneutic approach to research, typified in the human sciences, is theoretically weak when it comes to matters at the heart of liberally constituted research. This weakness is exposed when we consider the role of the concept of objective truth in the liberal approach which traditionally has sought to distinguish between progress and regress, to liberate people from superstition, and to unmask false representations.

The fear of negative moral and political consequences of the loss of objectivity in the human sciences, has been expressed clearly in the response to Gadamer's hermeneutics by Karl-Otto Apel. (Apel 1973) According to Apel, a hermeneutics that is not up to the critical task threatens the democratic and emancipatory project that has developed in Western societies over recent centuries. Apel sees the 'idealist' hermeneutics of Gadamer as incapable of preventing the political manipulation of information. Apel's chief political objection centres on the fear that the 'de-objectivisation' of social knowledge opens the door for the powerful and unscrupulous to interpret events (and texts, utterances, history and so on) according to their own current interests. Acceptance of a plurality of potential interpretations under such circumstances undermines criticism in that it provides no clear method of establishing that one interpretation is objectively more correct than another. Apel typifies the response of a number of critical thinkers in identifying the problem of Gadamerian hermeneutics in terms of its moral and political consequences. He locates the source of the problem in what he perceives as Gadamer's failure to move hermeneutics from being an account of the complexity of what is involved in coming to describe something, to a method of sorting between true or valid statements and the rest. Apel speaks the objection of many when he articulates his concern that '...the task of a normatively relevant critique cannot be abandoned in favour of a mere description of that which is.' (Apel, 1973, pp35-36).

This need for a conceptual apparatus that is capable of providing a theoretical underpinning of normative critique is a theme which pervades the liberal educational

research paradigm. The importance of the wherewithal to generate criticism can be revealed through consideration of the unwelcome consequences that are thought to arise through the failure or lack of a critical framework. The general charge is that in the absence of some form of objective and common framework, we are in danger of lapsing into relativism. In order to understand why relativism is such a threat, and why it is important to deal with it, it will be helpful to spend a little time unpacking the idea of relativism.

The problem of relativism may be understood through consideration of a cluster of interrelated though conceptually distinct 'relativisms'. The first, and perhaps the most commonly referred to, is 'cultural relativism'. According to the doctrine of cultural relativism, the judgement of what is the case, what is true, real, or right, is ascertained with reference to the cultural context from which it originates. Cultural relativism as a doctrine is based on the belief that experience is culturally specific. In its weaker guise, the argument is that the world exists as it were 'out there' but that we experience it in different ways. That is, different people hold different perspectives on the same reality according to their cultural background. A stronger version would hold that people of different cultures inhabit significantly different worlds. Such a position rests on the idea that the meaningful world is both disclosed and generated only via culturally derived mediating apparatus. In general, cultural relativism invokes what has been termed a 'dependency thesis'. The argument here is that experience and judgement, rather than being objective and independent, are dependent on other factors which go to make up the culture.[1]

These cultural factors, factors that determine how we experience and judge the world, may be described in terms of the linguistic resources at the disposal of members of a culture. This relationship is explored in the work of Sapir. He writes 'The 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of a group. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not the same world with different labels attached. We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation.' (Sapir, nd. p.209) A sentiment that finds echoes in Peter Winch's classic 'The Idea of A Social Science', who puts forward the case that what counts as real to us is to a degree governed by the language we use. (Winch, 1972) A second sort of cultural relativism sees differing experiential and judgmental perspectives as based more generally in cultural tradition. This may include linguistic but also non-linguistic features. The major thesis underpinning these claims is that the perceptual and conceptual apparatus of humans is culturally shaped. Martha Nussbaum writes, 'Even sense-perception is interpretive, heavily influenced by belief, teaching, language and in general by social and contextual features. There is a very real sense in which members of different societies do not see the same sun and stars, encounter the same plants and animals, hear the same thunder.' (Nussbaum, 1993). This idea, that persons perceive and conceive of the world

in a manner related to their cultural background, is perhaps interesting rather than immediately starkly problematic. One place in which relativism might generate practical problems, however, is when the relativist doctrine is considered in relation to morality. Moral diversity may result in practical problems when actual disputes and difficulties are encountered in moral and political practice. Differing beliefs may be held by different persons or groups without causing too much trouble, but, when translated into action, incompatible moral codes may clash, bringing about offence or injury. The relativity of morality to local and particular traditions would imply that there is not necessarily any way of solving disputes of this kind. If moral actions are sanctioned with reference to a particular rather than a shared context, then finding a mutually agreeable settlement to disputes may be out of reach. In the absence of an overarching appeal to some universalist means of arbitrating between competing moral positions, a pragmatic accommodation or negotiated settlement may be thought to be the best available option. However, on closer inspection, accommodation and negotiation may not represent good or acceptable moral options for particular cultures, and more often may represent the least worst option in situations which allow for the unequal exercise of power.

It would seem that the difficulty encountered in attempting to reconcile diverse and conflicting moral and political positions, may go deep, perhaps reflecting the manner of the justification for the claims made. The relativity of justifications may be such that not only claims about what is right, true, and important, are relative to their cultural context, but also that what is to count as a validating justification for the beliefs held is context dependent. The possibility that the problem of cultural relativism goes this deep is addressed in, among many other works, the collection 'Rationality and Relativism' edited by Hollis and Lukes. (1982) In their introduction, they introduce the problem thus, 'In upshot, what counts as a good reason may be context-dependent. Galileo consulted observation and experiment, Bellarmine the scriptures; Evans-Pritchard the available evidence of causal connections, Azande the poison oracle. Each is equally enmeshed in a web of reasons, properly woven by its own standards from within but finally incapable of support from without' (Hollis and Lukes, 1982, p.10). It is indeed difficult to arbitrate between competing claims if they rest upon competing views of how we validate claims.

The relativisation of what is to count as validation for a claim raises difficulties for the resolving of moral and political disputes that arise between those of different cultures. Relativism threatens to take away the rational grounding of non violent forms of intercultural dispute resolution, and, in the limiting case, leaves us faced by the prospect of the force of naked power. If we were to accept the sort of relativism put forward here, what appears to be forsaken is the possibility of finding common ground upon which to build consensus even about the sorts of procedures that might be employed in the pursuit of peaceful coexistence. The problem is both practical and theoretical. Practical because it is relevant to how we discharge our moral and political responsibilities towards those who are different from ourselves. In the educational

context, the problem of the plurality and relativity of values and beliefs provides a problematic theme that runs through the processes of making decisions about curricula, aims, policy and so on. Theoretical because the possibility of relativism forces us to reconsider the commonality and universality of the epistemological or ontological grounds of intersubjectivity.

The view that the doctrine of moral relativism rides on the back of that of epistemological relativism is articulated by Harvey Siegel in his robust defence of universal rationality. '... it is commonly held that education ought to respect all students/persons, regardless of their race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.; and moreover that education ought to be particularly, and scrupulously, sensitive to the needs and interests of minority and other 'marginalised' students..... However, this moral/political perspective is often conjoined with a related epistemological perspective. The latter is perhaps best thought of not as a single epistemological position, but rather as a family of related theses: that knowledge is culturally determined and/or relative; that different cultures endorse their own epistemologies, e.g. their own conceptions of truth and views of the nature or criteria of epistemic justification.' (Siegel, 1995, pp.33-34). The problem of moral/political relativism is put into a package with epistemological relativism, and hence can be seen as a reflection of the crisis of western traditions of rationality. Whereas in the past, thinkers in our tradition made claims that were confidently justified according to the tenets of universal reason, in late modernity we are confronted with the possibility that this form of reasoning may be parochial rather than universal.

The threat of a moral relativism that is grounded on epistemological relativism lies in its potential to undermine the educational hope of finding the commensurability necessary for evaluating and reconciling competing claims. If it were true that those of different cultures could not agree on how to validate a claim, then it would appear that no value, nor any measure of value, could claim the assent of all those affected. The complete absence of universals implied in this position is taken by Siegel to be not only undesirable, but philosophically incoherent. In pointing out the incoherence, Siegel attempts to help to sustain the traditional enlightenment epistemology which he sees as vital for grounding the liberal value of promoting equal respect for others.

His major point is that the liberal aims of education and the educational initiatives that flow from them rest on 'conservative' Enlightenment epistemological presuppositions. That is, in attempting to respect the diversity of moral positions, we are inevitably thrown back into an enlightenment conception of rationality. 'The justification *[for educational initiatives concerned with promoting equal respect regardless of culture]* rests on at least the following: that it is true, or at least that we are rationally justified in believing, that children, students and persons generally deserve to be treated with respect and in ways that, at a minimum, are not unnecessarily harmful to them; and that it is true, or at least that we are rationally justified in believing, that marginalised

students and members of marginalised cultures are not in fact being treated with respect or are in fact being treated in ways which cause them to suffer unnecessary harm. These pieces of the liberal justification of 'multicultural' education are conspicuously 'liberal' or 'Enlightenment' in their epistemological presuppositions: they presuppose that it is possible for moral principles, and descriptions of factual states of affairs, to be true or false (i.e. to have truth values); they presuppose as well that those same principles and descriptions admit of rational justification.' (ibid.). A liberal pedagogy which recognises and respects cultural diversity then is, for Siegel, necessarily wedded to epistemological universalism. This is the sense in which Siegel can argue that: 'Radical' Pedagogy Requires 'Conservative Epistemology' (ibid.).

It seems immediately clear that to say that western liberal educational initiatives rest on western epistemological foundations does not fully meet the problem stated. If relativism is to be taken seriously then what must be brought into question is the validation of liberal values and initiatives themselves. It is here that Siegel finds incoherence. His argument is that the very questioning of liberal initiatives such as multiculturalism presupposes a liberal conception of them. '...the key epistemic notions of rationality and rational justification, according to the dominant, Western, 'Enlightenment' epistemological tradition, are universally applicable, such that calling the 'liberal' justification of multicultural education initiatives into question presupposes the 'liberal' understanding of those very notions - and, therefore, that it is not possible coherently or non-arbitrarily to reject them....' (ibid.). Siegel is surely leaping to unwarranted conclusions in this claim. Rejection of the Western conception of 'multiculture' may be a challenge to the liberal conception rather than presupposing it. Furthermore, rejection of the liberal notion of multicultural educational initiatives need not be either rational in the Enlightenment sense nor arbitrary. Western conceptions of rationality and arbitrariness do not exhaust the groundings for rejecting an initiative.

Siegel seems to be on firmer ground when he goes on to make the more general claim that universal rationality is required for its own rejection. If the existence of universal rationality is necessary for rejecting universal rationality, then it is not a plausible target of criticism. Siegel's assumption here is that an epistemological framework is incapable of generating a successful critique of itself, and hence that judgement that counts must proceed from a position of greater universality. The perceived need for both a practical and theoretical rebuttal of relativism leads Siegel into attempting to establish a transcendental, universal position. In order to achieve this, he begins by accepting that the grounds for judgement must originate in a particular culture, but argues that immanence of origin does not preclude transcendence of resulting framework. In effect he argues for the possibility that rationality is like mathematics in that, although arising within a particular cultural perspective, it constitutes a universal category of reasoning. 'We always judge from the perspective of our own conceptual scheme; there is no way to escape from all our schemes and judge from a God's-eye

point of view. Since our schemes reflect our cultural/historical circumstances, then these circumstances constitute limits on our judgement; we cannot escape them entirely. With these premises I agree. But some draw from them the conclusion that 'universal reason' is impossible; that our judgements cannot, in principle, have any force beyond the bounds of our own scheme. From this conclusion I dissent.' (ibid.).

Before commenting on Siegel's position more generally, I would like to outline a second attempt to rebuff relativism, this time from Martha Nussbaum. The two theoretical positions are similar in that each identifies relativism as a threat to the making of moral judgements in a small world, and each seeks to articulate the possibility of, and conditions for, a common framework that is not culture specific, as the means of grounding intercultural moral discourse and judgement. However, whereas in Siegel's case the commonality is understood as a cultural construction or discovery of rules and principles which have spread from the local to the global, Nussbaum looks instead to extant shared common human experience as the source of universality. Rather than understanding the universal grounding of morality as a human achievement, Nussbaum locates universality in the necessarily common experiences of all human creatures. Thus, the task of comparing and weighing rival moral claims can in principle be got off the ground via the common moral framework that we all share in virtue of being human. The schema employed by Nussbaum is presented as straightforwardly Aristotelian. From the facts of human life, an Aristotelian framework of virtues can be derived that can be made to do the work of a culturally transcendent moral approach.

The first premise of Nussbaum's approach is that all humans, regardless of culture, share a basic framework of 'grounding experiences'. These include: death, pain, appetite, and sociality. Although how we respond to this common reality may vary widely according to culture, or even within a culture, some response is inevitable. It is not possible that a human society could exist where the members did not have to think about, and act in relation to, such categories. In Nussbaum's own words, 'Everyone has *some* attitude, and corresponding behaviour, towards her own death; her bodily appetites and their management; her property and its use; the distribution of social goods; telling the truth; being kind to others; cultivating a sense of play and delight, and so on. No matter where one lives one cannot escape these questions, so long as one is living a human life. But then this means that one's behaviour falls, willy-nilly, within the sphere of the Aristotelian virtue in each case. If it is not appropriate; it cannot be off the map altogether. People will of course disagree about what the appropriate ways of acting and reacting in fact *are*. But in that case, as Aristotle has set things up, they are arguing about the same thing, and advancing competing specifications of the same virtue. The reference of the virtue term in each case is fixed by the sphere of experience - by what we shall from now on call the 'grounding experiences'.' (Nussbaum, 1993) For Nussbaum then, if we take an Aristotelian approach, we can say that all humans can, in their own

context, display either a vicious or virtuous relationship to, for example, the fact of human mortality. At its most general, the framework is 'transcultural'.

From Nussbaum's perspective, the purchase of this position is that it allows for the derivation of a universal and absolute measure of moral action. A universalism however which proceeds not at the expense of 'particularism', but rather in tandem with it. The promise is of a universal judge of conduct which is sensitive to the peculiarities of quite different and perhaps unique situations. 'What I want to stress here is that Aristotelian particularism is fully compatible with Aristotelian objectivity. The fact that a good and virtuous decision is context-sensitive does not imply that it is right only *relative to*, or *inside*, a limited context, any more than the fact that a good navigational judgement is sensitive to particular weather conditions shows that it is correct only in a local or relational sense. It is right absolutely, objectively, anywhere in the human world, to attend to the particular features of one's context; and the person who so attends and who chooses accordingly is making, according to Aristotle, the humanly correct decision, period. If another situation should ever arise with all the same ethically relevant features, including contextual features, the same decision would again be absolutely right.' (ibid.).

By positing the notion of the commonality of virtuous activity as it relates to the commonality of human experience, Nussbaum claims Aristotle to have described already, albeit in embryonic form, the conceptual apparatus necessary for developing an account of transcultural morality. Thus Nussbaum, through appeal to Aristotle's virtue ethics, has put herself in the position of making the grand claim that an objective framework may be conceived within which all particular moralities may be enclosed. Hence universal criteria of judgement can be formulated. The boldness of the claim comes out in her description contained in 'Non-relative Virtues'. 'Here then is a sketch for an objective human morality based upon the idea of virtuous action - that is, of appropriate functioning in each human sphere. The Aristotelian claim is that, further developed, it will retain the grounding in actual human experiences that is the strong point of virtue ethics, while gaining the ability to criticise local and traditional moralities in the name of a more inclusive account of the circumstances of human life, and of the needs for human functioning that these circumstances call forth.' (Nussbaum, 1993).

It is clear that both Siegel and Nussbaum feel a need to articulate the grounding for the possibility of an objective and universal framework from which rational criticism of moral actions and beliefs may be made. The impetus toward carrying out this constructive task in western liberal philosophy comes from the fear of perceived practical dangers to the liberal project that would follow (or are following) from the undermining of objectivism. If the foundations of objective morality cannot be philosophically shored up from within the enlightenment perspective, the only alternative appears to be full blown relativism.

However, both Siegel and Nussbaum, in their arguments for the necessity or desirability of the establishing of objectivist foundations for criticism in moral life, seem

to be starting from some culturally specific presumptions. Hence a general charge can be made against their arguments that they are merely reflecting some Enlightenment prejudice. Specific criticisms of the positions of Siegel and Nussbaum might help to reveal some of these (hidden) presumptions.

In the Nussbaum example this can be evidenced with reference to her argument that all humans share in the need to take an attitude to their own mortality. Death is seen as a universal and objective part of all human life. Nussbaum thus argues that although attitudes to death can and do differ, some attitude to this existential fact must be, and always is, taken. For Nussbaum it is not conceivable that whether or not one dies could be relative to one's culture. But this is surely to miss the phenomenological understanding of death. If we understand death as it appears in the meaningful reality of persons, then death is by no means an objective or universal phenomenon. Death may, according to this approach, refer to the termination of a particular biological existence, or may refer to the end of a cycle of physical and spiritual manifestations that takes place over a long period of time. Alternatively, the termination of the physical human organism may herald a shift onto a different plane of being. In a nutshell, the end of one's physical life may be a quite singular final termination, a transition, part of a cycle and so on according to one's culture. In the absence of information as to how such events are interpreted by those taking on attitudes, it is not possible in advance to say whether these events are the same. From our perspective, and using our categories, death may appear unproblematically universal. From other perspectives, what counts as death may be radically different. Hence everybody takes an attitude, but to phenomena differentiated in terms of their meaning and significance.

In incorporating the idea that beliefs and attitudes to some degree determine the meaning and significance of phenomena, we undermine the universalism that Nussbaum is seeking. The point becomes clearer when we consider Nussbaum's example of the objectively and absolutely correct navigational judgement. Of course it may be true that in the same navigational situation the same decision will be correct. However, this does not take into account that if faced by different people with different traditions, values, and outlooks, the situation may be a very different one. Furthermore, there is a disanalogy between navigation and moral action that weakens the value of the example. Whereas ends in navigational situations might be thought to be clear and shared, ends in moral situations may well be changing and disputed. In navigation the end is normally to get to a predetermined destination safely and efficiently. In morality what takes priority, for example respect or liberty, what these terms mean, and how they are approached, are subjects of unending debate. Good navigation is more akin to good hygiene in the sense that it is used by Steven Lukes. Lukes understands good hygiene practices as common across various cultures implying that they can be usefully thought of as objective, but goes on to argue 'But - ... - moral matters are not like matters of hygiene. There is no objective point of view or 'view from nowhere' such that all reasonable persons (from all

cultural backgrounds) can be brought to agree on, say, how the dead should be honoured, or, indeed, whether they should be honoured at all' (Lukes, 1995) The difference is, in one sense, between situations that require technical decision making, and those that require moral reflection. There is no good reason to think that the objectivism and universalism of validation procedures that are appropriate in judging good navigational judgement should apply in the realm of ethical judgement.

Returning to the Siegel example, it is presumed that the alternatives of objectivism and relativism constitute the only available options in the understanding and judgement of moral and social life. Hence in Siegel's account, we encounter an unexamined presumption that criticism must involve an attempt to get 'outside' or 'beyond' the discourse, and attain a position from which to reflect in a detached manner on its object. However, the dichotomy of objectivism or relativism is exhaustive only from within a particular strand of Enlightenment rationality. This strictly scientific approach to knowledge of the human world brings with it a particular, and historically parochial, view of the possibilities for criticism.

From the perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology, each of the two attempts to ground criticism is methodologically weak in that each fails to incorporate consideration of its own presuppositions. This failure to bring the fore-structures of critique to explicit awareness in the critical process renders such approaches open to the charge that they can only remain critical within their respective paradigms. In Gadamer's terminology, the failure is a failure of the development of consciousness of effective history, and hence a failure to comprehend the role and nature of 'prejudice' as it affects one's own position. Criticality is purchased at the expense of the possibility to criticise the enlightenment foundations of the structure of critique.

The radical difficulties encountered by attempts from within the enlightenment tradition to derive an argumentatively sustainable universalism, indicate that the spectre of relativism may be somewhat more difficult to exorcise than some western thinkers may imagine. The central difficulty that these attempts fail to overcome is that of generating effective critique. According to the hermeneutical approach, it is not in principle possible to generate a position that stands outside of all prejudices. No common currency is available with which to cash competing interpretations of reality. The charge is then that enlightenment universalism always, either explicitly or implicitly, relies on referring to an objective framework as the source of critical judgement. This very appeal is, from a hermeneutical perspective, simply one prejudiced account of critique that has its roots deeply embedded in the epistemology of the Enlightenment. The problem of relativism raised by Gadamerian hermeneutic phenomenology is worrying because according to the conceptual framework it adopts, it appears that criticism can never be final or telling. Hence, the horrors of a world where every claim is equivalent in that every claim represents a prejudice that cannot in principle be judged by any standard is possible. The problem of relativism on the hermeneutical account begins to look more

Nietzschean and more impossible to counter because the lack of objective frameworks is not an empirical or contingent matter, but rather an existential necessity of human understanding.

The need to retain the critical capacity needs then to be addressed from the hermeneutical perspective. If hermeneutic understanding is to stand as a useful form of understanding, then it needs to be critical. The major question for hermeneutic phenomenology is whether it can provide a 'non-Enlightenment' equivalent of the theoretical structures and processes necessary for deriving a critical understanding of the social world.

In order to introduce the notion of critical hermeneutics we may turn back to Apel. Apel's concerns about the need for criticality do not lead him to reject the insights of Gadamer's hermeneutics. Rather, his response is to think of the hermeneutic approach as an incomplete research programme, a form of investigative discourse in the making. Accepting the arguments for perspectivalism and for the necessary fore-structuring of experience that arose from the continental tradition, Apel directs his efforts toward the attempt to bring together the hermeneutical approach of continental philosophy with the morally and politically more robust approach of the English speaking tradition. In the words of Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, 'Many of his works can be seen as an effort to mediate between the hermeneutic-humanistic and the empirical-analytical outlooks. He was one of the first writers to point out and to investigate in detail the affinities between ordinary language philosophy - notably that of the late Wittgenstein - and the hermeneutic tradition on the Continent.' (Mueller-Vollmer, 1985, p.32). The general task for western philosophy, identified by Apel, is that of bridging the divide between the two philosophical traditions. To use a more illuminating metaphor, what he sees as required is a marriage, and an ensuing cross fertilisation, that might spawn practically useful concepts and methods. The general solution put forward for overcoming the weakness of continental hermeneutics in its relation to the liberal critical tradition is to call for the emergent hermeneutic paradigm to be augmented through the development of a 'quasi-objective science' (Apel, 1973). In a very general sense this forms the jumping off point for the development of what has become known as 'critical hermeneutics'.

Perhaps the most notable attempts to derive critical theory whilst taking on board the general thrust of hermeneutic phenomenology are those of Jurgen Habermas. Over time, Habermas has changed his approach to the question of how a critical discourse is possible within a hermeneutically informed framework. In his earlier work, he focused on the weaknesses of hermeneutic phenomenology, attacking its idealism and consequent conservatism. Here we find the development of 'critical hermeneutics'. In a loose sense, the formulation of critical hermeneutics can be understood as one version of a 'quasi-objective' method. It is important to note that in this endeavour, Habermas is in substantive agreement with Gadamer's hermeneutic approach to understanding in the human sciences. Not only does Habermas share the rejection of the positivistic approach

of the social sciences and the attendant claims to neutrality and objectivity, but he positively endorses the hermeneutical stress on the necessary situatedness and 'prejudicial' character of all understanding. '...hermeneutic consciousness calls to the attention of the social sciences problems which arise from the symbolic "fore-structuring" of their investigative field.' (Habermas, 1985, p.299) Habermas further makes it clear that he endorses a Gadamerian questioning of the location of meaning in social scientific understanding, rejecting any account that appeals solely to the subjective intentions or motives of the social actors involved. Where Habermas finds Gadamerian hermeneutics lacking is in its position within the rational emancipatory project of the West. For this what is needed is a critical edge that is rationally and demonstrably justified.

In order to attain this critical edge, the hermeneutic thinker needs to be in a position to distinguish between true and false consciousness. The possibility of such a distinction is sought in the relation of discourse to material conditions. It is, for the earlier Habermas, in the material and political conditions, and ultimately in their transformation, that the key to emancipation lies. The criticism of Gadamerian hermeneutics is that his account of language is too abstract and idealistic. Whilst accepting that linguisticality pervades all human existence, Habermas argues that an adequate account of social action must go beyond the purely hermeneutic and comprehend language as a part of a social matrix which includes the class structure and power. 'Social actions can only be comprehended in an objective framework that is constituted cojointly by language, labour and domination.' (Habermas, 1977, p.361). Traditional discourses are then seen as taking place within a context of possibly repressive social power relations. A genuinely critical discourse must be able to account for the distortions that arise in discourse as a result of the influence of social, economic and political factors. For Habermas, it is only through an understanding of the related political, material and linguistic conditions that shape how we understand, that emancipatory understanding is possible. 'Such a frame of reference would no longer leave tradition underdetermined as some comprehensive entity, but it would allow us to grasp tradition as such and in its relations to other moments of the totality of social existence, so that we are able to indicate those empirical conditions external to tradition under which the transcendental rules of comprehension and action undergo changes.' (Habermas, 1980, pp.155-156).

For Gadamer however, the objection that hermeneutics is limited to dealing with only the possibly ideological linguistic products of a society, as contrasted with an understanding which incorporates the potentially distorting material framework, underestimates the power of the hermeneutic approach. For Gadamer, hermeneutics represents the best means available of dealing with communicative distortion. This is because hermeneutics is specifically oriented towards prejudice or fore-structuring. The process of hermeneutic understanding is expressly concerned with revealing the assumptions that underpin both our own perspective and that of the other. The

uncovering or recovering of hidden meaning is central to the hermeneutic task. This work of revealing of hidden assumptions is alluded to in Gadamer's reflections on scientific methodology. 'Hermeneutical reflection ..... can, however, by elucidating for the sciences the ruling preconceptions of the moment, uncover new avenues of enquiry and thus indirectly be of service to the work of methodology.' (Gadamer, 1989, p.291). On this account, rather than failing to get to grips with the hidden fore-structures of understanding, hermeneutical reflection is uniquely adapted to systematically reveal such constructs.

Gadamer's defence of the universality of hermeneutics fails however to give due attention to the real force of Habermas's criticism. The important claim is that hermeneutics cannot cope with the systematically distorting effects of ideology which results in what Habermas calls 'systematically distorted communication' or 'pseudo communication'. 'Such hermeneutical consciousness proves inadequate in the case of systematically distorted communication: here the unintelligibility results from a faulty organisation of speech itself.' (Habermas, 1985, p.302) Ideological obfuscation is distinct from prejudice in that it is pervasive and subverts meaning systematically throughout an entire field of discourse. If we are subject to such systematic obfuscation and distortion, Habermas argues, it is difficult to see how a hermeneutic encounter with a past society or text could dislodge our false beliefs. 'Pseudocommunication produces a system of misunderstandings which remain opaque because they are seen in the light of a false consensus.' (ibid.).

If systematic communicative distortion does reveal the limits of hermeneutic understanding, from Gadamer's perspective it also signals the limit of social theory. The possibilities of social theory and the possibilities of hermeneutic enquiry are identical. 'Linguisticality, however, is finally so deeply woven into the sociality of human existence that the validity and limits of the hermeneutical inquiry must also occupy the theoretician of the social sciences.' (Gadamer, 1989, p.276) Gadamer is here referring back to his point about the universality of language as the medium of all meaningful activity. Understanding and communication '...are modes of social coexistence which, in the last formalization, is a community of dialogue. Nothing is exempt from this community, no experience of any kind.' (Gadamer, quoted in Bleicher, 1980, p.157). Even if there are 'external' factors at work in the shaping of tradition, the absolute impossibility of getting outside language entails the impossibility of preceding the hermeneutic encounter with any method or theory.

However, for Habermas, force and domination, as moments in the matrix of social reality, are in a significant sense prior to language. They help to shape and generate meaning. It is here that Habermas introduces the psychoanalytic model. Psychoanalysis is perceived as linguistic analysis. It deals with distorted communications. These '... can be understood only to the extent that the general conditions which govern the pathology of colloquial communication are known.' (Habermas, 1985, p.301).

Psychoanalysis proceeds through the retrieval of lost meanings which are made accessible through 'scenic understanding', that is with reference to the original conditions which led to the distortion. 'The analyst's understanding, as we have seen, owes its explanatory power to the fact that a systematically inaccessible meaning can be elucidated only to the extent that the origin of the loss of meaning can be explained.' (ibid. p.311). Habermas sees psychoanalytic therapy as proceeding only via comprehension of the original source of distortion. 'The what, the meaning content of the systematically distorted expression cannot be 'understood' unless the why, the development of the symptomatic scene can be 'explained' through reference to the initial conditions of the systematic distortion itself.' (ibid. p.311). The model's focus on the genesis of distorted meaning and the power to reverse the effects of distortion through subjective awareness is analogically applied in the critique of ideology.

In social scientific terms, emancipation requires an understanding of the role of labour and domination in the distorting of our assumptions. 'On the sociological level, the counterpart of metapsychology is a theory which explains the acquisition of the basic traits of role behaviour. (ibid. p.312) What must be brought into question is tradition as a body of shared assumptions in its relation to the power structure of material life. Only in such terms can hermeneutic understanding become critically self aware. Viewed from this perspective, the theory of society precedes the hermeneutic encounter. It is able to do this by providing a genetic explanation of systematic distortion. As Habermas puts it, critical hermeneutics '.....assimilates the metahermeneutical knowledge concerning the conditions which make systematically distorted communication possible. Only when the source of distortion is brought into relief is there a possibility of restoring meaning to its non-distorted state.' (ibid. p.314).

If we accept the possibility of a critical theory modelled on psychoanalysis, a critical approach which could incorporate examination the genesis of the preconditions of hermeneutical reflection, then we may be in sight of the holy grail of a hermeneutical social science that can escape the charge that it lacks critical capacity. The revealing of the ideological deformation of language is made possible through rational and demonstrable means. It is through awareness of the possibility of sources of communicative distortion, a kind of hermeneutical consciousness, that the rational critical capacity is enabled. 'A critically enlightened hermeneutics that differentiates between insight and blindness incorporates meta-hermeneutical knowledge of the conditions of the possibility of systematically distorted communication. It connects understanding to the principle of rational discourse...' (Habermas quoted in Warnke, 1987, p.129).

In order to complement the theoretical framework of critical hermeneutics, Habermas gives us insights into the practicalities of how the psychoanalytic approach to the emancipatory understanding of society may be cashed in. In effect he gives us a description of examples of praxis. The major difficulty, that of recognising distortion and distortive influences, is bound up with the further problem of the reluctance of those

caught up in a distorted discourse to feel any need to change their perspective. Habermas suggests two ways in which the reluctance may be overcome, and distortive influences revealed. Firstly the communicative barriers which prevent us from identifying sources of distortion may be broken down by the 'initiation of periods of reflection'. Secondly, dialogue between those with different interpretations of social reality may be initiated. In effect Habermas sees hope lying in the initiating of dialogue between those with an adequate understanding of the framework of how discourses are distorted through the effects of power and domination, and those with less of an understanding. Such dialogic encounters can proceed both within the more liberated groups in society and between the more liberated and the less, '... these are situations in which attempts at radical reformism - which tries not only to preach to the converted but also to the convert - are more promising than revolutionary struggle.' (Habermas, 1980, p161).

In order to illustrate the Gadamerian critique of this conception of critical theory, we can begin by looking at the limitations of the psychoanalytic model in its social science application. In psychoanalysis, the analyst adopts a strategic position in relation to the patient and selects the significant experiences of the patient's development in order to retrieve undistorted meaning. The emancipatory results are validated with recourse to the patient's own self evaluation or in terms of his or her future success within a community. The latter means of validation is not however available at the social level, and the former, it seems, is incapable of itself escaping its own hermeneutical circle. The question of whether one has moved from a distorted view to a clear one and not the other way, or indeed whether one has simply moved from one distorted view to another is in principle not definitively answerable.

In the absence of criteria for establishing the distinction between ideological and non-ideological discourse, the ascertaining of which of one's preconceptions lead to truth and which to falsity is not forthcoming. Furthermore, any criteria that are forthcoming must themselves be presented via the medium of language which may itself be ideological and must be trapped in its own hermeneutical situation. Ultimately, the impossibility of the existence of a neutral language with which to describe the processes involved in emancipatory praxis leaves critical theory conceptually short. Indeed without a convincing yardstick, the set of assumptions that ground critical theory cannot be raised above the fray. Critical theory itself may turn out to be ideological, or in Gadamer's terminology, will turn out to be simply one more prejudice that fails to recognise itself as such. This is an important point. The framework so far proposed by Habermas gives no justification for the underlying assumption that, behind the ideological fog created by distorted discourse, there is a single and demonstrably correct understanding waiting to be accessed.

The psychoanalytic model and the attempt to use language to get at the objective conditions of domination (and hence production of ideology) falters then as a research project. The realist assumption that there must be one correct interpretation of social

reality, and the breakdown of the psychoanalytic analogy in practice render the approach both philosophically and practically weak. However, in his subsequent work, Habermas has further pushed this approach that seeks a universal from which to launch criticism whilst retaining the insights of hermeneutic phenomenology.

A suggested universal that would supply the necessary criterion for an adequate critical theory is put forward in the form of an idealised 'dominance free speech situation'. In theory, discourse could be judged according to how closely it resembled the ideal of totally uncoerced linguistic activity. Habermas insists that some sort of universal is necessary for grounding criticism, but further recognises that the universal must be meta-linguistic if it is to overcome the hermeneutic challenge. 'Without the proviso, in principle, of universal dominance-free agreement, therefore, it is impossible to differentiate in a fundamental way between dogmatic acknowledgement and true consensus.' (Habermas, 1984, p.316). This 'ideal speech situation' would have the power to reveal, through comparative assessment, the relative degree of openness of traditions. Paraphrasing Habermas, the ideal is formulated by as a model of communication in which all parties affected are able to examine disputed claims on an equal basis with equal chances to perform all kinds of speech acts and without fear.

The hermenuetical rejection by Gadamer can in one sense be understood through the argument that human understanding is necessarily 'finite'. The historical sourcing of critical concepts and of notions of what constitutes critique works against the possibility of ever being in a position to talk of reality as it is. Critical reason can never in principle be divorced from prejudice. The notion of ideality, used in Habermas's sense, constitutes one more manifestation of the enlightenment prejudice, one more appeal to the separation of the world into subject and object, one more approach that attempts to derive rules that can be applied. For Gadamer this reveals a lack of hermeneutical consciousness about our Enlightenment prejudice. Critique can only be reflexive, the closest we can get to critical rationality is practical reason. Gadamer writes 'I agree with Habermas that a hermeneutic fore-understanding is always in play and that it therefore requires reflexive enlightenment. But that is as far as I go with "critical rationality" because I consider perfect enlightenment illusory.' (Gadamer, 1989, p.555). The role of practical reason rather than technical scientific reason in critique gives Gadamer an edge in criticising scientific methodology from a position not wholly within the scientific framework, thus he is able to understand science as a particular historical development. 'Relying on the tradition of practical philosophy helps us guard against the technological self-understanding of the modern concept of science.' (ibid. p.557). The general thrust of Gadamer's dispute with Habermas's critical conceptual apparatus (ideal speech situation plus critical rationality), is that it fails to comprehend its own prejudicial and limited character. This is because Habermas fails to be critical enough of the enlightenment prejudice that he has inherited. Habermas is then left with the hermeneutically untenable

conception of critique, a conception that, in deriving from Enlightenment science, is inadequate to criticising the Enlightenment conception of critique.

Habermas has, in his more recent work, explored further the possibilities for deriving a theoretical grounding for a hermeneutically sensitive critical theory but with more emphasis on the embedding of reason in communication rather than with an appeal to epistemology. The theory of communicative action takes into account the pragmatics of the sort of dialogue which aims at mutual understanding. On this much more hermeneutical model, disputed validity claims should be settled, it is argued, only by the force of the 'better argument'. A good argument can be described with reference to the necessary prerequisites of a discourse which aims at mutual understanding. In this way, rational criteria for critical understanding are made available. Habermas's argument here is that practical discourse presupposes an implicit validity basis. 'These universal claims (to the comprehensibility of the symbolic expression, the truth of the propositional content, the truthfulness of the intentional expression, and the rightness of the speech act with respect to existing norms and values) are set in the general structures of possible communication.' (Habermas, 1984) In the realm of 'communicative action' at least, criteria for judging between truth claims are available, and are held to be universal.

In moving away from a monological model and to a dialogical model, and in focusing on the pragmatics of communication rather than relying on epistemology, Habermas has managed to produce a model of critical reason that comes much closer to answering the Gadamerian critique of Enlightenment conceptions of criticism. This later Habermasian approach carries with it the potential to derive critical method and without recourse to the sort of Enlightenment objectivist structures that underpinned the earlier formulation of 'critical hermeneutics'. On the later account, Habermas is able to distinguish a valid from an invalid claim according to whether the speaker's utterance is comprehensible, propositionally true, intentionally true, and in conformity with norms and values. Hence the validity of a claim can be judged in terms of the answers to the questions as to whether what is said is clear, whether the proposition is true, whether the speaker really means it, and whether the accepted norms of discourse are adhered to. If the answers to all questions are affirmative, then we have a candidate for what might be termed 'genuine conversation'.

The shift by Habermas from a position of trying to derive a 'critical hermeneutics', that must refer to the objective conditions of the genesis of discourse, to a position whereby conversation is validated according to its adherence to specified prerequisites of 'genuine conversation', marks a significant move in the attempt to generate a practical and critical hermeneutic method. The major distinction is that critical method on the latter conception derives its resources from within the hermeneutical situation rather than with reference to externalised objective conditions. Perhaps more accurately, the validity of hermeneutic interpretation in practical dialogic settings is judged with reference to the metahermeneutical conditions which make possible what Gadamer would call 'genuine

conversation'. In effect, Habermas has come much closer to the Gadamerian position. What is held fixed, and therefore what acts as a yardstick for judging the quality of conversation, is a set of necessary moral, political, social, and epistemic conditions, conditions that enable dialogues which aim at understanding to take place.

This metalinguistic approach to judging the quality of dialogue respects the hermeneutical critique of enlightenment conceptions of criticism. However, whilst such an approach helps to describe the metahermeneutical conditions for dialogue, it supplies scant criteria for judging actual dialogues. The more fully hermeneutical understanding of dialogues reveals the inappropriateness of the application of what might be termed 'Enlightenment method', but as yet the replacement is inadequate. Rather than providing a hermeneutic method, it opens up the question of method. In order to explore the sort of questions raised in the attempt to elevate phenomenological hermeneutics to the status of practical method, it may be helpful to look at a particular example of one such attempt.

4.2 The Question of Method

Truth and Method, the primary source of philosophical hermeneutics presented by Gadamer, is conceived in his terms as a philosophical work which explores the structures and dynamics that make possible interpretive understanding. We are given little explicit practical guidance concerning the actuality of understanding. Furthermore, the disjunction between truth and method in the title of Gadamer's major work reflects the view that understanding is not reducible to any particular method. In his words 'a philosophical theory of hermeneutics is not a methodology' (Gadamer, 1989, p.466). The move to derive method, including ways of distinguishing good from bad interpretation, would seem to be needed however if we are to derive an adequate account of practical hermeneutics. As Madison argues in his book 'The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity', 'For only if it could be shown that phenomenological hermeneutics does *not* afford a license for arbitrariness and does in fact provide for methodological rigor in interpretation could phenomenological hermeneutics be positively argued for and defended.' (Madison, 1988, P.26) If practical application of the principles of hermeneutic phenomenology in the educational domain is our intention, reflection on method is necessarily a concern. In the absence of help from Gadamer himself, this may involve some constructive work that builds on his approach.

Even though Gadamer himself appears to argue that method has no place in interpretive understanding, there are good reasons why questions of method might be thought important, and why methodological criteria or norms would be useful if a practical hermeneutical theory is to be generated. One reason is articulated by Madison when he argues for the methodological primacy of the subjectivity of the interpreter. 'This is necessary because only the individual, human, conscious, reflecting subject can be

held *responsible* for what he or she says or does. (Being, the Tradition, and so on, cannot be held accountable for what it "does"). To be responsible means to be able to make an attempt at defending or justifying one's own words and deeds, which is to say, at providing arguments for them. Now to argue is always to appeal to certain principles, the ensemble of which can be said to constitute a set of criteria. In short, correct method is necessary if interpretation is to be a responsible business.' (ibid. p.27). Methodological criteria are then required so that a person making a particular interpretation can be held responsible for that interpretation and can be publicly requested to defend it. A second reason for insisting on methodological criteria is for arbitrating between claims in what Ricoeur terms the 'conflict of interpretations'. The point here is that a non-arbitrary means of adjudicating between rival interpretations may be required in order that we are not reduced to entrenchment in contradictory positions with no means of showing one interpretation to be superior to the other.

In the attempt to derive a set of criteria applicable to the interpretive task, Madison makes an interesting move which enables him to derive practical criteria from the theoretical hermeneutics outlined by Gadamer. Madison relies for this move on the relation between theory and practice involved in any example of praxis. 'Theory is always the theory of a certain praxis, which means that theory should be able to serve as a guide in certain concrete activities, in this case, interpreting texts. There is always a back-and-forth between theory and practice, in the sense that a theory can always be translated into a concrete procedure to be followed in practice, and also in the sense that the satisfactoriness (or lack thereof) of the practice is a measure of the truth (or falsity) of the theory.' (ibid.). This approach by Madison then argues for the theoretical possibility of deriving practical criteria from the theory of hermeneutic phenomenology, but begs the question of what sort of criteria would be appropriate in this particular case. In general terms the argument is that Gadamer is correct in arguing against the possibility of appropriating the hypothetico-deductive method of science as a possibility for deriving a method for hermeneutic phenomenology, but that his reticence in relation to practical method per se is not warranted.

The crucial distinction brought out by Madison in his articulation of this point is that between, on the one hand, method in an abstract and formal sense, and on the other, method in a normative sense. Method in the former sense refers to rational technical or instrumental method. 'One has only to learn the method itself, in itself and for itself; it is an intellectual technique (like the "scientific method"). Having done so, one has only to apply it to whatever subject matter one chooses; the only criterion in applying the method is *correctness* of application (not *appropriateness* in choosing it in the first place); one's guide is the method itself, not the subject matter (such as human beings) to which it is applied.' (ibid. p.28). The purpose of the application of method in this sense is to generate exact and objective knowledge. Method in a normative sense by contrast does not displace subjective judgement, but rather is meant as an aid to good judgement.

'It therefore makes for *rational* judgements - not in the aforementioned sense, but in the sense that one can give *reasons* (persuasive arguments) for the judgements one makes: One can defend one's judgements or interpretations by arguing that they embody or conform to certain generally accepted criteria, norms or principles. It therefore makes for *responsible* judgements. The norms here in question could be compared to ethical norms.....One cannot become a good interpreter simply by mastering a certain method. One therefore does not "test" interpretations, one evaluates them.' (ibid. p29).

Method in this latter sense constitutes a set of interpretive principles that can orient action and help to formulate norms for interpretive activity. Although 'objective' conclusions are ruled out, the possibility of public scrutiny that refers to norms of interpretation, can allow for interpretation to be conceived as a rigorous (though not exact) discipline. The general justification for such an approach can be taken from Aristotle in the much quoted, but nonetheless apt, statement that '..it is the mark of the trained mind never to expect more precision in the treatment of any subject than the nature of that subject permits;..' (Aristotle, 1976, p.65). The nature of the subject in this case is meaningful reality that is always interpretable. In so far as we are aiming at truth, it is the truth of agreement rather than the truth of science or logic. Norms of interpretation can both limit the possible range of interpretations and help to settle disputes. In both cases the process is one of justifying with recourse to reason. As Madison argues, 'Assent always remains a free choice, but it is not arbitrary, or irrational.' (ibid. p.32). Whereas reasons do not on this account determine the correct interpretation, they do influence and justify what can count as a good interpretation.

The attempt by Madison to generate a list of norms of interpretation involves him in working up some general philosophical principles, used by Gadamer to describe the possibility for hermeneutic interpretation, into a set of norms that provide a guide to good practical interpretation. Hence he quotes Gadamer's assertion that 'The harmony of all the details with the whole is the criterion of correct understanding. The failure to achieve this harmony means that understanding has failed.' (Gadamer, 1989, p.259) as indicating the possibility of employing the notion of 'coherence' as a norm of good interpretive practice. An interpretation on this account should be internally consistent. The presence of contradictions within an interpretation is taken as an indicator of a faulty interpretation. Madison goes on to provide nine further norms that distinguish good from bad practice in interpretation.

The second norm of practical interpretation put forward by Madison is that of 'comprehensiveness'. The principle of comprehensiveness is related to the formal condition for understanding of the foreconception of completion. Here, the overall work as a whole or the whole body of works of an author may need to be taken into account. The principle seeks to establish coherence of the whole of that which is to be interpreted, or the whole of which it constitutes a part, as a norm of interpretation. Thus disputes over interpretation, of say a text, may appeal to other texts by the same author. In

Gadamer's terms the similar principle of completeness is derived from Schleiermacher. 'It states that only what really constitutes a unity of meaning is intelligible. So when we read a text we always follow this complete presupposition of completion, and only when it proves inadequate, i.e., the text is not intelligible, do we start to doubt the transmitted text and seek to discover in what way it can be remedied.' (Gadamer, 1989, p.261).

The remaining eight norms are more loosely tied to the exegesis of Gadamer's texts, but are still, in Madison's view, articulated within the spirit of hermeneutic phenomenology. The third norm cited is 'penetration'. This refers to the need to take account of the underlying problematic of an author's work when we attempt to make texts intelligible. 'Thoroughness' as a norm refers to the idea that a good interpretation is one that can 'deal with all the questions it poses to the interpreted text'. 'Appropriateness' refers to the belief that the questions to which one is oriented in the act of interpretation are in fact questions that are raised by the text itself. 'Contextuality' refers to the requirement for giving due regard to the historical and cultural context in which the text was produced. 'Agreement (1)' addresses the need for interpretation to agree with what the author actually says. This restricts the scope for the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' which might take into account for example Freudian interpretation of authorial intentions. 'Agreement (2)' establishes the norm that 'A given interpretation should normally be in agreement with the traditional and accredited interpretations of the author.' 'Suggestiveness' as a norm indicates that good understanding is fertile in that it stimulates further research and interpretation. Finally 'potential' is important for a good interpretation in the sense that the final validation of an interpretation can only be judged in the future, that is that it comes to something rather than nothing.

The brief outline of Madison's approach is presented here as both an example of good and of bad practice. Madison is arguing for the need for norms of interpretation to guide practice in the development of practical hermeneutics. Such norms may not be universalisable, but would seem to require, as he asserts, a measure of agreement amongst interlocutors. The status of these norms will also be temporally limited due to their reflexivity in that decisions made through their employment will have a retrospective bearing on the norms themselves. Madison's approach seems plausible in making the case that practical reasoning rather than theoretical or scientific reasoning is what is required in the service of interpretive method.

However, Madison presents a rather restricted account of practical reasoning with the emphasis on the objective of consensus building. Throughout, his account of practical reasoning draws on the tradition of legal hermeneutics and the persuasive reasoning of rhetoric. These sources serve his purpose for the most part because the methodological problem of hermeneutical understanding that he is working with stems from problems of interpreting texts. For our purposes, this approach is inadequate. An account of practical hermeneutics that is relevant to self understanding and the understanding of social life needs a more sophisticated version of practical reason. When

we consider non textual 'objects' of enquiry, we need to broaden the conception of practical reason. With a broader conception of practical reason we should be able to question and go beyond some of the norms of practical interpretation presented by Madison.

In the attempt to achieve a form of practical reason more appropriate for practical hermeneutic interpretation, we can gain some insights by looking more closely at some of the problems and peculiarities of practical morality that led Aristotle to put phronesis forward as the appropriate form of reasoning in contrast to theoria and techne. This should illuminate the parallel problems for hermeneutic understanding outlined by Gadamer in Truth and Method, '...if we relate Aristotle's description of the ethical phenomenon and especially the virtue of moral knowledge to our own investigation, we find that his analysis in fact offers a kind of *model of the problem of hermeneutics.*' (p.324)

It is Aristotle's concern with the question of the good in human action that raises questions that parallel those identified for hermeneutic interpretation by Gadamer. Aristotle is interested in describing the mode of knowing that is appropriate to moral and political action in the lived world (Aristotle, 1976, 1.4). The rejection of Platonic idealist ontology and Socratic method as a basis and route to moral knowledge leaves Aristotle in the position of having to work out an alternative methodology for achieving moral knowledge and for informing moral action. In general Aristotle argues that method relies for its determination on its object, that is that the mode of understanding must be appropriate to its object. (ibid. 1.7)

In this case the object is the activities of moral and political beings. The aim of moral reasoning is however not merely to describe such activities but to act well. The understanding of moral and political action is then intimately connected with action. In Gadamer's words, 'For moral knowledge, as Aristotle describes it, is clearly not objective knowledge - i.e., the knower is not standing over against a situation that he merely observes; he is directly confronted with what he sees. It is something that he has to do.' (Gadamer, 1989, p.314). The intimate connection between knowledge and action is one basis for distinguishing moral knowledge (phronesis) from scientific knowledge (episteme). A person active in a moral and political situation is involved with that which he or she is trying to understand in a way that a disinterested and detached scientist is not.

What distinguishes phronesis from episteme then is the relation of the sort of knowing to action. What distinguishes phronesis from techne (craft knowledge) is the particular sort of action. Aristotle puts forward several ways of distinguishing between techne and phronesis. Firstly, moral action requires a layer of knowledge not needed for good craftsmanship. Knowing how to behave morally requires knowledge of oneself as a moral being, what Aristotle calls 'self knowledge' (Aristotle, 1976, Book VI.) Secondly, Aristotle argues that whereas a techne can be learned and forgotten, phronesis is always

present and cannot be forgotten. Thirdly, morally right behaviour cannot be fully determined in the absence of consideration of the situation in which moral action is required. Whereas the objective of the craftsman is fully determined by the intended use of what is produced, moral action needs to take account of the particularity of the situation in which action takes place. Fourthly, moral knowledge aims at informing good living in general, and over life as a whole, whereas techne serves particular ends. Finally, phronesis, unlike techne, enables deliberation only about good action. Whereas techne may serve either good or bad ends, the person with the virtue of phronesis (in contrast to the 'deinos' (ibid.)) cannot employ his or her insight and character in the service of anything other than good.

Phronesis then as a description of the manner in which we come to moral knowledge has to incorporate the implications brought about through understanding its object as moral being; the conscious, purposeful, and responsible activity of persons that is informed by moral consciousness and which takes place within particular human institutions and particular concrete situations. One of the key points here is that moral action and moral understanding do not relate as ends and means respectively in the way that a craft product and craft knowledge do. What is specific to moral knowledge is that it is gained in and through moral action. It is not learned first then applied with a predetermined product in mind. Rather, we find ourselves already in a moral situation in which learning and action are ongoing and mutually determining. Action is informed by learning and learning results through action. Aristotle's insight is that moral knowledge unlike craft knowledge involves internalisation of moral sensibility over time and through experience of moral action. The nature of a moral situation is both interpreted according to already held moral knowledge, and is constitutive of that knowledge.

The model of Aristotelian phronesis finds its application in Gadamer's attempt to articulate the methodological problem of textual hermeneutics. 'We too determined that application is neither a subsequent nor merely an occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding, but codetermines it as a whole from the beginning. Here too application did not consist in relating some pregiven universal to the particular situation. The interpreter dealing with a traditionary text tries to apply it to himself. But this does not mean that the text is given for him as something universal, that he first understands it per se, and then afterwards uses it for particular applications. Rather, the interpreter seeks no more than to understand this universal, the text - i.e., to understand what it says, what constitutes the texts' meaning and significance. In order to understand that, he must not try to disregard himself and his particular hermeneutical situation. He must relate the text to this situation if he wants to understand at all.' (Gadamer, 1989, p.234). The parallels between the sort of reasoning needed for good moral action and that needed for good interpretation then grow out of the peculiarities that they share in. These being that both the domains of moral action and hermeneutic understanding involve a reasoning process that is productive rather than reproductive, and production that is more complex than

mere technical production because of the particularity of the objects and the relation of means and ends. In each case reasoning is directed at informing action which involves the agent in the activity, in each case account must be taken of the particular concrete situation, in each case the reasoning and action are mutually determining, and in each case the outcome is imprecise and cannot be exactly predicted beforehand.

The question is then whether phronesis, as a form of reasoning which Gadamer recognises as uniquely relevant to the problem of interpretive hermeneutics, can in some sense be used to inform what might be termed a hermeneutic method. It seems clear that such a conception of reasoning could not in principle be amenable to the development of method in the form of universal rules. Perhaps hermeneutic method cannot be circumscribed by rules at all. On Gadamer's account, rules cannot govern application where application is codeterminant and contemporaneous of the process of understanding rather than subsequent. Indeed, the sort of things that distinguish good from bad hermeneutics may be more readily understood in terms of states of consciousness and disposition rather than as behavioural codes. However, this does not immediately rule out the sort of attempt to work out norms of interpretive understanding in the sense presented by Madison. Such norms will though need to be concerned with understanding in social life rather than strictly with texts, and will need to take into account that understanding is productive rather than reproductive, and will need to incorporate an allowance for the reflexivity of understanding. The aim must be to narrow down rather than to circumscribe possible interpretations, and, at the same time, to allow for the ongoing development of the horizon of the person or persons engaged in understanding.

Taking these considerations into account, it is immediately clear that Madison's categories often miss the mark. The norm of 'Penetration' is too closely tied to the attempt to access an author's intentions. This is harking back to pre-Gadamerian hermeneutics and gives authorial intention an authority unwarranted in hermeneutic phenomenology. It therefore errs on the side of conceiving interpretation as an attempt at reproduction rather than production. 'Thoroughness' on this account is also suspect in so far as the notion of dealing with all the questions raised by a text is, from Gadamer's perspective, in principle impossible. A good interpretive understanding opens up the possibility of always reinterpreting and thus always finding more questions. Interpretation can never be exhaustive. 'Appropriateness' conceived as dealing with questions raised by the original author is inappropriate for the same reasons as 'penetration'. 'Agreement' in both its guises applies only to particular conservative notions of hermeneutics not endorsed by the Gadamerian approach. These criticisms of Madison's norms of interpretation are not solely the result of his concentration on textual hermeneutics, they stem also from his conflation of pre-Gadamerian and post-Gadamerian hermeneutics, and his failure to distinguish techne and phronesis adequately. However, the four norms: 'coherence', 'comprehensiveness', 'suggestiveness' and

'potential' do seem to be both potentially valuable to our task, and to reflect the spirit of hermeneutic phenomenology. Perhaps, then, Madison is asking the right sorts of questions in the attempt to formulate hermeneutics as something like method. It may be worth then trying to develop his approach of deriving norms of good practice from an account of a good version of hermeneutic understanding.

A list of the features of successful hermeneutic understanding in the social context could be constructed from the presentation of Gadamer's philosophical ideas of the previous chapter. It might run as follows. A good example of hermeneutic understanding will be one in which one's presuppositions are brought to consciousness through the dialogic encounter. That is, through the attempt to understand, one's own prejudices are exposed in their partiality and in their necessarily historical development. This development of effective historical consciousness constitutes the basis of the reflexive hermeneutic critique. In successful hermeneutic understanding, the 'fusion of horizons' will lead to a change in one's fore-structures that enables one to interpret and understand in a way previously unavailable. A good example of hermeneutic understanding will also involve production of an interpretation that is significantly novel. Such an interpretation will be motivated by practical desires to understand for practical purposes. This interpretation will be one which leaves open, or opens up further, the possibility for future reinterpretations. 'It is imagination that is the decisive function of the scholar. Imagination naturally has a hermeneutical function and serves for what is questionable. It serves the ability to expose real, productive questions, something in which, generally speaking, only he who masters all methods of his sciences succeeds.' (Gadamer, 1976, p.12). In good hermeneutic understanding this productivity should also extend to allowing for further future productivity. An interpretation that results in definitive answers, that forecloses on possible future questions and interpretations, is antithetical to the spirit of hermeneutic phenomenology. In the end the judge of a good interpretation is future developments. 'The only thing that characterises the arbitrariness of inappropriate fore-meanings is that they come to nothing in the working out.' (Gadamer, 1989, p237).

From these indications of good practice, the norms that might be produced in order to separate 'valid' interpretations from 'invalid' would be something like: 'recognition', where this refers to the explicit revelation of one's prejudices as such, 'alteration', referring to enabling changes to the fore-structures of the interpreter and perhaps 'awareness', where this refers to reflecting on the framework of interpretive understanding itself, 'production', referring to the novelty of the particular interpretation, 'potential' understood as the capacity of an interpretation to open up the possibility for future interpretations, and 'practicality' taken to mean that an interpretation is useful in addressing genuine practical concerns in the lived world. The role of such a checklist would be to provide an evaluative language with which to talk about disputes in which different interpretations compete for attention and ultimately for practical action. Thus if

someone presents an interpretation of an event that I do not agree with, I can refer to these sorts of norms in order to criticise that interpretation. These norms could also act as a guide to interpretive activity as it were before the event. They might be employed in informing the manner and scope of interpretation as we approach understanding.

It is difficult to assess how valuable such norms could be in the quest to distinguish good and bad examples of interpretive understanding. Part of the problem is the inevitable interpretability of the norms themselves. Any norm pertaining to interpretation must itself both form part of the fore-structure of interpretation, and represent only a historically contingent prejudice. Norms as prejudice must themselves be open to criticism. The problem is that we appear to have nowhere from which to criticise these particular norms. Secondly, in developing norms that do not fall prey to the specific criticisms of Madison's norms, we may be producing norms which are too bland and general as to be of much real practical value. In disputes over interpretation for example, it is not clear that raising the question of whether one interpretation will lead to more fertile future questioning could in practice be answered. In general, the problem is one highlighted by Gadamer. Any norm must be limited in efficacy because it is an attempt to externalise standards. The separation of critical or judgmental apparatus from the moment of application, i.e. deriving norms and then applying them, fails to accommodate the hermeneutical constraints of practical (as contrasted with technical) reason. Perhaps then Gadamer is wise to caution us about the attempt to derive a practical hermeneutic method from the philosophical principles of hermeneutic phenomenology. Perhaps the idea of norms of interpretation can provide hermeneutics with a useful analogy for method which can be referred to in the articulation of good practice, but perhaps not a means of judging as it were objectively good from bad interpretation.

In taking on board the Aristotelian conception of phronesis as the model of situated rationality in hermeneutic understanding, the possibilities for method in interpretation are necessarily limited. The sorts of relationships and procedures associated with this form of reasoning militate not only against the universal pragmatics put forward by Habermas, but against universal norms or rules of interpretation in general. Norms for practical interpretation are restricted to those that secure agreement. They will be in a state of constant flux, and will require interpretation according to particular situations.

In moving away from the untenable Enlightenment ideal of detached and objective criticism for understanding in practical life, and towards a hermeneutical conception, the possibilities for criticism have been somewhat circumscribed. In the Enlightenment inspired accounts of Siegel and Nussbaum, the hope for an appeal to a possible universal is seen as the only secure grounding for critical rationality. The earlier account of critical hermeneutics by Habermas similarly relies for its critical edge on the belief in a realist conception of social science where there is one objectively correct interpretation of reality. The later work of Habermas opens the door to the possibility of

deriving critical method through judgmental criteria that spring from the conditions necessary for enabling dialogue that aims at understanding. Madison attempts to derive norms of good interpretation as they apply to texts from the theoretical prerequisites of philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer. Latterly I have sought to indicate the sort of norms of interpretation that might guide interpretive method in the kind of social reality of late modernity.

Overall, the movement has been, by degrees, from the idea of criticism, towards the idea of method. Method in the form of describing good and bad practice in dialogues and interpretations that aim at understanding. The change is then away from the binary opposition of true and false claims (and hence the sort of criticism appropriate), to exploring the means of distinguishing between better and worse conversations or interpretations. The latter judgement can never be final and the logic of judgement is much more akin to Aristotelian moral reasoning than to Enlightenment science. The aim of method on this approach is to rule out some interpretations (those which are clearly nonsensical, those which foreclose on discussion) and to encourage the range of interpretations that aid understanding (those that illuminate their own preconceptions, those that enable further interpretations, those that have practical use, those that generate framework awareness, and so on). The limitations on the application of method in the working out of interpretation are such that any norms generated will hold only 'for the most part' in particular circumstances and for particular times. They may allow for competing interpretations to coexist.

4.3 Practical Hermeneutics

The explorations of the peculiar character of criticism, and of the limitations for method in hermeneutic understanding, have been undertaken in the quest to articulate a viable version of hermeneutic understanding. What I have termed 'practical-critical' hermeneutics. The general purpose of this is to prepare the ground for bringing together hermeneutic understanding and liberal educational aims. Prior to this encounter however, a little more clarification is required and some obstacles to the actualising of 'genuine conversation' in late modernity need to be addressed. In the pursuit of a clear and practical conception, it will be necessary to think about the practicalities associated with the notions of 'fore-structuring' and 'horizon' and their application in the context of late modernity. With more practical flesh on the theoretical bones we should be in a better position to deal with the practical objections to hermeneutic understanding, and to proceed to uncover the positive value of the encounter between the liberal justification of education, and the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology.

In the interests of clarifying a working conception of practical hermeneutics, a useful entry point is the taxonomy of hermeneutical orientations that is employed by Sean Gallagher. Of particular value is his description of 'moderate hermeneutics'. (Gallagher,

1992). In addition to the clarificatory power of Gallagher's approach, it is worth looking at Gallagher because he explicitly considers hermeneutic understanding with relation to education, and because his work acts as a foil for the attempt to grapple with the question of the content of 'horizons' in the practical educational context. In order to understand the notion of 'Moderate hermeneutics' that he employs, we need to follow Gallagher in the contrastive distinctions he draws between this and other hermeneutical orientations as they apply to education. The taxonomy will also provide a brief summary of the positions so far encountered in this chapter.

'Conservative hermeneutics' is employed in the redescription of the position of those who stress the reproductive role of education. In hermeneutical terms this is an approach which seeks to complete our understanding from within a paradigm, but does not challenge the paradigm itself. A conservative hermeneutics respects its traditions and seeks to build on them through accretion of knowledge and skills. Gallagher, somewhat provocatively, includes critical thinking within this approach on the various grounds that: cultural literacy and critical thinking are mutually engaging and reliant, critical thinking is largely the reproduction of skills rather than their discovery, and that, as Harvey Siegel argues, critical thinking relies on a conservative epistemology (with what are claimed to be ideologically neutral conceptions of objectivity and validity). A typical example of what Gallagher terms 'conservative hermeneutics' is the approach taken by E.D. Hirsch, where education is primarily characterised as the locus for the intergenerational transmission of culturally important skills and values. Education as initiation into disciplines or practices might also fit into this 'conservative' camp.

'Critical Hermeneutics' is taken by Gallagher to denote that branch of post Gadamerian hermeneutics that seeks to retain a critical edge through retaining the notion of an ideal of undistorted communication. The critical capacity is seen as necessary because of the possibility of what appears as value neutral language being in fact ideological. The goal of critical hermeneutics is emancipation from the constraints of hidden power relations. Emancipation is achieved through liberation from the distorted discourse which systematically masks the relations of domination and oppression. Criticism must then unmask distortion through reference to extra linguistic features. This is the approach taken by Habermas employing the 'depth hermeneutics' derived from Freudian psychoanalysis. (op.cit.). In the same vein, Bourdieu and Passeron provide a critical theory of education which conceives education in these terms; as the reproduction of system hegemony.[2] Freire also sees the existence of a world of objective power relations as a prerequisite for getting a transformative pedagogy off the ground. (Freire, 1972).

'Radical hermeneutics' is the label given to post-structuralist versions of hermeneutics. Derrida and Lyotard reject the possibility of going beyond the text into a quasi-objective domain as a source of critical standpoint. The radical approach is to affirm the parochiality and corrigibility of all standpoints and to avoid domination by

deconstructing all claims as to universality or correctness of method. This is the hermeneutics of suspicion taken to its logical extreme. Rather than identifying linguistic constraints and transcending them, on this approach the educational task is to recognise that linguistic constraints are inevitable and to learn to live with it. Criticism on this sort of approach can proceed in the 'genealogical' sense or perhaps with reference to the sociology or 'archaeology' of knowledge.

'Moderate hermeneutics' is that most closely aligned with Gadamer's proposals. It is the conception that is most useful here, and the one which Gallagher himself favours. On this conception, in contrast to conservative hermeneutics, meaning and significance are conflated, and understanding is achieved through the give and take of dialogic mediation, sparked off by practical concerns. In this account there is no appeal to an objective determinate reality or archimedean point from which to cast objective criticism. Rather Aristotelian phronesis acts as the model of context situated critical rationality. Moderate hermeneutics accepts the impossibility of escaping the hermeneutic circle, but, unlike radical approaches, claims to find the resources within for revealing and positively modifying its basic assumptions. This, as we have seen, comprises a process of bringing to consciousness 'fore-conceptions' through dialogic encounters with novel situations and with those with different 'fore-conceptions', typically those which render understanding initially problematic according to the schemata we are working with. Assumptions are on this account necessary, and necessarily corrigible and modifiable. This conception of hermeneutics is labelled 'moderate' because it relies on the dynamic set up between conservatism and progress. It operates through both trust and suspicion, needs to both respect and undermine authority, is at the same moment both reproductive and transformatory.

Gallagher's insight, in contrasting this conception of hermeneutics with the other three conceptions, lies partly in his appreciation of the temporal aspect of understanding. Moderate hermeneutics is contrasted with 'conservative', 'critical', and 'radical' hermeneutics on the basis of the role of history. The moderate conception of hermeneutics grants us the linguistic resources with which to get beyond a sterile debate between conservatism and progressivism, and to produce a more subtle account of the relationship between history and future action. In fact, conservative hermeneutics and radical hermeneutics are, from the perspective of moderate hermeneutics, untenable, theoretically limiting cases. Reproduction is never a perfect replica of what went before, as transformation is never total. Moderate hermeneutics has the capacity to probe the actual situations of change and to describe the particular constraints on, and possibilities for, production. Perhaps the best illustration can be found in Gadamer's controversial argument in favour of prejudice as a necessary condition of understanding, and over the role played by tradition in the process of hermeneutic understanding.

Prejudice, in the form of 'fore-conceptions', is necessary to this account of understanding in that it furnishes us with a schemata in which to try to fit new

experiences of the world. In Gadamer's view, this prejudice is granted to us by our tradition in the form of (largely unconscious) linguistic and conceptual categories. Tradition thereby directs our experience. Our means of understanding is conditioned by the past. Hence it makes sense for Gadamer to argue that before we make history, it makes us, and that our tradition goes before us. Tradition is projected into the way we see the future. The legacy of tradition is at the same time both enabling and constraining. Without it we cannot experience, but by its nature tradition is limited and parochial, granting us only a particular and partial view. However, traditions are temporary human achievements, and as such, are flexible and subject to constant renewal and renovation. No tradition is utterly fixed just as none is fully fluid. While there is no possibility of achieving the enlightenment fantasy of escaping into an atraditional realm of pure reason from which to judge and change tradition, there is equally no chance of complete fixity either. A constant possibility is the making of changes to the tradition itself in the light of ever new experience. On this reading of tradition, conservative hermeneutics makes the mistake of trying to preserve that which has to be chronically remade in the light of new circumstances, and critical hermeneutics represents a failure to comprehend its own enlightenment prejudices as it searches for a point of ahistorical stability outside the hermeneutic circle. Moderate hermeneutics embraces traditional prejudice both as the facilitator of understanding, and as an object of understanding to be modified in the process of the expansion of our own horizons.

This brand of hermeneutic understanding achieves criticism without appealing to the possibility of escaping the hermeneutic circle. There remains though a charge that 'moderate hermeneutics' is conservative in that the critical resources at the disposal of those doing the understanding are produced by the tradition that they seek to criticise. The implied suggestion is that the critical apparatus produced by a tradition will not be effective when it comes to criticising the fore-conceptions of the tradition itself. This parallels the argument that scientists lack the resources to criticise adequately their own epistemological foundations. Hence, there is a danger of hermeneutic understanding having a limited critical capacity whereby it can question its fore-conceptions only in terms of those fore-conceptions. This would amount to a sort of blindness where the 'paradigm' or 'world view' remains hidden and invisible whilst perhaps appearing to be the subject of critique. This charge of conservatism is rebutted by the account of how, in practice, fore-conceptions are challenged and changed.

In practice transformatory criticism is possible from within the hermeneutic circle, but it needs the impetus of external stimulation. One example of transformatory hermeneutical criticism is found in Kuhn's notion of the collapsing of scientific paradigms. (Kuhn, 1970). According to Kuhn, particular paradigms are transformed when, under the weight of contradictions in empirical evidence, and hence failure of coherence, a shift in presumptions is necessitated. The 'external' stimulus to change fore-conceptions on this account derives from system failure where system failure is judged in

terms of coherence, predictability and control. The 'paradigm shift', which is otherwise describable as a transformation of fore-conceptions, is less than fully radical insofar as the general purpose of science and general methodology remains intact. The change is however clearly significant in that it raises some assumptions into explicit consciousness and changes them.

The hermeneutical situation that concerns us is that of understanding ourselves, other humans, and human institutions. Here, 'external' stimulus cannot come from the needs for prediction and control. Instead, challenges to traditional fore-conceptions derive from engagements with others that have alternative fore-conceptions. It is in the act of trying to understand others that fore-conceptions come into view as such, and are subject to transformation. Understanding that is problematic prompts fore-conceptions to change in order that understanding can be made possible. The process of hermeneutic understanding then results from the practical need to engage. The 'external' that makes criticism possible is, on this account, the alternative fore-conceptions of others. This point is echoed by Vattimo in 'The End of Modernity', 'The condition of encountering radical cultural alterity represents the basis of the notion of ethnographic hermeneutics...'(Vattimo, 1988, p.153).

The positing of the 'external' sources as important parts of the structure of practical-critical hermeneutic understanding in the social world leads to what seems to be a problem for criticism if such sources are absent. If bringing to light and changing our own traditional fore-conceptions relies on dialogic engagement with those with different fore-conceptions, then criticism will end if diversity of fore-conceptions ends. An important question now arises as to whether the necessary 'alterity' or 'distance' persists in the late modern age. Vattimo argues that at least in the straightforward sense the necessary alterity no longer persists. Sameness, rather than difference, characterises our age. He writes, 'Secondly, what is the relationship between the hermeneutic discovery of sameness at the bottom of every dialogue and the unification of the world which is displayed in the Europeanisation of the earth and of the very essence of man?' (ibid. p.154). According to Vattimo, the development of hermeneutical theory in Europe itself signals the end of alterity. Hermeneutic theory is seen as evolving in a period of cultural unification. 'Yet, as a philosophical theory, it develops instead in an era not of radical alterity but of a fully unfolded metaphysical and scientific-technological unification of the world.' (ibid.) If Vattimo's suggestion, (that ethnic traditions, including metaphysics, science and technology are by now significantly similar), is correct, then perhaps the scope for hermeneutic criticism of our own fore-conceptions is rendered problematic.

Vattimo's own response to the threat to the 'metaphysical homologation' of the world is to argue that this phenomenon is not only a destroyer of the condition of dialogue, but is also a condition for it. In order to sustain the view that homologation acts as both a destructive force and constitutes a condition of understanding, Vattimo plays on the definitive 'constitutive ambiguity between newness and sameness..' that is a

feature of all hermeneutics (ibid. p.156). Unpacking this ambiguity leads us into a more complex conception of hermeneutics. This is a hermeneutics in which the terms must be understood in their reflexive relationship within the structure and processes of understanding. Thus we are presented with a hermeneutics where the notion of the alterity of the other is necessarily a corrigible part of our theoretical scheme. More particularly, the conception of 'homologation' is modified, as the ideal account of ethnographic hermeneutic understanding is replaced by a practical account. 'The hermeneutic - but also anthropological - illusion of encountering the other, with all its theoretical grandiosity, finds itself faced with a mixed reality in which alterity is entirely exhausted. The disappearance of alterity does not occur as a part of the dreamed-for total organisation of the world, but rather as a condition of widespread contamination.' (ibid. p.159). The difference that this makes to the possibility for hermeneutic engagement is that the meaning of the term 'homologation' is itself transformed through the contamination. It is the shifting content of the notions of sameness and difference that provides the flexibility needed to continue hermeneutic encounters even when it is the case that all cultures are increasingly coming to share a similar set of fore-conceptions with which to understand the world.

Vattimo's argument, that the whole world is coming to share a similar outlook, can be made stronger if we accept a link between the development of linguistic and conceptual resources and that of economy and technology. Part of the 'globalisation thesis' would have us believe that we are witnessing, in late modernity, global harmonisation in the capitalist mode of production, and increasing commonality of productive and communicative technologies. Under these conditions it would not be surprising to find alternative fore-conceptions of understanding being replaced by those much more like our own. The 'homologation' argument appears to carries some weight then, but Vattimo's response, that the implied lessening of alterity can be countered through changes to the notions of same and different, is less than convincing to the exponent of practical hermeneutic understanding. The problem is that there is a danger that the changing of the terms of what counts as significantly different may lead to an illusion of genuine conversation based on an inadequate conception of alterity. If the other which is to be engaged is not really different in outlook from ourselves, it seems illegitimate to, as it were, manufacture differences in order to supply the necessary distanciation that is required for the hermeneutic encounter.

In order then to rescue the possibilities for the process of hermeneutic understanding getting off the ground in late modernity, we may need to challenge the 'homologation' thesis itself. This will entail arguing for the existence of the necessary alterity of fore-conceptions. In contrast to Vattimo, who relies on general empirical claims concerning 'Europeanisation' and 'widespread contamination', we need to look more closely, at the conceptual level, into the prerequisites of hermeneutic understanding. That is, we need to think about the sources of the linguistic and

conceptual resources that make up fore-conceptions, and hence the sources and boundaries of horizons. These need to be articulated if the absence or otherwise of alterity is to be gauged.

On Gallagher's account of the educational implications of hermeneutics, horizons are local phenomena. This is the basis for his argument that educational practice must be specific to particular locality and cultural tradition. The argument that there is no overarching general method of establishing validity in hermeneutic understanding is also partially derived from the cultural situatedness of particular horizons. In this spirit Gallagher can argue that descriptive, explanatory and prescriptive educational discourses must be played out and determined with local people and with reference to the local context. The emancipatory aims of education are, for Gallagher, best served through the initiation of a questioning dialogue which explores the reality and educational needs of that context. Hence, Gallagher illustrates his moderate and restrained approach with reference to those thinkers whose aim is to uncover and transform local power relations through dialogic encounters. These include Foucault in his questioning of the location and technologies of power, Geertz in his articulation of dialectical teaching approaches, and Freire in his pedagogic proposal of starting dialogues aimed at finding out about learners' local situations and raising awareness of them. Horizon then, for this clutch of critical educational thinkers, refers to a necessarily local phenomenon. This contrasts sharply with the sort of approach taken by Vattimo, which understands Western metaphysics or Enlightenment science as constituting our horizon.

The localisation of 'horizon' in the work of these writers and practitioners leaves open the possibility of alterity in late modernity. Traditional languages and conceptual schemes are, for these people, derived from a series of contexts. These may include, at the most local, the family and friends, moving through the village or suburb, town or city, county, state, and continent. Presumably, as we are looking at conceptual schemata rather than at cultural identity, each level which makes a contribution should be taken into account. That is, in understanding, each more or less local input needs to be taken into account as a necessary but not sufficient source of fore-conceptions. Furthermore, there is no apriori reason why geography should be the best guide to locating sources. Many traditional 'prejudices' may emanate from non-geographically located traditions. For example, the women's movement, the labour movement, the tradition of gay sexuality and so on. Each tradition provides linguistic and conceptual resources which enables its members to understand the world in particular ways. In the late twentieth century, changes in transport, media and communications in the industrialised world make the geographic grounding of tradition increasingly less tenable but makes membership of a variety of cultural traditions commonplace. Such considerations open up the possibilities for the articulation of a number of distinct cultural 'horizons'.

This sort of approach would see us all as members of a number of different traditions, and would do much to suggest possible sources of the alterity needed for a

hermeneutical dialogic process. One question this raises is whether such an account would fit in with a generally Gadamerian conceptual framework. That is, whether such traditions could count as traditions in the Gadamerian sense. It would appear that in principle the answer is yes. The structural prerequisites needed for hermeneutic understanding would be met as long as the cultural traditions act as a source of linguistic and conceptual fore-conceptions, and insofar as some of these fore-conceptions remain hidden in the normal discourse but are open to becoming explicit and to change through dialogic engagement. If it is the case that many different sources of corrigible linguistic and conceptual resources inform understanding in late modernity, and that many of these remain hidden in normal discourse, then perhaps we have a basis in principle for grounding hermeneutic engagement. Ultimately, the outcome of hermeneutic encounters in practice will determine whether the structural determinants are up to the task of enabling the hermeneutic process of understanding.

Overall then one could speak of there being three sorts of response to the problem of homologation. Firstly it might be argued that the homologation thesis is, in its own terms, empirically doubtful. Certainly a number of very different religious traditions are to be found in late modernity (along with a great deal of atheism) and little evidence to suggest that this is changing very much. Perhaps as well, western anthropologists underestimate the diversity and influence of traditional cultures in late modernity. Secondly, it might be argued that although we are at a time in history where alterity is being undermined by the globalising effects of technology, this process is far from complete. On this account, alterity does still remain but is being eroded. Such a position might make hermeneutic engagement all the more urgent. Thirdly there is the position that a wide diversity of cultural horizons exists in the myriad of cross cutting traditions that make up the complex late modern social reality. The latter position would support the view that particular traditions remain open for interpretation from other traditions, and leaves open the possibility that new prejudices will continue to be constructed. On this account, further and ongoing research into the question of cultural horizons may be both possible and beneficial for human understanding.

Concluding Remarks

The attempt to produce a conceptualisation of hermeneutic understanding that may be useful for the task of conceiving and promoting liberal aims of education in late modernity, has involved trying to articulate a 'practical-critical' hermeneutics. In the move from conceiving hermeneutics as a philosophical description of the structures and processes that make understanding possible, to conceiving hermeneutics as a useful mode of engaging with the social world, a series of objections has had to be dealt with. The first objection concerns the possibilities for criticism. Hermeneutical criticism cannot proceed through the employment of appeals to objectivity or universalism. Criticism is

restricted to the uncovering and alteration of 'prejudices'. The second objection is that concerning method. Sorting between good and bad interpretations or good and bad dialogues does not readily lend itself to the application of method in any scientific sense. Certainly, method is restricted in that universal rules cannot be derived, nor does it seem likely that any useful procedures could be determined in advance of hermeneutic encounters. More weakly, perhaps the most we could hope for is local and corrigible regulative norms. The third objection concerns the question of the availability of the sort of alterity needed to sustain the hermeneutic process. While it may be argued that the diversity of grand metaphysical prejudices is eroding, it is arguable in a number of ways that traditions with significantly different prejudices do persist.

In addressing these objections to the possibilities for practical hermeneutics, I have attempted to illustrate some of the problems and possibilities for a 'practical-critical' hermeneutics. The quid pro quo for rendering philosophical hermeneutics practical has been the limiting of critique, the weakening of method, and a rethinking of the notion of horizon. The result is an account of hermeneutic understanding that forsakes any claims to certainty or finality. A conception whereby disputes remain chronically open to further argument, and where all understanding is left open to possible future reinterpretation. From an Enlightenment perspective, this renders 'practical-critical' hermeneutics methodologically weak. From the hermeneutic perspective, such a view only reveals the illusions of the Enlightenment. The understanding of oneself, of others, and of social institutions involves the same finitude, uncertainty and openness as moral reasoning on the Aristotelian model.

Chapter 5. Hermeneutic Understanding and Liberal Aims of Education

Broadly speaking, this chapter attempts to respond to the question as to what difference it might make to the articulation of liberal educational aims if we were to accept the arguments in favour of a 'practical-critical' hermeneutics as a relevant account of human understanding. Has the consideration of hermeneutical theory, the generating of 'practical-critical' hermeneutics, and reflection on the hermeneutical character of self understanding, the understanding of others, and the understanding of one's society, provided useful conceptual equipment with which to rethink important themes in liberal educational thought? I think the answer is yes, that the hermeneutic approach grants us alternative and complementary ways of understanding liberal educational aims, different means for questioning the adequacy of current aims, and novel descriptions of how they might be extended.

The positive purchase of bringing hermeneutic understanding to the articulation of liberal educational aims can be understood as coming in two forms. Firstly, as we are enabled to think differently about the complex process of understanding in the human sciences, so we are enabled to think differently about educational aims insofar as they incorporate a requirement, on the part of the learner, for cognition of what may be broadly termed the personal and the social world. That is, to the extent that cognition is a factor in the account of liberal flourishing that educator's seek to promote, then the account of hermeneutic understanding is worth listening to. Secondly, and more radically, reflection on the hermeneutical approach to understanding brings the possibility for engaging critically and constructively with the underpinning notions of choice, liberty and agency promoted through liberal educational aims. As an account of the origins, limitations, and possibilities for understanding, hermeneutic theory can provide a critical perspective which can aid commentary on, and perhaps reconstruction of, concepts that are central to the idea of educating for the autonomous well-being of individuals.

In the interests of clarity, it is worth reiterating that the Gadamerian account of hermeneutic understanding that has been presented in this thesis owes its specificity to its particular account of the structure, dynamics, and limits of understanding (an account which both contrasts and adds to traditional 'Enlightenment' accounts of knowledge). What we need to bear in mind as we reconsider liberal aims of education is the following set of phenomenological-hermeneutical arguments. Firstly, experience is 'fore-structured' according to traditional and more or less local categories of understanding. Secondly, these 'fore-structures' are malleable, and are typically stretched, broadened, and transformed, through 'practical-critical' dialogic attempts to understand that which is couched within alternative conceptual matrices. Thirdly, the structure, processes and scope of hermeneutic understanding can be brought to explicit awareness through experience of the process and outcomes of 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogues.

5.1 Hermeneutic Understanding and Informed Desire Satisfaction

The liberal notion of informed desire satisfaction, and its position in the articulation of liberal educational aims, has already been given an airing in chapter two. It will suffice here to say that on this account, one component of liberal well-being is the capacity and opportunity for an individual to satisfy his or her desires. In traditional liberal thought this tends to mean pursuing one's most important goals or interests over one's lifetime. What is important is that the desires satisfied are truly the most important desires of the individual involved.

In light of our account of 'practical-critical' hermeneutic understanding, there appears to be a fairly radical sense in which the doctrine of informed desire satisfaction might be reviewed. This is a result of the complexity entailed in the hermeneutical approach, which grants us a more sophisticated way of conceiving the 'informed' component of this conception of individual well-being. Generally speaking, one possibility for looking afresh at informed desire satisfaction (or its equivalent) is generated through the substituting of hermeneutically informed accounts of self-understanding, understanding others, and understanding social practices and institutions, for the sorts of knowing associated with Enlightenment rationalism. The alternative account of the structures, processes, and relationships, associated with hermeneutic understanding, enables us not only to give an alternative account of how an individual is informed about his or her desires and their satisfaction, but also reveals an alternative way of thinking about some of the complex dynamics involved in the formation of a desire structure.

Informed desire satisfaction includes both the selection and pursuit of one's major ends. The 'informed' part of this equation refers therefore both to the accessing of knowledge or generating of understanding about one's own desires, and to the accessing of knowledge or generating of understanding pertinent to the actualising of these desires. From a perspective which, to a degree, substitutes understanding for knowledge, and which characterises this understanding as hermeneutical, the relationship between information and an individual's desire structure is seen as reflexive. The reflexivity would indicate that rather than a person coming to know their own desires and desire structure through some form of self observation, rather, both the conceptual apparatus that grants a perspective for self understanding, and the structured desires, are locked in a mutually determining relationship. That is, self understanding may be characterised as a reciprocally determining structure through which both one's capacity for understanding one's own desires, and the character and significance of those desires, change in mutual relation over time and in the light of experience of the world.

To spell out how the hermeneutical approach comes to such a conclusion about self understanding it might be useful to use an ocular metaphor. According to the hermeneutic model, our self as desires cannot be made into an object for the detached

self as observing subject. Instead, extending the ocular metaphor; the spectacles through which we look at our own structured desires are themselves intimately, and causally, engaged with that desire structure. The reflexivity of the understanding relationship is such that the information we gain about ourselves alters our capacities for self reflection which in turn allows for further reinterpretation of our desires and their evaluation. The understanding required to inform the satisfying of one's desires then is reflexively involved with one's desire structure.

This hermeneutical conception of self understanding goes some way towards undercutting a traditional bipolar opposition between the conceptions of the relation of self understanding and choice in what might loosely be termed liberal notions of autonomy and the more 'existential' notion of authenticity. Self understanding according to the account of liberal autonomy can be understood as the accessing of an existent hierarchy of desires. In philosophy of education this sort of approach is commonplace, for example in White (1990) and Callan (1988) who sees self understanding as insight into 'interests' or that which is to one's personal advantage. In contrast, a more existentialist approach sees self understanding as an insight into the freedom of the individual to construct a desire hierarchy from life experience.[1] On the former account the pertinent metaphor is of discovery of personal values, on the latter the values are generated, or in the extreme case, are understood as wholly self chosen. According to the hermeneutical account, neither of these does justice to the dynamics of self understanding and desire hierarchy formation.

The hermeneutic critique of each of the above caricatures of self understanding is that on each account the self is inadequately understood because of the inadequacy of the conceptual framework of the internal relationship of subject and object. On the hermeneutic account, both the scientific separation of self into subject and object (that underpins liberal autonomy), and the 'bootstrapping' method of deciding ones own values (that characterises authenticity), are rejected in favour of a conception which sees self understanding as a circular process taking place over time in response to significant external stimuli (which may be questions asked directly or questions emanating from practical needs). On this model self understanding is carried out from a particular perspective and the categories of judgement used to generate interpretation are subject to change both through their relation to what they reveal, and in relation to the external world. Because self understanding gets off the ground only through the exercise of categories of 'prejudice', any view of what constitutes one's most important desires will be true only while that particular prejudicial framework holds.

Hermeneutically configured self understanding turns out to be an ongoing and never ending process. Reading off one's own values is like reading a text in that one can return to confront oneself equipped with different values and altered ways of seeing, and hence see more or interpret differently in the future. The double reflexivity of self understanding means that the 'lens' through which the text is understood as well as the

'text' itself is altered in the process, a process which derives its impetus from practical concerns raised in the meaningful reality of the lived world. Self understanding on this account turns out not to be simply about gaining insights into one's desires as they are structured by one's values, but rather sees self understanding as a constant process of revealing and 'becoming' through the mutual development of both the desire structure and the forestructures that condition the understanding of that desire structure. A perspective that comprehends a self that is, as it were, both internally related and in perpetual motion.

In addition to recasting self knowledge as reflexive hermeneutical self understanding, the hermeneutical account of understanding may also be brought into the reckoning in our account of the understanding of the other persons and of the social practices and institutions that informs our desire satisfaction. At one level, these domains of understanding may be understood as secondary to self understanding. They are domains of understanding necessary for the achievement of desire satisfaction in that they provide information about the desires of others, about what sort of desires one might choose, and about the opportunities available for satisfying one's desires once they are chosen. Re-characterised to reflect the structures and processes involved in hermeneutic understanding, such understanding can be seen as necessarily interpretive, partial, and ongoing. In the case of understanding others, the process may need to involve entering into genuinely dialogic relations. In the case of understanding social practices and institutions, an understanding of the dynamics of reflexive development may need to be part of the story. In each case the interpretation must be understood as proceeding from a particular perspective, and possibly involve alterations to one's original viewpoint.

Perhaps more importantly, the understanding achieved in each domain can impact upon the conceptual framework through which it is perceived. The hermeneutic understanding of others and of social practices and institutions may therefore impact directly on self understanding. If it is the case that the understanding of the social world involves stretching and altering one's perspective, then it is also likely that these changes in one's capacities for understanding will alter how we see ourselves. The matrix structure of interrelated domains of understanding implied by the hermeneutic approach pushes into the self understanding component of our account of informed desire satisfaction. Self understanding turns out not only to comprise a dynamic and reflexive internal structure, but is inescapably enmeshed with our experience of the external social world.

In general then we can argue that, from a hermeneutical perspective, self understanding be usefully described in terms of the constant to and fro that takes place between the desire hierarchy, the apparatus of understanding, and the meaningful environment. Self understanding on this account is not a state that can in principle be attained through as it were revealing oneself to oneself, but rather refers to a process of

an ongoing unfolding of dimensions without end, and which can never be divorced from the necessary and ongoing input of external meaningful reality. The better metaphor for describing the structure of hermeneutical self-understanding would be something like an ecology, where the forestructures of experience and the hierarchy of desires (structured according to values), evolve in a 'symbiotic' relation within an environment of practical stimulation. It is a process involving the formation of new ways of understanding one's desires and their structuring and new ways of interpreting one's beliefs, feelings, and so on.

The conception of self implied is in more than one sense a social self. Firstly the source of the categories of understanding is traditional. This means both that the means for making judgements and ascribing significance to phenomena are culturally derived, and that the concepts of understanding are sourced from tradition. The cultural source extends to the particular conception of self and of what constitutes choice. This accords with Charles Taylor's account of the concept of self where the concept of self with which we operate must be understood as particular and local with its own long history and tradition. (Taylor, 1989) If, as argued from the hermeneutic approach, this concept of self is bound up with our self understanding, then self understanding is restricted by the cultural milieu in which the individual is embedded. Hence, to the extent to which self understanding constitutes a necessary condition for desire satisfaction, desire satisfaction is limited by the traditional self concept bequeathed to us by our culture. We can further argue, and it would be closer to Gadamer's own approach, that self understanding is also limited by the general categorical framework of epistemology. Self understanding is limited by an exclusively epistemological or scientific methodological framework in the same sense that for example physics is limited by the absence of quantum theory or the human sciences are limited by exclusively positivistic methodology. A framework which routinely divides the world into the scientific categories of subject and object restricts one's viewpoint such that it is difficult to raise and respond to questions about the dynamic circularity of self understanding. A positivistically conceived methodological framework leaves the relationship of self understanding as mysterious, and sees mutually determining interaction between 'subject' and 'object' as a regrettable methodological flaw rather than a necessary and positive condition for understanding in the human world. The positivity of circularity may therefore remain hidden from view. Secondly, on the hermeneutic model, one's desires are not accessed through an individual introspective method. Rather, it is in the attempt to understand, prompted by either practical necessity or in response to questions raised by another, that the reflexive process of self understanding is activated. Desire satisfaction on the hermeneutic model is therefore social in that it proceeds through reaction to social stimuli as well as insofar as it relies upon traditional cultural resources.

5.2 Hermeneutic Understanding and Personal Autonomy

The liberal educational aim of personal autonomy incorporates the requirement that the choices made by an individual are based on the individual's own desires and on his or her own beliefs about their relative importance, urgency, and so on. For an individual this means choosing, and acting upon, one's own major ends, free from coercion or the constraints of imposed or unquestioned religious or traditional doctrine. Such individual freedom of choice is constrained not only by the threats to liberty posed by oppressive states, laws and suchlike, but more subtly insofar as the individual may fall victim to political or religious indoctrination, or become a mere follower of social conventions, norms, public opinion or fashion. In the strong sense, (distinguishing autonomy from autarchy) personal autonomy requires that individuals recognise, and distance themselves from, the accepted value framework or belief system of their culture. The general point here is that thought and action which does not involve critical reflection on the sources of one's beliefs and values may leave one making choices which in the relevant sense are not one's own. One way of countering this sort of threat to personal autonomy comes in the form of the notion of 'critical distancing'. The argument put is that the autonomous person will to some degree have reflected critically on, and to some degree distanced him or herself from, the norms and conventions of his or her society. (for a fuller account see chapter two)

In light of the model of hermeneutic understanding presented by Gadamer, it might be possible to re-characterise the threats to autonomy that arise from failures to recognise and act upon hidden constraints on one's beliefs. The model of hermeneutic understanding incorporates the idea that social norms and conventions may be constraining, but goes further in identifying categories of sense making, judgement, and interpretation as possible sources of constraint. In addition to the threat to freedom implied by the uncritical acceptance of religious dogma or public opinion, a hermeneutic approach identifies the uncritical acceptance of the more basic categories of knowledge and reasoning as limiting. This, in part, constitutes Gadamer's critique of Enlightenment epistemology and scientific reasoning. The Enlightenment account, in presenting itself as neutral or natural, obscures itself from our view as one particular example of forestructuring. It remains as it were in the background whilst at the same time both enabling and restricting vision. In effect, by appearing to constitute a universal rather than a particular and fallible framework, the Enlightenment prejudice turns out to place a restriction on our capacity for understanding. Whilst such a prejudice remains hidden from view, or immune to criticism, it can be thought of as constituting a constraint on freedom of thought.

The apparent universality of Enlightenment reason, both in the sense that it seen as the route to truth for all cultures, and in the sense that it applies in all domains of thought, is partially maintained by the impotence of the associated account of critique.

The sort of criticism enabled by the rationalist epistemological structure and method is weak in its potential for revealing its own presuppositions. The model of criticism relies on a conservative epistemology and therefore has difficulty in bringing that epistemology into question. The ideas: that there is one true answer to any question, that such answers may be fully objective, and that the search for truth involves subjects observing objects in a spirit of detachment, militate against the possibility for effective critique of the Enlightenment paradigm. The weakness of the conception of criticality leaves the rationalist approach looking like a natural, neutral, and universal method because it does not have the capacity to reveal its particular prejudicial character. Crucially here then, from a hermeneutic perspective, the critical apparatus associated with Enlightenment rationalism can be seen as placing unseen limits on what may be criticised, limits which exclude criticism of the philosophical underpinnings and methods of the model of critique itself.

In contrast to the Enlightenment account of truth seeking, the Gadamerian model of hermeneutic understanding supports a conception of criticism that is concerned not with finding objective truth and falsehood, but with uncovering hidden presuppositions. The philosophical theory of hermeneutic understanding begins with the argument that all knowledge and understanding begins in prejudice, is parochial and perspectival. The upshot of this is the establishing of a position of 'metacritique' whereby any method of truth seeking can be criticised in terms of its limited perspective and the parochiality of its presuppositions. No method can account for all phenomena and no method can claim a neutral or objective viewpoint. From this position the philosophical theory of hermeneutic phenomenology would suggest that one methodological framework may be effectively criticised from the perspective of another, or rather that critique arises through the 'fusion' of the two 'horizons'. Whilst 'practical-critical' hermeneutics might provide an approach to understanding that carries the potential to generate a critique of alternative methods of enquiry and their associated version of criticism then, it cannot close the door on criticism of its own presuppositions and limitations. 'Practical-critical' hermeneutics as method is parochial, prejudiced, and enabled and constrained by tradition. It rests on particular presuppositions and is thereby vulnerable to critique.

The critical purchase of philosophical hermeneutics comes through the description of this general framework whereby all cognition is seen as prejudiced and conditioned by tradition. The recognition of prejudice as such, and the associated recognition of the limitedness of all knowledge and understanding, undercuts all claims to final or fully objective truth. The critical purchase of 'practical-critical' hermeneutics comes through the process of dialogic hermeneutic engagement with those in alternative perspectives. It is through 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogues that new ways of understanding are generated from which the strengths and weaknesses of one's original perspective are revealed. Critical reflection, on this model, means reflecting from other perspectives, or, more correctly, seeing from a perspective generated through mediation

with another perspective. Distancing oneself from one's cultural norms and conventions, and from one's own culture's conception of critique, does not mean standing back onto neutral ground in order to get a clearer view. There is no territory in which to stand back, there are only other traditions and prejudices. The hermeneutic approach to criticism doesn't allow for the possibility of detaching oneself from one's culture, rather it implies that to be critical one needs to become dialogically engaged with those of an alternative culture.

So where does this leave the concept of autonomy? Firstly, the hermeneutic approach would seem to indicate that effective critique should bring into the story the notion of criticism itself. If we have a method of criticism and apply it to the norms and conventions of our society without engaging in methodological reflection on the assumptions and limitations of that critical method, then we remain in danger of living with the appearance rather than the reality of freedom. From the perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology, one can carry out a method of rational critical enquiry unreflectively. In fact, to the extent to which one can be said to be following a critical method, one is not being fully critical. Secondly, according to the hermeneutical critique, autonomy implies critical reflection on the basic presuppositions that enable and constrain one's perspective. In short, autonomy requires awareness of, and reflection on, the sources of our categories of truth, judgement, interpretation, reasoning and so on. This awareness of our own prejudice as such would seem to imply a recognition of the existence of various different approaches to truth seeking. Perhaps, on reflection, an effective autonomy supporting critical perspective therefore requires that one has an insight into a variety of methods of enquiry and domains of cognition.

In addition to giving an opportunity for rethinking autonomy in light of the alternative account of critique, the hermeneutic approach suggests alternative ways of thinking firstly about the process by which one becomes autonomous, and secondly about limitations on the achievement of autonomy. In the first case, the process of becoming more autonomous cannot, on this model, be wholly understood as the application of a method. The need to incorporate reflection on method implies the sort of alteration to perspective that arises through mediation with alternative perspectives. Escaping the constraints on one's understanding, that result from one's embeddedness within a particular tradition, requires intercultural engagement. In the second case, the argument that all perspectives are necessarily limited implies that autonomy is limited. All human perspectives will always be finite and partial, and hence all understanding will necessarily be conditioned by particular presuppositions or fore-structures. If knowledge and understanding is constrained by fore-structures, then autonomy, insofar as it relies on knowledge and understanding, will also be constrained.

In a sense, the hermeneutical account of the sources of one's categories of understanding might seem to imply that one's view of the world is determined by the traditions that equip us with apparatus for understanding. Such apparatus is both

necessary for understanding and necessarily limited in scope. The question arises then as to whether hermeneutic understanding grants us positive potential for enhancing or increasing personal autonomy rather than merely insight into our cultural determinism. Does the hermeneutic approach carry the promise of greater freedom of thought or more personal control over our choice making? The philosophical theory of hermeneutic understanding might alert us to the possibility that we are in error about the status of our epistemological framework, but if we see our prejudice as unhidden but necessary then we are more educated but not more free. However, according to the hermeneutic conception, one's future remains open to change both in terms of one's capacities for understanding and one's desire structuring values. Some freedom from the constraints of one's particular perspective is possible insofar as one's prejudice can be brought into explicit awareness, and, more importantly, significantly modified, through the hermeneutic dialogic process. The possibility of future flexibility, or the further overcoming of parochiality of perspective, appears to be ongoing and open-ended.

The idea that one's perspective can be rendered explicit, and that it remains always potentially flexible, does not of itself however imply that it can come under one's control. The idea of exercising some control over one's forestructures of understanding needs to be approached with caution as one's forestructures of understanding on this account are never solely the preserve of the individual person. Changing one's capacity for understanding is not carried out at one's whim, it is rather triggered by encounters with influences outside oneself. Changing forestructures is therefore in part dictated by the sorts of stimuli to which one is exposed. The choice of such stimuli may be to some degree open to the individual, but the choices of experience or of conversational partner or text might not normally be expected to be that which challenges one's forestructures. An individual may well be more liable to choose influences that confirm the values already possessed, and to experience events that fit into existing conceptual frameworks. Control over the choosing of the environment of experience then is unlikely to result in the hermeneutic extending of one's powers of understanding. Rather it is in struggling to understand that which does not readily fit into one's current categorical framework, and which challenges one's values and beliefs, that alterations in one's capacities for understanding occur.

It would be misleading then to say that the individual is in a position simply to choose to see his or her prejudice as such, or to choose to significantly alter his or her perspective. Instead it would be more accurate to say that one moment in gaining some control over one's future capacities for understanding lies in one's insight into the structure and process of hermeneutic understanding. The transparency of the process is however not enough to enable an individual to take responsibility for his or her future self. In addition to recognising the partiality and fallibility of one's current prejudice, one needs a readiness and willingness to change, and this means a readiness and willingness to enter into 'genuine dialogues'. Furthermore, whilst escaping the parochiality of one's

perspective is, on this account, comparable or complementary to the idea of critical distancing on the traditional liberal account of autonomy, control over one's future perspective would require further that the direction of one's future alteration of perspective could be chosen. This would presumably involve individuals taking responsibility not only for entering into 'genuine dialogues', but for choosing who to enter into dialogue with. Understood from a hermeneutic perspective then, the conditions for achieving autonomy include not only that the individual achieves some insight into the limited and prejudices nature of his or her own categories of understanding, but also that individuals take responsibility firstly for entering into genuine dialogues, and secondly for choosing those dialogues with the potential to significantly challenge one's current beliefs and assumptions.

5.3 Hermeneutic Understanding, Openness, and Open-Mindedness

A third educational objective which might benefit from being thought about from a perspective which takes account of the hermeneutical nature of human understanding, and an area in which liberal educators and liberal educational theorists might be expected to show a keen interest, is that of the nurturing of intellectual virtues. In speaking of intellectual virtues I take as the starting point the Aristotelian tradition of virtues where the intellectual virtues can be described generally as those excellences concerned with knowledge and truth. More specifically, Aristotle presents, in the Nicomachean Ethics, an outline of a number of capacities, abilities, and dispositions, the exercise of which helps in the quest for truth, and in the production or discovery and transmission of knowledge. To these ends we find, in the Aristotelian schema, a range of intellectual virtues which includes both universal excellences such as memory and forethought which might be thought of as necessary conditions for any knowledge or understanding, and specific intellectual virtues that are more tied up with particular intellectual activities or practices. We are here interested in the latter category, in the virtues that help in particular learning activities.

My suggestion is that to the extent to which a traditional account of the intellectual virtues is bound up with a particular account of knowledge (i.e. that of the Enlightenment), it may not be adequate to the task of providing a guide to good practice in the sphere of human understanding conceived in hermeneutic terms. This is to say that the intellectual virtues deriving from the Aristotelian tradition, but understood from an Enlightenment perspective, may be candidates for some modification in the light of our hermeneutical reflections. The relationship between intellectual and moral virtues may also be in need of some rethinking if the full implications of the hermeneutic model of understanding are to be catered for. However, here is not the place for a comprehensive account of either the complexities of the relationship between moral and intellectual virtues, or the history of virtue theory in general. The task is somewhat humbler. In order

to illustrate the major points about how the adoption of a hermeneutical account of understanding might affect the way we think about intellectual virtues, it will be enough to focus down on how our understanding of intellectual virtues might be modified in order to reflect the hermeneutically informed conception of learning and understanding, and to think about whether we might usefully suggest intellectual virtues specific to hermeneutic understanding.

In order to bring out the specific features of an hermeneutically informed conception of the intellectual virtues that might inform educational practice, it will be helpful to begin contrastively with a modern interpretation of the intellectual virtues. A source that serves the purpose well is the paper on the intellectual virtues by Neil Cooper (Cooper, 1994) Cooper's paper is helpful not only in that it presents a set of intellectual virtues as they are understood within the Enlightenment epistemological tradition, but also because he attempts a taxonomy that links intellectual virtues to specific intellectual activities, and because he makes explicit reference to those intellectual virtues associated with education.

In building his taxonomy, Cooper splits an Aristotelian list of intellectual virtues into what he terms '...the inquisitive, the forensic, the judicial, the educative, and the all pervasive.' (ibid.). Within the inquisitive group are those virtues concerned with enquiry. These include curiosity, orderliness and methodicalness, precision and accuracy (with the proviso that the degree of precision sought in an enquiry can only be that appropriate to the nature of the subject matter), nimbleness, thoroughness and caution. The forensic group contains pertinacity, a virtue needed to make sure the best possible case is made for any thesis, tempered by the caution that to dogmatically refuse ever to abandon a thesis is equally a vice. The judicial virtues are those concerned with doing intellectual justice to arguments without favour. This requires intellectual integrity, a balanced approach which takes a detached and synoptic perspective of evidence and argument. Of the all pervasive virtues, the ones that add to our account include rationality, interpreted by Cooper as instrumental rationality, plus consistency, and wisdom. Wisdom on Cooper's account is 'the knowledge of ourselves, self-knowledge and knowledge of others' (ibid.). Cooper sees this knowledge as imperfect because it is impossible to achieve full objectivity. However, objectivity remains a guiding ideal. 'To see ourselves with complete objectivity is impossible; we cannot completely detach ourselves from our own feelings, emotions and attitudes. But if we have wisdom, we experience and respond to a pull or nisus towards the objective.' (ibid. p.468).

Potentially of special interest is Cooper's grouping of the intellectual virtues that operate in the sphere of education. The virtues here are those associated with the communication and transmission of knowledge. The virtues proposed are mostly concerned with the sort of excellences needed for good teaching. The prime virtue required of the educator is, for Cooper, intellectual clarity. 'Without clarity one cannot develop one's arguments, without clarity one cannot counter the arguments of others...'

(ibid.). Clarity is both the most important of the educator's virtues, and unusual in that it doesn't conform to the Aristotelian system wherein the mean lies between deficiency and excess. 'Clarity, unlike other intellectual virtues, should not and cannot be balanced by its opposite, obscurity. Where clarity is obtainable and appropriate, there is no room for compromise.' (ibid.). Cooper also cites the related virtue of simplicity as a virtue of the educator, both because to make things simple tends to filter out unnecessary complexity, and because in the educative process it is more appropriate to move from simplicity to complexity than in the opposite direction. In both cases it is argued that simplicity makes understanding easier. The third virtue of the educator is nameless. It concerns being open to the ideas of the pupil. Cooper refers to the requirement for a teacher to imagine the pupil's point of view. This requires intellectual tolerance and respect, and aims to allow the pupil to exhibit spontaneity and originality.

Although Cooper's taxonomy of intellectual virtues is helpful in stimulating us to think about the place and character of Aristotelian virtues in intellectual life, in focusing on education as an activity of an educator, rather than in general as a practical sphere of life, or from the point of view of learners, it tends to obscure rather than illuminate the question of the role of intellectual virtues as they correspond to education for the good life. Here we are concerned with the qualities of mind that we are attempting to nurture in learners rather than teachers. Cooper has surprisingly little to say on this matter, but what he does say is quite revealing. 'Educative virtue needs to be not only in the educator but also in the pupil. The pupil needs to be *receptive*, to have the windows of his mind open to new ideas and new ways of thinking and doing. Preconceptions and 'prejudices' are unavoidable since we do not write on a blank tablet, but they should be preconceptions which are easily removable and do not act as obstacles and stumbling-blocks in our path, as we seek to advance and acquire knowledge and understanding.' (ibid. p. 467).

The reason for presenting Cooper's taxonomy of Aristotelian intellectual virtues here is that it illustrates the point that the way in which we comprehend the virtues; their relationship to one another, and their applicability in intellectual life, is related to our own intellectual framework. The groupings and the characterisations must to some degree reflect our own concerns and our own cultural assumptions. Cooper works therefore with a particular conception of understanding. 'The virtue of having a connecting knowledge, of knowing how to connect bits of knowledge with one another, we call *understanding*.' (ibid. p468). He also employs a particular conception of education. This is broadly liberal, as is witnessed by the citing of John Stuart Mill, John Locke and William James, and the emphasis on the educational aim of promoting intellectual originality. Rather than attempting to explicate these preconceptions, Cooper refers to his taxonomy thus. 'This framework or taxonomy is, as I see it, unashamedly *ad hoc* and provisional; my sole purpose in proposing it has been to explore or even to illuminate the intellectual virtues with its aid. In this spirit I invite others to explore my

framework and to linger a while in savouring it. If you do not like the taste, try another framework.' (ibid. p. 468).

When it comes to thinking about intellectual virtues in their relation to a hermeneutical approach, it seems that Cooper's general approach of grouping virtues may be of value, but it seems also that, coming from a different account of understanding, the taxonomy needs to be revised. In particular, some of the virtues from the 'non-educative' groups will be required in order to think about the sorts of excellences appropriate to the promotion of hermeneutic understanding in education. Cooper cites the general virtue of 'openness' not as an educative virtue but as one part of the virtue of 'Intellectual integrity'. To quote Cooper, 'The fourth part of intellectual integrity consists in keeping ourselves open to new ideas and being prepared to modify old ones. Such an *openness*, to be genuine, must involve a readiness to connect the new with the old and to restructure, if necessary, the whole web of our belief. Moreover, being open to new ideas is expressed by a readiness to ask new questions and new kinds of questions.' (ibid. p.464)

From the hermeneutical approach, openness is much more clearly an educative virtue. Readiness to change one's beliefs and to ask new questions are necessary conditions not simply for coming to an honest appraisal of evidence and argument, but more crucially are necessary conditions for the hermeneutical process of learning. Indeed, openness is a virtue at the very heart of an education for intellectual well being that takes on board the hermeneutical nature of understanding. Openness as a virtue is thus both shifted and promoted in the hermeneutic scheme in contrast to Cooper's scheme. From a Gadamerian standpoint, 'genuine conversation', where forestructures and beliefs and values may really be changed through dialogic engagement, cannot even begin to get off the ground without openness. Openness is then not only a manifestation of 'the golden rule' whereby we should treat others in conversation as we would have them treat us. On that account the aim of openness is to strike the proper balance between uncritical acceptance and over scepticism. Rather, openness, from the Gadamerian perspective, is a primary virtue, as it enables hermeneutical progress to get going at all. In this particular form of understanding, openness is a primary virtue in the sense that it is a necessary condition for understanding.

In addition to changing the importance and function of the virtue of openness, the switch from considering intellectual excellence in terms of knowledge to that of hermeneutic understanding invites us to rethink the content of the concept of openness. Whereas for Cooper openness is denoted by readiness to ask new questions and new kinds of questions, the Gadamerian approach is concerned with the structures and processes that make possible the asking of new questions. The intellectual virtues therefore should address the conditions that make the asking of new questions possible. This, on the hermeneutic approach, means taking into account the forestructures of understanding, or more correctly it means dealing positively with the forestructures of

understanding. This is because the sort of questions that we are capable of asking is dependent on our perspective on the world, on the sort of conceptual apparatus available to us with which we gain experience. Openness has therefore to refer to a willingness not only to change the questions asked, but to a readiness to change the position from which questions are asked. It should be noted here that we are talking about an exchange or modification of preconceptions rather than merely losing prejudices. Openness in the hermeneutic sense involves not just a letting go of habitual ways of understanding the world, but of positively embracing new preconceptions. In effect, the idea of openness needs to be stretched in order to accommodate the possibility of the restructuring of the 'foreconceptions' that make understanding possible.

One practical requirement that attends this hermeneutical conception of openness is that of particularly sensitive listening. It is in the attempt to understand the unfamiliar that we are called on to stretch and alter our conceptual apparatus, and this implies hearing the unfamiliar. This may be understood in a number of ways. For example, an English adult male talking to an African, a child, or a woman, may be said to be engaging with cultural difference, to be conversing with those with different foreconceptions of understanding. To hear the voices of others, voices that at first may seem to not make sense, requires a particular orientation to, and sort of, listening. Similarly, in reading a text, we need to be open to hearing the question raised for us by the text, a question that perhaps is easily overlooked because of our limited foreconceptions. The same could be said to be true of practical questions. The general point is that in order to hear the question raised from an unfamiliar framework of foreconceptions one requires a disposition to hear others in their otherness and to be prepared to change in order to be in a position to respond to the question. Openness then here is not about asking questions as Cooper would have it, but more importantly about hearing questions. Listening, in this particular sense, can be understood as a virtue or sub-virtue of openness.

In addition to a particular sort of listening, we might suggest further sub-virtues connected with hermeneutic openness. One further candidate for inclusion in the picture of hermeneutically conceived intellectual virtues is generosity. A virtue more conventionally at home amongst the moral virtues, generosity is important for hermeneutic understanding because of the 'otherness' that is encountered in learning relationships. Generosity is required for hermeneutic understanding because understanding has to proceed from the assumptions that that which is very different from oneself is intelligible and worth listening to. It could for example be argued that had Evans-Pritchard been more generous in his anthropological dealings with Azande ritual life, then he wouldn't have been so quick to dismiss their 'witchcraft' as inferior science. With greater generosity, he might have begun from the assumption that Azande life was, in its own terms, quite sensible. (see Winch, 1972) Perhaps however a more significant sub-virtue of openness in this case would be intellectual humility. The attitude that one's

own intellectual tradition is merely one amongst many and is parochial and partial may have served anthropology better than the belief that western reasoning constitutes the highest form of thought. Intellectual humility is a virtue of hermeneutic understanding because it is a good response to the necessary finitude of any human perspective, and is a response proportionate to the idea that there is always more to learn.

The intellectual virtue of openness as it relates to understanding conceived from the hermeneutic approach then differs significantly in importance, in its relation to other virtues, and in content, from the notion of openness that is presented by Cooper as a sub-virtue related to the quest for objective knowledge. A quest couched in generally scientific terms and based on the enlightenment conception of the knowing subject. From the more hermeneutical standpoint, the virtue of openness involves the sort of listening that enables changes in experiential frameworks or 'prejudices'. This implies a relation between ability to understand and readiness to let go of one's viewpoint in favour of another more enabling perspective. The relationship between valued desires and fore-conceptions means that the willingness to change fore-conceptions entails risk, not only to the forestructures of understanding, but to one's desire structure also. This sort of risk demands a particular application of intellectual courage. This is because hermeneutic understanding, at the personal level, involves the understanding person in the process (in a sense which contrasts with the enlightenment model where the subject can be thought of as to some degree insulated by the detachment of the subject in the relationship with the objectified world). Hermeneutical understanding hence involves a disposition to change that does not need to be accommodated in the model of knowledge acquisition that accompanies the enlightenment approach.

Along with the re conceptualisation and re-evaluation of the virtue of openness comes the question of the associated vices. It is clear that, on the hermeneutical account of understanding, the absence of openness, closedness, may be thought of as a vice. The refusal or avoidance of engagement with 'alien' discourses, failure to listen, unwillingness to change one's beliefs and viewpoint, might all be seen as vicious. A closed attitude would disable the process of understanding and encourage dogma. However, at the other pole, there are clearly times to stick to one's guns and to hold on to fundamental values, and times to retain a particular conceptual scheme with which to orient experience. Too much openness may also be then thought of as vicious, if it means being too willing to take on board every novel way of experiencing without discrimination. If this is correct, then we might want to say that openness as a virtue lies between the extreme deficiency of 'closedness' (the vice that prevents understanding from getting off the ground due to dogmatic fixity of fore-conceptions), and the extreme excess of openness (the vice that could be termed 'promiscuity', as it involves the indiscriminate adoption of fore-conceptions due to an over willingness to change).

If we accept this sort of schema, we are still left with the practical difficulty of steering the mean course of openness, between the vices of 'closedness' and 'promiscuity'.

The practical question of whether and to what extent one should allow one's prejudices to change has no formulaic answer. Limiting cases might be rejected according to criteria available from within the hermeneutical concept cupboard. For example, Gadamer's hermeneutics tells us that a conceptual scheme that effectively forecloses on future changes should be rejected. Only a viewpoint that is capable of itself giving way to further changes should be adopted. Hence sticking to self perpetuating dogma that prevents one from viewing things in alternative ways is to be avoided. A second criterion is intelligibility. According to the hermeneutic approach, changes in forestructures that render the world more intelligible are to be favoured over those which render the world less intelligible. The constant shifting of the grounds of understanding entailed in 'promiscuity' would militate against intelligibility. Such criteria however serve only to describe the consequences of the vices associated with the virtue of openness. At best they reinforce our understanding of the importance of the virtue framework. In practical life, the degree of openness to change of one's fore-structures can only be determined with reference to the particular situation of understanding, the capacities of the person or group engaged in understanding, past experience and perhaps practical intentions. Hence, as with all virtues, a question remains as to whether a judgmental master virtue akin to Aristotelian 'phronesis' is needed in order to discriminate between good and bad alterations in foreconceptions. Perhaps only with practical wisdom would it be possible to determine whether one tends to be too conservative or too radical, and to initiate the necessary swing of the pendulum towards the other pole.

The nature of a hermeneutically conceived educational virtue of openness might be illuminated by (and illuminate) debates within liberal philosophy of education about the sort of intellectual openness that might be promoted through education. Openness to hear others' beliefs, and openness to change one's own beliefs, is a theme debated recently by, amongst others, Hare (1985, 1988), Hare and McLaughlin (1994), McLaughlin (1985) and Gardner (1993, 1996). Generally speaking, this debate can be understood as a liberal response to the threat of political or religious indoctrination of children. More specifically, the worry of liberal educational thinkers is about the extent to which the personal autonomy of children might be compromised by parents who bring them up to have particular firm and determinate beliefs. To protect against indoctrination, and hence against heteronomy, these liberal writers have argued the case for educating for 'open-mindedness'. The concept of 'open-mindedness' is described succinctly by Hare, 'the open minded person is one who is willing to form an opinion, or revise it, in the light of evidence and argument.' (Hare 1988) In effect then, the argument is that one indicator of one's beliefs being one's own, is that their formation, or re-formation, can be evidentially or argumentatively justified. Open-minded persons justify beliefs rationally for themselves, whereas closed-minded persons run the risk of holding beliefs merely as a result of adherence to particular doctrines.

In practical terms the debate concerns the extent or degree to which one can or should be open-minded. In philosophy of education, one focus of this debate has been the question of whether it is possible to hold firm beliefs whilst at the same time being open-minded about those beliefs. For example Gardner asks '...is the Pope Open-Minded about the Existence of God?'. (Gardner, 1993) Gardner's conclusion is that common usage of the term 'open-minded', and the demands of coherence, suggest the answer is no. In their response to this argument, Hare and McLaughlin argue for the 'need to distinguish between a person who holds a belief but continues to entertain questions about it, and someone who holds a belief *dogmatically*'. (Hare and McLaughlin, 1994) From their perspective, holding firm beliefs is compatible with open-mindedness insofar as the firm belief is not absolutely fixed. On the basis of this conception of open-mindedness they can make the educational point that in teaching we should educate children in such a way that they have firm beliefs, but remain willing to form or revise their beliefs in the light of evidence and argument. In support of this position they cite, amongst others, Dewey's characterisation of the attitude of open-mindedness as an active disposition to welcome points of view hitherto alien. (ibid.)

As a critical reflective approach to beliefs, the rational open-mindedness, proposed by Hare and MacLaughlin, would appear in some ways to chime in with practical-critical hermeneutics. Each approach is explicitly anti-dogmatic, each rejects the finality or fixity of all particular beliefs, and each insists on the positive possibility of future revision. The concept of 'open-mindedness' is also similar to what I have labelled the practical-critical hermeneutical virtue of 'openness'. Both concepts involve persons listening to the arguments of others, and both require that persons are disposed to change as a result. The respective difficulties associated with open-mindedness and openness also show parallels, for example the rejection of fixed beliefs raises for each the spectre of a slide into relativism.

There are however some important points of difference between, on the one hand, the rational liberal approach with the concept of open-mindedness, and, on the other, the practical-critical hermeneutic approach with the concept of openness. The distinction can be evidenced with a quote on open-mindedness from Hare. Hare writes of open-mindedness 'It is, therefore, the attitude which strikes at the heart of prejudice, where views are reached prior to, and independent of, a consideration of the available evidence. The standards aimed at are objectivity, and impartiality, the pitfalls bias and error. (Hare, 1988) Such a claim could not be made of the hermeneutic notion of openness. In contrast to striking at the heart of prejudice, hermeneutic understanding embraces prejudice as a necessary and positive precondition for understanding. Furthermore, objectivity and impartiality could not be seen as standards to aim at from the hermeneutic approach. The two sorts of approach and the two concepts that seemed to parallel one another, on reflection, appear to be oppositional. Perhaps it would be fruitful to ask how such oppositional accounts could be produced.

One by now familiar response can be made at the level of methodology. The practical-critical hermeneutical approach to understanding does not proceed by attempting to negate prejudice in favour of a neutralist or objectivist account. Rather, it attempts to incorporate reflection on the prejudicial character of understanding into the methodology of understanding. From this point of view, particular prejudices are enabling and limiting, not wrong. They can be changed, but understanding cannot proceed in their absence. The appearance of a lack of, or end to, prejudice is merely an appearance that results from failure to recognise a particular (ones own) prejudice. The holding of objectivity and impartiality as standards merely reflects one prejudiced methodological framework that contains particular preconceptions, such as the idea that there is one correct uncontaminated perception of reality. The dichotomising of accounts into those that are prejudiced and those that are objective and impartial is replaced on the hermeneutic approach by distinctions between better and worse interpretations made from explicitly prejudiced positions. Whilst both approaches agree that hidden prejudice needs to be overcome, the rationalist approach argues for this overcoming through the achievement of an objective prejudice free position, whereas the hermeneutic approach overcomes hidden prejudice via an explicit incorporation of the fact of prejudice in the methodology of understanding.

Although the hermeneutic approach can be contrasted with the rationalist approach, it does appear to fit well with the Deweyan account of open-mindedness cited by Hare and MacLaughlin (1994). The theory of hermeneutic understanding seems well suited to making sense of a phrase like 'a disposition to welcome points of view hitherto alien'. Firstly, the theory of hermeneutic understanding carries with it a motive for attempting to understand that which appears alien. In Gadamerian hermeneutics, understanding that which appears alien is the means by which we increase our powers of understanding. There is good reason then for welcoming seemingly alien points of view. Secondly, hermeneutic theory describes the dynamics of mediation between different points of view. Hermeneutic theory is explicitly concerned with engagements between those with different points of view rather than between those with similar viewpoints but holding different beliefs. Thirdly, hermeneutic theory describes the structures and processes involved in the sorts of dialogic encounters that aim to overcome the alterity or alienness of other points of view. It is then arguable that insofar as it gives a grounding for motivation, focuses on perspective, and describes the dynamics for overcoming the 'otherness' of perspective, the hermeneutic approach fits well (and perhaps better than the rationalist approach) with the Deweyan notion of open-mindedness.

Looking more closely at the dynamics of the process of overcoming 'otherness' of perspective helps to develop the implicit hermeneutical critique of the rationalist position. In order to achieve the mediation with those with alien viewpoints, the viewpoint of the 'hermeneutic understander' needs to be made explicit and open to change. It is in part in

the recognition and alteration to one's own perspective that hermeneutic understanding is made possible. In practice, from a hermeneutical perspective, the rational liberal idea of open-mindedness might turn out to be too constrained, and too inflexible, for engaging with those who do not share the same Enlightenment presuppositions. That is to say, it is not radical enough to cope with the problems thrown up in attempts to understand those with very different perspectives. For the 'open-minded', beliefs are judged according to the criteria of evidence and argument, but the judgement is made only from one perspective with its own built in but unseen bias. This approach does not tell us much about how we might listen effectively to those with different viewpoints from ourselves, rather it seems to implore us to judge them by our own rational standards. In short, the rational liberal line on open-mindedness fails to live up this aim of Dewey as it is interpreted from an hermeneutical perspective. It appears to lack the conceptual apparatus that would underpin the bringing of 'otherness' into productive dialogue, it seems to be in danger of not hearing, or of rejecting, that which doesn't appear rational.

In conclusion then, the rational liberal notion of open-mindedness can be seen as doing important conceptual work in the description of how we can protect against the threat to autonomy that arises from the fixity of (unreflected upon) beliefs. It provides a way of assessing beliefs, and of ensuring that they are our own rather than someone else's. However, it is a more limited concept than that which I have termed the hermeneutic virtue of openness. This can be illustrated in two ways. First, the rationalist conception of open-mindedness does not provide the conceptual apparatus for bringing out its own underlying presuppositions for critical scrutiny and possibly change. It caters for bringing beliefs into question, but not for bringing into question the framework and assumptions that inform its methods of judgement and investigation. Second, it lacks an adequate theoretical account of a means of engaging with, and understanding, those with a different perspective rather than merely different beliefs. The concept of open-mindedness then, as it is used in the rationalist liberal tradition, can be seen as an aid to the promotion of personal autonomy within a particular cultural tradition and against a background of threats to autonomy that arise from religious or political indoctrination. The hermeneutic virtue of openness is an attempt to aid the promotion of personal autonomy within a multicultural and multitraditional world in which Enlightenment rationalism is merely one traditional prejudice, and where there can be assumed no epistemological universals. The threat to autonomy on this account is raised by the possibility of being stuck in one particular prejudice that furnishes us with one particular limited perspective.

5.4 Hermeneutic Understanding and the Social Aims of Education

To talk of social aims of in the context of discussing liberal educational aims may, at first hearing, sound a little discordant. The sort of liberal justifications for education

outlined in this work would appear to preclude some of the more robust visions of the future purpose or destiny of a society. It is arguably illiberal to posit a particular conception of the good society toward which we should orient our educational policies and practices. Rather we are generally more concerned with leaving future possibilities as open as possible so that individuals can exercise choice and take responsibility for their actions. Here we are talking of moral and political individualism, but importantly we should remember that liberal discourse also tends to be methodologically individualistic. This means that the unit of causal explanation or understanding in social life tends principally to be understood in terms of the decisions and actions of individuals. This individualism may also be understood as an ontological commitment to the view that in the human social world it is individual persons rather than parts of persons or collectivities or abstractions that have the highest status. Perhaps more correctly, we can say at least that liberalism carries with it a healthy suspicion of belief systems or doctrines that reify social wholes.

In the absence of such reification, it is difficult to grasp what might be meant by such phrases as 'a healthy society' or 'the interests of society'. If we are working from within a liberal framework, to talk of social aims is to come close to talking heretically or nonsensically because a society as such cannot have aims, only persons can. From a liberal perspective, any discourse about the interests or health of society as a whole must be figurative only. The reification of social wholes is dangerous because if we allow a society to have an aim, then we open up the possibility for conflict between what is good for individuals and what is good for society itself. The interests of the reified society need not correspond to the interests of its members, and may easily be used as a justification for oppression.

There seem to be some good reasons then why, from a liberal perspective, it is dangerous or illegitimate to talk of social aims. Indeed, it is this sort of approach to social thought that has prompted much liberal thought about how individual freedoms may be threatened and defended. However it might be useful to speak of social aims where that term is used generally as a collective term to cover discourse about social institutions, practices, and types of political and social relations. In order to allow such a discourse to proceed within the liberal moral, political, methodological, and ontological framework, we need to be clear about the sense in which we employ the terms relating to social aims. The overriding point is that any reference to any sort of social good (whether it be the health, interests, needs, purposes or whatever of society) must (morally and ontologically) ultimately be cashed in with respect to individual well being. A secondary point is that concerning methodology. Although it may not be possible to explain and understand traditions, institutions and practices straightforwardly as resulting from individual beliefs and actions, we should remember that they are human achievements that affect human life only because humans build, maintain, and believe in

them. Given these caveats, some more bold claims about the social aims of education in a liberal democratic state can be made.

Taking a generally liberal democratic line, the social aims of education can be said to reflect in part the political requirements of a liberal civil state. Subsequently, the educational emphasis tends to be on producing good citizens within a liberal democratic framework. Good citizens are those who uphold, exhibit and promote the values of liberal democracy. These values include a variety of freedoms such as freedom of association, movement, thought, expression, and action. They are more or less enshrined in law in terms of the rights of individuals. This valuing of 'negative liberty' effectively seeks to maximise the domain of personal choice whilst minimising the unwelcome intrusions of powerful bodies such as church and state. The requirements of social justice and humanitarian values involve recognition of the rights of others to similar freedoms to those that we may wish for ourselves. Hence, liberal policy is concerned with promoting the value of respect for others, and more concretely the doctrine of equality of respect. This respect must effectively extend to minority interest groups who might otherwise be marginalised or maltreated. In Mill's terms then, our guiding principle is the promotion of the freedom of the choice making individual, which is circumscribed by the need to respect the rights of others such that they should not be harmed, and by the need to guard against the oppression of minorities by the tyranny of the majority.

These very general liberal aims are translated into the educational objectives of promoting the sort of knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes, and skills that support liberal political aspirations. It might be useful to think of these in terms of the objects to which they are directed. On the one hand, some of these are, as it were, self regarding. Examples of 'self regarding' liberal educational objectives might include, among others, knowing one's rights, becoming skilled in the processes of democratic decision making, taking responsibility for self directedness, information processing, and making choices in a rational manner. Another set of objectives might be understood as directed towards the promotion and maintenance of liberal institutions. Within this category we would want to include the appreciation of press freedoms, support for public libraries, interest in news and politics, and participation in activities and organisations that try to foster civilised behaviour, social justice, and the like. A third set of objectives would be those that are, as it were, 'other regarding'. These would concern our dealings with other people, in particular how we should effectively respect their views and how we should foster good relations within and between communities. Already much has been said about the 'self regarding' educational objectives. However the hermeneutical approach to understanding may also allow us to say something about the latter two categories.

In the case of the supporting of liberal democratic institutions, the hermeneutic account alerts us to the dynamics of institutional maintenance and change. The argument that one factor in institutional change is how we understand the institution in question, leads to the possibility that how we educate about institutions will have a bearing on the

future development of those institutions. The argument can be illustrated with reference to the hermeneutical account of the reflexive configuration of the institution of marriage. If we reach a stage where irretrievable breakdown of marriages is commonplace, then the way individuals understand the institution changes. For example, marriage vows may be understood as ideals rather than as binding contractual agreements. Overall, marriage may be seen as a commitment, but not necessarily for life. This re-understanding of marriage itself feeds into the institution via the expectations of those becoming married. In effect the concept of marriage is transformed and the institution is transformed. These transformations are mediated by the intentions and expectations of the participants, and by the availability of social scientific information. Hence, both the phenomenon of marriage, and our conception of what a marriage is, are altered.

The same sort of argument could be offered in the cases of other institutions that are more directly important to liberal democracy. For example, institutions of higher education might be argued to be changing away from being understood as forums for developing socially necessary specialist knowledge and skills, and as places that foster intelligent debate and critique, and towards being understood as conduits that allow for personal access to power and wealth. In a more general sense we can make a plausible claim that higher education institutions are at the moment responding increasingly to economic concerns, perhaps at the expense of their social, environmental and political functions within a liberal democracy. From the hermeneutical perspective, part of the causal story of the change occurring to such institutions comes from the changes to our understanding and expectations of them.

The changes to institutions of higher education are important to liberal democracy insofar as these institutions support liberal freedoms and liberal notions of progress through their generation of information, critical thought and so on. If one causal element in institutional change is our understanding of, and expectations about, the institution in question, then we may want to address this when discussing educational aims. On such grounds we might argue that liberal educational aims should incorporate an understanding of institutional function and change, and that, from the hermeneutically informed position, this understanding requires a better grasp of the role and efficacy of the understanding of the institution in the change of the institution.

The argument about the character and role of understanding as it affects the development of institutions may be better illuminated if we understand it as a species of a more general and abstract point about the relation between cultural understanding and cultural change made in Gadamer's writings, and reflected in Gallagher's account of the hermeneutics of cultural change. (1992) In particular what I have in mind is what Gallagher refers to as the 'aporia' concerning cultural transmission and cultural transformation. Gallagher's claim here is that there exists in educational aims a necessary and ongoing tension between the role of education in transmitting culture, and its role in transforming culture. Here, the term 'culture' refers to not only to institutions but more

broadly to language and other social practices. According to Gallagher, the consideration of hermeneutic theory helps us to think about educational aims because both hermeneutic theory and educational theory face parallel puzzles resulting from the hermeneutical structuring of the mode of understanding. In general, according to the logic of hermeneutic understanding, the understanding of cultural products plays a part in the ongoing remaking of those products which in turn affect our categories of understanding. Social science is thus akin to history in that it involves interpretive understanding which proceeds from current concerns and uses currently available concepts, but is practically active in the sense that it changes both its 'objects' and the perspective of the social scientist through its application.

Returning to our account of the implications for the promotion of the sorts of institutions that foster liberal democratic possibilities we can make the claim that social institutions cannot be adequately described objectively. Not only must an adequate account refer to the value judgements that inevitably accompany our beliefs about an institution, but it must also take on board the notion that judgements are made on the basis of more or less explicit traditionally derived 'fore-conceptions' of understanding. Furthermore, the manner in which we understand institutions has, when translated into expectations and actions, a causal role to play in institutional development. On this basis, the promotion of liberalising institutions rests in part on the public understanding of those institutions, and that understanding rests on an apprehension of the role and character of hermeneutic understanding itself. Such a causal chain has implications for our account of educational aims. The 'practical-critical' hermeneutical account of institutional change draws us towards not only promoting an appreciation and support of democratic institutions as an educational aim, but also towards the requirement of an awareness of the sort of practical-critical reasoning entailed in their maintenance.

The hermeneutical approach to understanding appears to help us to go some distance in talking about the social aims of education in terms of the institutional requirements of a liberal democracy. It may be of further assistance when it comes to articulating our relation to, and understanding of, others. I said in the opening paragraph above that a liberal and democratic approach to the social aims of education would involve fostering respect for others, tolerance of the different views of others, and good relations with others. Before going on this needs a little explanation, most immediately we need to know what is meant by others. For my purposes, I will take 'others' to mean other persons or groups who hold beliefs, (and have interests and needs) that are important and significantly different from our own. Typically they will be differences that we can correlate with commonly understood sociological categories. These might include religion, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, gender, age and so on. The sorts of beliefs might express religious, political or moral conviction. Overall what we are dealing with is the areas where dispute and conflict can and will arise as a result of the individual and group freedom of thought and action that is created within a liberal society.

The traditional liberal approach to dealing peaceably with the conflicts that arise from liberty is to promote respect and tolerance and to open channels of communication and mechanisms for negotiation. Traditionally, part of this story has been the appeal to enlightenment reason, seen as an ultimately neutral arbiter in the settling of disputes. The hermeneutical approach, in common with some feminist and post-modern critiques, has somewhat undermined this possibility of making judgements within the court of universal reason. Enlightenment rationality is increasingly seen as historically and culturally parochial, a voice of reason but not of detached objectivity nor authority. Putting this point aside for the moment, the liberal case for respect and tolerance of diversity of beliefs remains justifiable both in the objectives of avoiding negative outcomes and in promoting positive outcomes. On these grounds, liberal educational aims have included elements such as: enabling different and minority voices to be heard, the promotion of mutual understanding of different cultures, tolerance of different religious beliefs or the lack thereof, and education into the ways of solving disputes through negotiation rather than through the exercise of power.

Diversity, or from our perspective the immediacy of 'otherness', is widely conceived by liberal educators as positive. One reason for this is that diversity helps in the choice making process, differences are good because they display a range of possibilities for living fulfilling lives. Examples can be thought of as both revealing and galvanising choices. The more expansive menu from which to make choices aimed at maximising happiness is therefore linked to enhanced individual liberty. A white working class English male brought up in the Church of England may, at the end of the twentieth century, become a middle class vegetarian Buddhist, even female. A second way in which we might argue that cultural diversity is a good thing is that it enriches experience. This is perhaps most apparent in the aesthetic sphere where a diversity of cultural forms brings with it a diversity of sounds, tastes, and ideas. Appreciation of a wide variety of foods, sports, performance and visual arts, architecture, religious iconography and so on, is arguably much more easily facilitated within a culturally diverse milieu. A third sense in which cultural diversity is attractive to those with a liberal outlook is in terms of the relationships between those with different beliefs and values. Difference represents an opportunity for developing the dispositions and virtues that are beneficial to a liberal democratic state. An example might be in learning to be humble about ones own beliefs, and recognising the validity of those of others. The products of these relationships are also potentially positive. The generation of new cultural forms through cross fertilisation of cultural products is an increasingly important and arguably attractive feature of late modernity.

Consideration of the hermeneutical account of understanding I think gives us further reasons for supporting cultural diversity, and therefore for promoting the associated liberal educational aims of tolerance, respect, and good relations. It might also, by enabling us to focus more closely on the educational impact of cultural diversity,

help us to think further about the sorts of intercultural relations that liberal educators should be promoting. The general point is that, from the Gadamerian perspective, 'otherness' is a necessary structural element in the learning process. Engagement, in the right sort of way, with 'others' is the key to learning about not only others, but about ourselves and our institutions and practices. 'Otherness' therefore can be argued to fulfil a key role in the process of generating the sorts of understanding necessary for the liberal good life.

The 'otherness' that interests Gadamer is the difference in cultural traditions which furnishes members of different cultures with different 'fore-conceptions' of understanding. It is the difference of 'fore-conceptions' that enables differences of perspective. For Gadamer, this means literally different apparatus with which to understand the world. It is the understanding ability, supplied by a cultural tradition, that enables and circumscribes the 'horizons' of the members of a particular culture. The 'otherness' defined above can be thought of in these terms, as difference of horizon. For Gadamer then, the most important difference between members of different cultures is the differences in how the world is understood by those with different 'fore-conceptions'. It is primarily the ability to interpret reality in different ways, according to different traditions, that constitutes cultural diversity.

Cultural horizons that traditionally enable perspectives and that traditionally circumscribe the extent of understanding, are however neither fixed nor isolated. Horizons can be stretched and transformed. For this, 'others', that is those with alternative 'fore-conceptions' (and hence alternative horizons), are required. It is, from a Gadamerian perspective, only in the attempt to understand 'others' that the process of hermeneutic understanding takes place. It is through dialogues of difference that we become aware of our own 'fore-conceptions' or 'prejudices' as such. It is through the process of 'genuine conversation' that we come to modify and extend (or even transform) our 'prejudices'. Hence cultural diversity is practically positive in enabling the sort of encounters that lie at the heart of Gadamer's conception of understanding. The mutual desire or need to understand those with alternative 'fore-conceptions' is the motor which drives the development of the practical-hermeneutic understanding that is necessary to the cognitive dimension of the liberal good life.

So how does this affect the liberal account of the 'social aims' of education, of promoting relationships of respect and tolerance for those with different cultural backgrounds? I think that the answer lies in the quality of the relationship. Whilst tolerance and respect are required, the sort of relationships required for hermeneutic understanding must also be ones of engagement and change. 'Genuine conversation' involves the conversational partners in relationships where each has a willingness to change their preconceptions, where risks to one's own 'world view' are taken in the act of trying to understand. The emphasis is then not simply on measures for allowing for differences of values and beliefs based on difference of culture to coexist, but rather on

the need to engage in 'genuine conversation' with 'others' as a means of coming to understand better. In the end this might lead us to a better appreciation of cultural diversity in so far as it feeds in to our possibilities for the living of liberal good lives.

In general terms this account of the role of cultural diversity in human flourishing might lead us to rather unexpected conclusions. Not only could we claim that cultural differences are necessary and good for personal well-being as described in liberal aims, but it is also arguable that disruptions and disputes that arise from cultural difference are themselves potentially positive contributors to personal flourishing. For it is not the areas where relatively benign cultural differences can be handled through passive respect and tolerance that we find the most benefit to increased understanding. Rather it is where we need or desire to engage with differences that changes in the capacity for understanding occur. Respect for another culture on this account means taking it seriously in the 'conversation' and allowing it to change us, and to be changed by us, rather than allowing it to be preserved in splendid isolation. We might go a step further and argue that, from the perspective that sees hermeneutic understanding as necessary for the liberal good life, mutual dialogical challenge between those of different cultures should be encouraged.

The hermeneutical approach has then two potentially important things to say regarding liberal educational ideas of tolerance and respect. Firstly, on this model, respect and toleration should make reference to persons embedded within particular traditions. This conception of a person as culturally embedded springs from the Gadamerian locating of the origins of a person's understanding capacities within a particular cultural framework. Whilst Richard Peters may be correct in arguing that respect for persons springs from recognition of others as persons who are 'agents or determiners of their own destiny', and that respect must take into account the subjectivity of others into account (Peters, 1970, p.210), the hermeneutic approach would seek to emphasise the need to respect and tolerate others in their cultural 'otherness', and would see tolerance of, and respect for, difference as beneficial for the development of understanding. Secondly, and relatedly, the hermeneutic approach suggests an argument in favour of more engaged versions of respect and tolerance. A distinction might be drawn between 'passive' and 'active' respect and tolerance. Where passive respect and tolerance are concerned to preserve the personal agency of others, active respect and tolerance are relationships that aim at furthering the understanding (and therefore enhancing agency) of all engaged interlocuters. What this amounts to is a package of appreciative and supportive tolerance of differences of prejudices and beliefs, and respect for others in terms of their capacity for increasing understanding through hermeneutic dialogue.

Chapter 6. Promoting Hermeneutic Understanding

6.1 Educating for Hermeneutic Understanding

The justification for educating for hermeneutic understanding, like the justification for any educational aim, rests on a series of 'ifs'. Firstly, if the understanding of oneself, of others, and of one's social institutions and practices is recognised to be necessary for the living a flourishing life, then a case can be made for promoting understanding through education. That is to say, educating for understanding can be justified in virtue of its role in the promoting of the good life. Secondly, if the sort of understanding required is believed to be hermeneutical in character, (that is, if we accept Gadamer's critique of the enlightenment account of knowledge, at least in so far as it applies to the human sciences, and if we see merit in the argument in favour of 'practical-critical' hermeneutical understanding as modelled on Aristotelian 'phronesis') then we have some justification for the practical promotion of hermeneutic understanding in education. In the context of late modernity, with its increasing multiculturalism and reflexivity, such a proposal is lent more weight.

If there is a case for arguing that hermeneutic understanding is worth trying to promote, then the question arises as to whether it can, and how it might be, taught. Hermeneutic understanding can be characterised as practical and social in that it is achieved in practical and purposeful situations. It is, on this account, not learned then applied, it is rather developed in the doing. However, clearly there are skills, cognitive abilities, understandings, and dispositions involved in the process of coming to understand hermeneutically, and there seems no immediate reason to think such things in principle impossible to teach and learn through practices experienced in formal educational settings. There appears no barrier, in principle, to the teaching of hermeneutic understanding. In order to investigate how we might go about promoting hermeneutic understanding through education, I will try, in this chapter, to think about how formal education might help to bring about the necessary skills, cognitive abilities, understandings, and dispositions, needed for practical hermeneutic understanding. In order to address the practical questions about learning, I will firstly introduce a notion of an educated person, hermeneutically conceived. Secondly, I will look at the role of curriculum. Thirdly I will consider teaching methods, and fourthly I will comment on the institutional arrangements that might help to facilitate education in hermeneutic understanding. However, first it is necessary to get clearer about what sorts of things we are trying to promote. What might be the stages in the development of hermeneutic understanding, how do we describe the processes and outcomes are we interested in, what would count as an educated person on this model?

Drawing on the earlier account of 'practical-critical' hermeneutics, we can begin to describe the sorts of things we would be looking to bring out in those participating in

the educational process. In Gadamerian terminology, education for well being might be described as aiming at bringing about 'effective historical consciousness' in learners. Developing a particular sort of consciousness sounds a bit of a grandiose claim, but the various moments that go to make up this sort of change are those familiar from what has been said thus far. One moment in developing 'effective historical consciousness' is the recognition of the particularity of one's own 'horizon', and therefore, by inference, recognition of one's perspective. This means revealing ones 'prejudice' as such; that is, as an historically and culturally located human achievement. A corollary of this is the generalised recognition of the partiality and necessarily 'prejudiced' perspective of all viewpoints. A second moment is the changing of perspective through the dialogic process, or 'genuine conversation'. This means developing one's categories of understanding such that meaningful interpretations of actions, events, institutions, and so on, are enabled. It is the generation of novel perspectives that allows the individual to understand in ways that were hitherto unavailable. Hence, previously unseen or seemingly nonsensical phenomena can be brought to understanding, and phenomena already understood can be interpreted afresh. A third moment is that of coming to understand the structures and processes of understanding themselves. That is to say; maximal 'effective historical consciousness' (and hence maximal autonomy) requires maximal transparency; the sort of thing that Charles Taylor calls 'framework awareness'. (Taylor, 1989)

This Gadamerian account of the learning structures and processes associated with hermeneutic understanding needs to be expanded a little if it is to be of value in describing the practical aim of promoting hermeneutic understanding through formal education. The principle is however clear. Because the structures and processes of hermeneutic understanding are different to those associated with the enlightenment account of 'knowing', by implication the associated account of learning is also different. That is to say, the redescription of the structures and processes of cognition brings with it, by implication, a different conception of learning. One way of exploring what might be called a hermeneutical conception of learning is through thinking about what, according to 'practical-critical' hermeneutics, makes for an educated person.

The notion of the educated person is implicit in the liberal aims of education. Partly this idea relates to that of the autonomous person. Only an educated person can be autonomous insofar as learning about one's desires, and the possibilities for acting on them, is a condition of their fulfilment. One might also argue that the notion of the educated person is important to liberal aims in the sense that liberal democracy only functions well when a sufficient number of the citizens are educated to the degree that is necessary for participating effectively in the political process. A third way in which the idea of personal educatedness comes into play in liberal aims of education is in the idea of becoming a 'balanced' and 'rounded' person. The sorts of things alluded to by such phrases might include having: a range of interests, the capacity to enter into different

sorts of relationships, a broad knowledge base, and the ability to appreciate a variety of cultural products. In less abstract terms, educated persons, according to the liberal approach, become so not only in virtue of their moral and political education, but also their intellectual, aesthetic, personal, and social, learning.

This liberal idea of the educated person then cannot be divorced either from the context of values, or from conceptions about what it means to be a person. Importantly, it cannot be divorced either from the conception of education and learning. In this section I want to consider how the liberal notion of the educated person might be affected by the introduction of the hermeneutic conception of understanding. What counts as being an educated person, and how this state is achieved, varies not only according to what education is thought to be for, but also according to the account of learning. That is, how we conceive the structures and processes of knowledge and understanding impact on what it means to become an educated person, and has implications for how learning takes place. Ideas about the fore-structures of understanding and their alteration, about the social relationships of hermeneutic understanding, and about the qualities of the understanding gained, will have significance for our account of the conception of the educated person.

Drawing on the legacy of phenomenological hermeneutics, we can introduce the ideas developed by Gadamer to the liberal account of education and learning that inform the idea of the educated person. The notion of altering one's horizons through 'genuine conversation' denotes a specific understanding of education and hence supports a particular conception of learning. The consideration of the hermeneutical nature of human understanding can then help to bring into view one characterisation of the processes of education itself. From the hermeneutical perspective, one vital constituent of the learning process is that of extending and changing one's 'prejudices'. In common educational parlance we tend to talk of individuals 'broadening their horizons' or 'changing their outlook'. A hermeneutical account of understanding might furnish us with useful conceptual apparatus with which to fill out this notion of educational progress.

If understanding is hermeneutical then the learning process can be partially described as the overcoming of the parochiality of perspective. Such phraseology echoes that employed by Charles Bailey in his arguments in favour of a conception of liberal education that aims to liberate the learner from the 'specific and limited circumstances of geography, social class and personal encounter and relationship.', and that can 'be of a kind that will widen his horizons, increase his awareness of choice, reveal his prejudices and superstitions as such, and multiply his points of reference and comparison.' (Bailey, 1984, p.21). However, whilst the horizon broadening aims of Bailey's conception of a liberal education echo those of the current work, there are significant differences. Bailey's account of understanding indicates the principle difference. According to Bailey, understanding involves relating and linking new ideas to those already understood. 'To build, as it were, a word, an idea, a proposition, an object, into a relationship or complex

of relationships with other words, ideas, propositions, objects *is* to understand that word, idea, proposition or object.' (Bailey, 1984, p.148) On this account, understanding is conceived as the construction of connected and ordered systems of pieces of information such that each piece of information is meaningfully related to others.

Whilst a laudable educational objective, such a conception does not capture the radical nature of 'practical-critical' hermeneutic understanding. Bailey's account of understanding does not incorporate the idea of fore-structuring, and in general terms can be accommodated within a traditional subject-object model of knowledge and understanding. In contrast, the growth of understanding on the 'practical-critical' hermeneutic model proceeds not only via the accumulation, linkage and structuring of information, but importantly through changes to the fore-structures that make experience possible. The changing of fore-structures or 'prejudices' enables the individual both to encounter experiences that were previously so to speak, beyond the range of vision, and to reinterpret experiences and information already gained. To gain understanding in this sense is not equated with the increasing power of a subject with relation to objects, it is rather a product of changes to the possibilities for understanding which follow a positive response to an invitation to look at the world in a different way.

The change in perspective achieved through the encounter with 'otherness' results in what Gadamer terms the 'fusion of horizons'. This phrase indicates the characteristics of the change of horizon and hence the change to what one is able to understand. The modification to one's horizon does not involve the assimilation of the horizon of the other into one's own schema. Neither does it mean going to the other extreme of adopting the horizon of the other while displacing one's own horizon. The interaction of the two horizons in the 'fusion' is better described as leading to a significant modification. It is no more than modification in that the original concepts of experience are not lost or forgotten, they remain as part of the new horizon. The change is significant in that genuinely novel ways of understanding are developed through the process. The general argument here is that one aspect of the educational process is the development of different perspectives. One way in which we can talk about a person becoming an educated person then is in terms of the opening up of novel ways of interpreting.

In order to achieve the sorts of changes necessary for the developing of new perspectives, the educated person will also be one who is capable of sustaining the social relations necessary for 'genuine conversation'. In effect this means acquiring the knowledge, skills, and disposition that are associated with productive hermeneutic encounters. It means being able and willing to carry on the conversation with 'others', where 'others' denotes those with alternative beliefs and assumptions. From a Gadamerian perspective, the educated person will be one who develops fresh ways of understanding through trying to understand others in the realm of practical life. This implies that a requirement for successful hermeneutic encounters is a willingness and

opportunity to enter into dialogues with others, and willingness to accept the possibility of change to one's strongly held views.

For the learner, one implication of the hermeneutic character of understanding in the personal and social world is the need to accept that no interpretation is ever final and authoritative. On the contrary, because by its nature all interpretation is partial, any interpretation that would provide the sort of understanding that would foreclose on future dialogue should be avoided. The future must always be left open in a way that may make current interpretation appear limited and parochial. The upshot of the changeable nature of perspectives and of interpretations is that the development of categories of understanding, and reinterpretation, will be a never ending, ongoing feature of well being. The educated person will never expect certainty or fixed truths in their understanding of personal, social, and institutional life. Rather he or she will be flexible and adaptable; capable of, and adept at, coping with routinely reflexive systems of knowledge and understanding. All interpretation will be necessarily finite and partial, and made from vantage points which move over time.

The depth of understanding that is required for the liberal good life implies the need to incorporate these features of hermeneutic understanding. Adequate understanding of the personal and social world needs also an understanding of the qualities and limits of understanding generated by the hermeneutic approach. To think that one is giving an objective account, or a final description when in fact all that is available is an interpretation, would give a misleading picture. The incorporation of the methodological considerations becomes then an important part of hermeneutic understanding and a vital ingredient in the educated person. Recognition of the nature of 'prejudices', of the particularity of perspective, and of the general structure and processes of hermeneutic understanding, is necessary not only because transparency is necessary for autonomy, but also because in the absence of such recognition, practical errors about the status of interpretations are liable to occur.

These moments of hermeneutic understanding: the recognising of prejudice as such, the alteration of perspective, and the illumination of the methodological framework of hermeneutic understanding, are then practical requirements for the development of hermeneutic understanding in learners. Each of these practical moments requires particular skills and dispositional traits as well as cognition. There seems no apriori reason why these cannot be teachable. Competence and excellence in hermeneutic understanding appears therefore to be a viable educational aspiration.

6.2 Curriculum for Hermeneutic Understanding

The domain of understanding argued to be necessary for living the liberally conceived good life encompasses understanding of ourselves, of others, and of our social institutions and practices. We might reasonably begin our thinking about the sort of

curriculum that would promote hermeneutic understanding therefore by looking at the human sciences. If our aim is to encourage the practical understanding of human social life, and to promote the skills, knowledge, and dispositions relevant to that understanding, then we might turn initially to subjects such as psychology, sociology and cultural studies.

Speaking generally we might argue that the content and methods of these disciplines could be made to reflect better the nature and complexities of hermeneutic interpretive understanding. However, hermeneutical reflections on social science methodology reveal such an aim to be rather complex. The character of the human sciences, understood as involving hermeneutic understanding, would be largely circumscribed by the impact of hermeneutic phenomenology on their methodology. As has already been said, hermeneutically conceived human science breaks away not only from positivistic methodological ideals, but also from those of Weberian 'verstehende' sociology, Schutzian phenomenology, and ethnomethodology. In the development of human science methodology, it would be misleading to see hermeneutic phenomenology as constituting simply another attempt to mirror social reality more accurately than previous methodologies. It involves rather a rejection of the mirroring metaphor. Hence the ideal of perfecting knowledge does not apply. Rather, hermeneutical understanding entails ongoing and unending changes to categories of understanding which lead to ongoing and unending interpretations. Neither does hermeneutically informed human science make an ideal of the detachment of understanding subject from understood object. Instead of trying to eradicate or compensate for the 'contamination' of objects by the subject, hermeneutic understanding thrives on the routine interaction of conversational partners. On the hermeneutical account, criticism does not consist in exposing objectively falsehood and ideology. Rather, the hermeneutical approach is concerned with the exposure of, and opposition to, dogma (including methodological dogma). It is the underlying, unspoken, methodological assumptions that are brought out for inspection and alteration through hermeneutical encounters.

On this account, the character of the human sciences needs to be understood and reflected in the human science curriculum. We might describe this character using the term 'practical' in that such a conception derives from the Aristotelian tradition of practical reasoning rather than the Platonic tradition of objective knowledge. Hermeneutical human sciences cannot rely on the structures appropriate to knowing about the natural world. Their character can only be misconceived if we try to employ the same metaphors for our description of their modus operandi. Hermeneutic human sciences work on the logic of practical human understanding of practical human affairs. Hermeneutic human sciences need to draw on intellectual resources that are specific to the understanding of human affairs; Aristotelian 'phronesis' and the Greek concept of 'praxis' being perhaps the two leading contenders. The difference between the appropriate mode of understanding in the hermeneutic human sciences and those of for

example mathematical or physical sciences cannot be captured simply through reference to differences in validation techniques or truth criteria. According to hermeneutic theory, it is the structures, processes, and relationships that are associated with the practical understanding of the human social world that give the human sciences their particular character, and which circumscribe their power and limitations.

In thinking about a human science curriculum that might promote hermeneutic understanding, we can argue that in one sense our main purpose is to produce practically useful understanding of the social world. The generating of useful understanding on the hermeneutic model however involves the learner in a process which necessarily has recourse to the recognition and perhaps alteration of the assumptions of the learner. The deep reason for taking such a radical line on understanding in the social world is the need for the human science methodology to account for the meaning laden nature of human social phenomena. Phenomena of the human social world are things already understood and interpreted. An adequate account of them needs to take into account the perspective from which they were understood as well as of their potential meaning to us. If the way of rendering phenomena meaningful to us is to alter our viewpoint then this will be a key moment in practical human science. Where such a change of perspective is a key moment in the educational process, the learner cannot as it were remain in the background collecting information. Even improving skills and judgement may prove insufficient for hermeneutic understanding. As Charles Taylor writes 'It may not just be that to understand a certain explanation one has to sharpen one's intuitions, it may be that one has to change one's orientation - if not in adopting another orientation, at least in living one's own in a way which allows for greater comprehension of others. Thus in the sciences of man insofar as they are hermeneutical there can be a valid response to 'I do not understand' which takes the form not only 'develop your intuitions' but more radically 'change yourself'.' (Taylor 1988 p.67)

In terms of generating awareness of the framework in which understanding takes place, the human sciences curriculum, as it stands in the later stages of schooling, already recognises the necessity for reflecting on methodological assumptions. This is perhaps inescapable given that it is clearly the case that human activities and products can be both explained and understood, a distinction that to some degree overlaps with that between 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' methods. It is also commonplace in existing social science teaching to discuss the limits of validity claims made on behalf of information gathered or generated through a variety of human science methods. In a sense then, studies in methodology go with the territory of the human sciences because of the inherent debates over the nature of their proper object and purpose. However, the methodological dimension of a hermeneutical human science involves more than the raising of awareness of alternative strategies associated with the different ways in which subjects can learn about different sorts of objects and for different purposes. More radically, the conversational paradigm of a hermeneutic human science can serve to open up the

question of the subject-object relation itself. It is in the exploration of the relationship of 'conversational partners' that awareness of the learner's involvement and the need for self understanding come to the fore. Part of the methodological awareness for hermeneutic human science comprises the recognition that particular forms of dialogic communication can reveal aspects of human social life that remain hidden from subjects trying to understand objects. Furthermore, awareness of the structures and processes of hermeneutic understanding is not achieved by detached reflection, but rather through practical dialogic encounters.

In close up, a hermeneutical human science curriculum would focus on the meaningfulness and significance of the phenomena that are being understood. Making sense of social phenomena would be an ongoing process whereby new layers of meaning are revealed as new perspectives are developed. Under such circumstances it would be quite reasonable to return to previously studied phenomena to study them again. In Gadamerian terms this would enable phenomena to 'speak again' to us given our changed capacity for hearing the lesson or story that arises through the 'conversation'.

The practical understanding of social life, generated through a hermeneutical human sciences curriculum, in general provides potential opportunities for raising awareness of particular perspectives, for experiencing the altering of ones perspective, and for bringing to light the hidden methodological questions associated with the understanding of human social life. However, we are drawn by Gadamer towards the particular case of the understanding of history because of its pivotal role in the formation of the sort of understanding necessary for a flourishing life. For Gadamer, history, in the form of our cultural tradition, has the lead part in the story of how we come to understand, it is our own lived tradition that makes us what we are. Understanding of all kinds is enabled because of the perspective granted to us through our cultural tradition. It is past culture that creates our possibilities for understanding and which describes the unseen limits of our particular horizon. It is history that provides the stocks of assumptions (open or hidden) and concepts that are needed to get understanding off the ground. Our history 'goes before us', helping to chart the unknown territory of the future. It is this practical account of history, of a tradition that furnishes us with our conceptual spectacles, that allows Gadamer to coin the term 'effective history'.

'Effective history' is, however, only a starting point in terms of what learners need in order to live an understanding life. Our categorical or conceptual inheritance may be constitutive of our powers for understanding anything, but the sort of understanding necessary for the liberal good life requires that we both know our history, and that we are cogniscent of the role and character of history and historical knowledge in the constitution of our capacity for understanding. If it is unreflected-upon history that gives us, as it were, spectacles to see, it is historical knowledge that gives us cognisance of the origins of our particular spectacles. The further move for turning 'effective history' into 'effective historical consciousness'; that is to say, what is needed in order to render the

understanding process transparent, is methodological reflection, a historiology of effective history. To push the metaphor, it is historiology that allows us to see the necessity of spectacles, their possibilities and their limitations. Such an historiology would, in the extreme, have to include reflection on the determination of the particularity of our own historiological perspective. In Heideggerian terms, this amounts to consciousness of this particular example of the hermeneutic circle. In other terms it amounts to an insight into the finitude of human understanding that results from the necessity of the cultural and temporal locatedness of all human understanding. In short it opens up a perspective on the human condition.

This conception of the role and function of our intellectual heritage in our understanding, and the potential for promoting transparency or 'framework awareness' about human understanding in general, might lead us to wish to raise the status of history as a practical curriculum subject. With a curriculum geared towards educating for the liberal good life, a case could be made for granting history primacy in relation to other subjects. Certainly, for Gadamer, learning about history is a way of coming to grasp the workings of the hermeneutic circle. This is enabled because it is a case of learning where, in attempting to understand past events, we employ concepts and categories of understanding that are themselves passed down to us through history. How we interpret the past is conditioned by the past itself. This particular feature of history, what might be termed the reflexivity of historical study, is however shown to be educationally significant only when we take into account the methodology of historical study. A methodology which, in attempting to understand from a particular perspective, reveals its particular perspective as such.

In considering the content of a history curriculum that aims at promoting effective historical consciousness, the primary focus would be on the roots of our own tradition. Selection of subject matter for a hermeneutical history curriculum would be made with reference to the generation of concepts and categories of understanding with which we now see the world. Instead of looking at how past peoples lived, the emphasis would shift towards seeing in what ways past culture stocked our conceptual cupboard. A hermeneutically configured historical study would be aimed at revealing the development of our capacity for understanding. An account of the construction over time of our categories of understanding is important to the hermeneutic enterprise because, according to hermeneutic phenomenology, this is what colours all historical, contemporary, and future interpretation.

This is not to imply that the study of history would be reduced (or elevated) to a history of ideas. Rather, the study of past events or periods would incorporate their meaning and significance both in what we understand as the context of the time, and from our context, and furthermore in terms of the development of our own categories of understanding. A process which is, in hermeneutical terms, itself formative of our categories of understanding. In this sense, the study of, for example, the second world

war would involve the to-ing and fro-ing between different interpretations as sense is made of the meaning of the phenomena from different perspectives, and as novel perspectives are formed over time. Clearly the meaning and significance of the second world war appears differently to young contemporary Europeans compared with those who lived through it. Furthermore, the phenomenon can be said to present itself differently to those who lived through it at the time of living through it compared with how it appears in hindsight. A practical-hermeneutical history of the second world war would seek not to generate objective scientific knowledge, nor to recreate the intentions or interpretations of those involved at the time. Instead, the attempt would be made to generate understanding from our perspective which, through the process of trying to make sense of those past events, would change this perspective. So, the history of world war two is not described adequately as German expansionism curtailed by an alliance of threatened countries. It is a story that has shaped the political, moral, psychological, and economic outlook of generations of people. A story told from a various and expanding number of perspectives, and teaching a wide range of lessons about, for want of a better phrase, the human condition. The process of generating perspectives that inform us about ourselves and guide our decisions about the future is ongoing. The lesson of history is how to live, the lesson of the historiology, that is integral to hermeneutic historical understanding, is how to learn from the lessons of the past.

A third curriculum area that could be of benefit in the pursuit of promoting hermeneutic understanding in learners is art. More accurately, what we might say is that aesthetic appreciation of artistic works can help to generate the sorts of insights, skills, and virtues associated with hermeneutic understanding. Such works might include those within any form of artistic media. 'Every work of art, not only literature, must be understood like any other text that requires understanding, and this kind of understanding has to be acquired.' (Gadamer, 1989, p.164). What constitutes aesthetic appreciation, and perhaps more importantly how it comes about, must however be grasped in hermeneutical terms if it is to serve our purpose here.

Continuing with the conversational paradigm of hermeneutic understanding, aesthetic education entails coming to practical understanding through dialogic relations with artistic works. Artistic works necessarily have an audience, but in hermeneutic terms, this audience is more than merely observational. The relation is one of mutual questioning. Questioning proceeds through the attempt of the audience to understand the meaning and significance of the artistic product. It is in this attempt to render an artistic work comprehensible that members of the audience are invited to stretch and develop their categories of understanding. In interrogating the work of art in order to produce meaning that is relevant to contemporary life, our own categories and concepts of understanding are also brought into question. This mutual questioning is productive at the point where it enables the member of the audience to develop categories and concepts such that new lines of inquiry into the meaning of artistic works may be

pursued. Over time it is quite possible to return to 're-read' a work of art in the light of subsequent aesthetic encounters.

As with the human sciences and history, the study of art can act as a trigger that sets off interpersonal, cultural, historical, and self understanding. As Gadamer writes, "...art is never simply past but is able to overcome temporal distance by virtue of its own meaningful presence.', and, '....understanding art always includes historical mediation.' (Gadamer, 1989, p.165). From the Gadamerian perspective, the significance of artistic works is revealed only in this complex of understanding. Art works when it challenges us to consider the origins of our categories of judgement, the perspective from which we see. This necessarily involves some historical reflection. Such a consideration can be of direct service to the living of the liberal 'good life'. In attending to the sort of understanding needed for living good lives, we need to be concerned with the effect that artistic appreciation can have in encouraging us to reflect on the origins and particularity of our own perspective, on the potentialities, limitations, and malleability of our own horizons. One of the appeals of the appreciation of artworks is the opportunity it creates for examining one's capacities for appreciation, including the origins and scope of these capacities. It is through such examination that we grant ourselves the possibility for extending them further.

Summing up, three areas of curriculum have been suggested that might, with the appropriate content, have potential in the promotion of hermeneutic understanding in learners. Although Gadamer is not concerned with formal educating, for those primarily interested in education the three areas suggest themselves from a reading of Truth and Method. The structures and processes associated with Gadamer's accounts of understanding in the human sciences, history, and aesthetics, have been transposed into a discourse which considers their relevance to the liberal good life and, subsequently, into a discourse which speculates on the curriculum implications of taking on board a hermeneutical account on understanding. A curriculum which aims to generate hermeneutic understanding of self, others, and late modern institutions and practices, would need in general to take account of the indexicality of understanding, allowing for the differences in the function and understanding procedures associated with understanding in different disciplines, to incorporate methodological reflection as a matter of routine, and to develop self understanding as a moment in all understanding. Such an aim would have major implications for the relative importance of different academic subjects, the content of the subjects, and the determination of core or compulsory subjects.

6.3 Educational Institutions for Hermeneutic Understanding

The principle role of educational institutions in promoting hermeneutic understanding in learners can also be summarised in terms of their potential for helping

to nurture the skills, disposition, and understanding that are associated with hermeneutic understanding. Institutions are important for this process insofar as they can act as locations that enable the sorts of hermeneutic encounters that are necessary for both the changing of horizons and the development of 'effective historical consciousness'. According to the Gadamerian approach, these encounters will typically be dialogic in character and held between learners with significantly different presuppositions. In order to meet the needs of an education for hermeneutic understanding, educational institutions would be required to provide the conditions for illuminating and challenging the 'prejudices' of learners. Such institutions might also be thought to have a role in bringing together, and into 'genuine conversation', persons with different assumptions and beliefs. In such terms the role of the institution might be described as providing the possibility for the 'fusion of horizons'. Arguably, the raising of awareness in learners of the structures and processes of hermeneutic understanding, and of the possibilities and limits of understanding the personal and social world, may only be achieved if actual 'genuine conversations' are experienced. This description of the role of educational institutions in the promoting of hermeneutic understanding has implications for the character of such institutions, and for the policy pertaining to them.

Perhaps the most immediate response to this approach to the role of educational institutions would be to see institutions as sources of alternative assumptions and values to those of the learner. It is possible that this may be carried for example through the ethos of a school. In this case it may be thought valuable for a school to embody and promote beliefs and values that are significantly different to those passed on to a child from his or her cultural or family background. A school that embodies alternative assumptions and beliefs and values could, in theory, help to fulfil the role of challenger to any dogma that a child may have picked up uncritically or unreflectively. In Gadamerian terms, it is through alterity that dogma is challenged and understanding takes place. It would seem therefore straightforward that a school which is to further the cause of hermeneutic understanding needs to be alternative.

This notion of the hermeneutically oriented school as one which is significantly different from home life is however not without its conceptual difficulties. A problem can be seen if we imagine a household where the parents themselves are inclined to the sort of disposition and beliefs enshrined in hermeneutic understanding. The question arises, should the school provide an alternative to this family background?[1] One way of responding would be to argue that agreement on the principles of understanding does not preclude disagreement and puzzlement at the substantive level, nor that such disagreements cannot lead to challenges to assumptions. A second response would be to argue that alterity may be provided through rather than by a school. On this approach, the school might be thought of as facilitating and co-ordinating hermeneutic encounters rather than as entering into the hermeneutic relationship itself. In such a scenario, 'Gadamerian' parents could send their 'Gadamerian' children to a 'Gadamerian' school

through which the child is exposed to 'genuine conversation' with those with significantly different beliefs, assumptions and values. The school's role is therefore understood as one of facilitating dialogues between different sorts of children from different backgrounds.

There is a move here from considering schools as being themselves different, to considering them rather as places which can put young people in positions where they can enter into understanding relationships with persons who are different. There is a variety of ways in which a school can act in order to enable what might be thought of as cross cultural dialogues. One is via the relation of the school to the outside world. Hermeneutical encounters are not confined to field trips and cultural holidays. Genuine dialogue can be fostered wherever significant differences of belief are encountered. Such beliefs may be held by members of another school, by those belonging to an alternative culture, or by different subcultural groups within a locality. Alternative cultural backgrounds need not be exclusively ethnic at source. Differences of nationality, generation, gender, religion, and sexuality, may be both conducive to fostering genuine dialogue, and be available to a particular school. The general point is that a school may serve to further hermeneutic understanding amongst its pupils through initiating dialogues with members of groups beyond the school itself. Closer links both with the local community and beyond would appear to aid this.

A second way in which a school could provide alternative viewpoints is through the diversity of its members. Diversity of beliefs amongst pupils would appear advantageous in that it allows for pupils within a school to meet with alterity, not only in dialogues that are as it were engineered by the school, but also, given the required disposition and skills, through practical engagements with fellow pupils. From a Gadamerian perspective, the more practical these dialogic encounters the better. That is, where hermeneutic encounters arise through the desire for practical action that involves others, the conversation is more likely to be 'genuine'. Under such conditions, understanding is more likely to be actual rather than rehearsal. Hermeneutical encounters between pupils in the same school may therefore benefit both from the practical nature of the motivation to engage, and from the spontaneity of the dialogue. Dichotomising dialogic encounters between those with significantly different viewpoints within a school into those which are purposely engineered and those which are spontaneous may be misleading, and is certainly not exhaustive. The enabling of communicative interactions of the sort of quality proposed here may arise as a consequence of the ethos of the school, as a consequence of the moral and intellectual virtues promoted by the school, or as a consequence of the political leanings of the school. In practical terms, the initiating of dialogues is neither wholly directed nor wholly spontaneous, but rather arises within a context and culture of opportunity, encouragement, and rewards.

The general argument, that hermeneutical understanding arises through 'genuine conversation' between people with significantly different outlooks, has repercussions for policy on schooling. If dialogue between persons of different cultures, or different sub-

cultures, is important for well being, then schooling policy should enable such dialogues. The current vogue for allowing parents to have increasing choice and influence over the sort of school attended by their own children is, from the hermeneutical perspective, very questionable. One might instead argue that the best interests of the child would be served by decreasing parental choice. Selection of most, if not all, kinds would also appear to run contrary to the aim of promoting hermeneutic understanding in learners. The isolation of groups formed according to religious, ethnic, gender criteria, would, on this approach, limit the scope for understanding and hence for living the good life. Indeed, on this somewhat cursory glance at the policy implications of education for hermeneutic understanding, we seem to be preparing arguments in favour of comprehensiveness in educational institutions.

The analysis that stresses the importance of schools as providers of the sorts of differences and challenges that get hermeneutical dialogues off the ground, may, in general terms, be transposed to the institutions of post-compulsory education. Further education is a path taken often by those ready to question their beliefs and outlooks, and where an amalgam of people of different backgrounds can collect. The voluntariness of further education, as contrasted with schooling, might also be thought to contribute to relationships conducive to genuine dialogue. A shared disposition towards learning and change tends to indicate openness to 'genuine conversation'. Something similar could be argued for higher education. In both further and higher education, opportunities are available for challenging dogma, whether it be that picked up at home, in one's religion, or through previous educational institutions. According to the hermeneutic account, the learning of specialist skills and knowledge is not an exhaustive aim of post-compulsory education. Rather, emphasis is placed on the alteration of perspective from which understanding takes place, and in order to enable this, on the relationships and experiences that challenge one's assumptions.

In summary, one way in which institutions might serve to promote hermeneutic understanding in learners is through helping to generate the conditions under which hermeneutical dialogues take place. These are the sort of dialogues that Gadamer refers to as 'genuine conversation', conversations in which presuppositions, including categories of understanding, are revealed, questioned, and altered, in the process of understanding. Such conditions are fulfilled where there are significant differences between interlocuters, where the interlocuters enter into conversation with a willingness to listen to that which at first may seem nonsensical or alien, and where each can enter a dialogue with the other in a spirit of openness to challenges and to the possibility of changing their categories of understanding. The extension of the possibilities for interpretive understanding that this process enables is, to some degree, made possible by the context in which the dialogue takes place. Educational institutions that aim at promoting hermeneutic understanding as part of educating for good lives would need to reflect this. Specifically this might mean arranging educational institutions so that they could challenge entrenched beliefs, and

enable people with different backgrounds to enter into dialogue. Providing such a secure and challenging setting would have direct implications for policy pertaining to educational institutions.

6.4 Educational Method for Hermeneutic Understanding

Space does not permit a thoroughgoing exploration of the educational methods that might be employed in order to help learners to increase their capacities for hermeneutic understanding. However, from what has been said already, it is clear that dialogue is central to the process of hermeneutic understanding. It seems fair then to begin speculating on educational method for hermeneutic understanding with some thoughts about the purpose, character, and practicalities of dialogue. Dialogues undertaken in educational settings may be thought of as ways of coming to understand particular phenomenon, but importantly, dialogues in educational settings can be seen as providing practice in the processes associated with hermeneutic understanding. Furthermore, it is through the practice of dialogue that the specific character and value of hermeneutic understanding can be made apparent.

Not all dialogues however come close to the Gadamerian notion of 'genuine conversation'. There are many forms of communicative interaction that might be termed dialogues which would have quite opposite educational effects to those aspired to here. What we need to do, in order to think about using dialogue as a way of promoting hermeneutic understanding, is to distinguish the qualities that are particular to dialogues that promote hermeneutic understanding, that is to practical-critical hermeneutical dialogues.

An initial point about the sort of dialogues associated with hermeneutic understanding is that they are serious rather than frivolous. Dialogues that bring assumptions into play explicitly, that can modify the frameworks of understanding, that open up new perspectives for understanding, and that can generate awareness of the structures and processes of understanding, should not be confused with chatting or debating. This does not mean necessarily that the subject matter of the dialogue needs to be of great gravity and consequence. Rather, they are serious in that hermeneutical dialogues involve learning, as contrasted with entertainment or mere stimulation of interest. Hermeneutical dialogues can be said to be pedagogical by definition, they always have learning something as their aim. Having said this, it needs to be stressed that they are pedagogical in a particular sense of the term. Hermeneutical dialogues are not primarily concerned with the transmission of knowledge, but with the generating of new understanding. Finding novel ways of interpreting phenomena involves the generating of novel perspectives. (Another sense in which the generating of novel perspectives in learners is a serious business is in that it affects the learners' own self understanding.) In addition to being generative of novel interpretations, Gadamerian 'genuine conversation'

is the path to the making explicit of all assumptions, including those which underpin hermeneutic phenomenology itself. This means that a genuinely dialogic relation is one where the rules of dialogue, the critical standards, and the relationships between interlocuters can be made part of the dialogue. This is a point made by Benhabib in an account of the possibility of deriving a discursive ethics; 'First, we can allow the conditions of the procedure to be thematized within the dialogue situation itself.....' (Benhabib 1989 pp147-148). Finally, hermeneutical dialogues are marked off from other dialogic forms in that they seek no final objective truth. A 'genuine conversation' is never ending, it always leaves room for further questions, it always safeguards future possibilities for further interpretation.

From these observations of some of the qualities of 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogues, we can begin to delineate these sorts of dialogues from other pedagogical dialogues. A useful way into this is provided in Burbules' work 'Dialogue in Teaching'. (Burbules, 1993 Ch.6). Burbules identifies four types of pedagogic dialogue: dialogue as conversation, dialogue as inquiry, dialogue as debate, and dialogue as instruction. In order to make sense of this typology it is helpful first to understand two important analytic distinctions that Burbules employs in the generation of the four types. The first distinction is concerned with the relationship of the conception of dialogue to knowledge. Dialogues may be either 'convergent' or 'divergent'. 'Convergent' dialogues lead to end points, conclusions that are correct or consensual. 'Divergent' dialogues are those which open up and multiply the possible or available interpretations. The second distinction is concerned with the orientation one has towards one's dialogic partners. Adopting an 'inclusive' orientation means assuming that one's partner makes sense and has at least some plausibility in their assertions. Adopting a 'critical' orientation means regarding the utterances of one's partner with scepticism or suspicion.

It is the combining of the different sorts of knowledge pathways (convergent or divergent) with the different sorts of orientation (inclusive or critical) that give rise to the four types of dialogue suggested by Burbules. (In reverse order), 'dialogue as instruction' is critical-convergent. Critical because at least one partner asks searching questions and may need to be persuaded, convergent because there is a particular goal of understanding to be reached. The classic example of such a dialogue would be that of Plato's Meno. 'Dialogue as debate' is critical-divergent. Critical because the views of the partners are tested and attacked, divergent because such a dialogue typically leads to strong advocacy of different positions. 'Dialogue as inquiry' is inclusive-convergent. Inclusive because the partners in the dialogue are teamed together in their search for understanding, convergent because inquiry involves trying to find a solution to a problem or an answer to a question. 'Dialogue as conversation' is inclusive-divergent. Inclusive because of the normally co-operative spirit of conversation, divergent because there is no pressing need to achieve consensus where the aim of the dialogue is greater mutual understanding.

This analysis and classification of pedagogic dialogues presented by Burbules draws heavily on Gadamer's account of the variety, subtlety, and applicability, of different forms of dialogic method found in the Socratic Dialogues. (Gadamer, 1980). To some degree it is useful to interpret the conception of hermeneutic understanding that I have presented as similar to Burbules' 'dialogue as conversation'. Hermeneutical dialogues are, in a sense, necessarily 'inclusive'. Firstly, hermeneutical dialogues are generous in assuming that the other makes sense and can be learned from. This is reflected in the observation that effort is required in listening to that which at first may seem to make no sense. Secondly, there must be a level of co-operation rather than antagonism. Hermeneutical dialogues are not fixed sum games where one wins at the other's expense, rather, they aim to be both productive and of mutual benefit. Thirdly, in the 'fusion of horizons' a shared language of understanding is generated. Although the description of hermeneutic dialogues as dialogues of difference might sound oppositional, the aim is to create the conditions for understanding for all concerned. To some degree it is helpful also to think of hermeneutical dialogues as 'divergent'. It is in the spirit of hermeneutical dialogues to open up new perspectives and new ways of interpreting. The idea of 'divergence' appears to fit well with the need for hermeneutical dialogues to avoid closure and fixity of outcome.

The parallels between hermeneutical dialogue and Burbules' notion of inclusive-divergent 'conversation' are unsurprising given that Burbules bases his account of 'conversation' on Gadamer's notion of 'genuine conversation'. However, in illuminating the particularities of what I have called 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogues we need to make some important modifications to Burbules' typology. Firstly, Burbules' dichotomy of 'inclusive' or 'critical' is too crude to pick up the subtlety of critique of the 'practical-critical' hermeneutic model. Here, 'inclusivity' is necessary in order that dialogues of mutual understanding can proceed, but critique is also necessary in the sense that partners should conform to good practice which has fairly clear notions of hermeneutic virtue and vice, and in the sense that disputes of interpretation can occur and can be brought into the public arena for further airing or possible resolution. This is because the practical nature of 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogues implies that action as well as understanding is the goal of dialogic practice. Secondly, 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogues need to be critical with respect to assumptions, including those of the dialogue 'game' itself. Hard questioning may have a role in bringing these assumptions out into the open so that they can be modified. It is often in response to the criticism by others that one learns to criticise one's own position. A third way in which the Burbules position fails to account adequately for 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogues is that the 'convergent' - 'divergent' dichotomy is weak. Whilst it is correct to say that a 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogue cannot lead to final answers or fully objectively correct solutions, they may nonetheless be convergent. Indeed, for practical life, convergence and consensus may be thought to be often helpful. What is ruled out in

'practical-critical' hermeneutical dialogues is not the possibility of convergence but rather the establishing of an infallible foreclosing convergent point. 'Practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogues can result in agreement 'for now', or in a good practical interpretation, as long as the possibility for reinterpreting, and going beyond this interpretation, is kept open.

In summary then, drawing on Burbules' typology, we can describe 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogues as necessarily and contemporaneously both 'inclusive' and 'critical', and, although not necessarily 'divergent', at least always open to future divergence. In this way we can hold on to Burbules' helpful analysis of dialogic types, whilst modifying it to illuminate the particularities of 'practical-critical' hermeneutics.

Does this analysis of 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogues help us when we turn to considering the methods of teaching and learning that foster hermeneutic understanding? The answer to this question is I think yes, but with some qualifications. One qualification is over the term 'method'. If method is taken in a narrow sense to mean an activity which is wholly rule governed, sharply correct or incorrect, or the unquestionably best means to a particular end, then 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogue is not a method. This sort of dialogue can only be called a method of learning in a much looser sense, and perhaps it would be more appropriate to term it something less prescriptive, like a process of understanding. Another qualification stems from the reflexivity of 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogue. No description of the characteristics of 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogue can be set in stone, they remain necessarily open to change. A third qualification is that this description is only one interpretation, and in particular settings and contexts, modified or different interpretations can and will be necessary and/or helpful.

Having said this, the description of 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogues as 'inclusive', 'critical', and open to future 'divergence' does give us some insights into how such dialogues might be recognised and nurtured and guided in educational settings. This is particularly so when we take these features into account alongside the other salient features of 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogues, namely the generation of perspectives and allied understanding of phenomena, recognition of prejudice (in particular and in general), practical purchase, and the appreciation and questioning of the framework of hermeneutic understanding. This family of features of 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogues may not stand as a checklist against which actual dialogues can be measured, nor does it give us something that is teachable in any straightforward sense. However, as a general guide to one particular sort of pedagogical dialogue that may help in the leading of flourishing lives, as a way of raising awareness of the purposes, possibilities, and potential pitfalls of 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogues, and as a starting point for reflecting on the framework of 'practical-critical' hermeneutic understanding, this description would appear to have some merit.

We can use this analysis to help us to think about the particularities of actual 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogues with and between learners. It gives us some insight into the requirements for such dialogues in terms of the expectations of the learners, the role of the teacher, teaching craft and so on For example, given the description of 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogues as open to 'divergence', learners should be encouraged to question their conclusions, and to change their interpretations when appropriate. Expectations of easy or definitive answers might be helpfully displaced by expectations of better but less secure understanding. Ongoing reinterpretation should be seen as positive. The need for 'inclusivity' might involve granting students from different backgrounds time and incentives to seek out a mutually comprehensible framework of understanding. It might equally imply a requirement for teachers and learners to generate common language rather than having the teachers' language code as the dominant voice. The requirement of 'criticality' might allow for not only hard questioning of particular positions, but also judgement by peers of the virtuousness or otherwise of styles and outcomes of arguments, and of particular interpretations. Full 'criticality' might also bring into question the basis for making such judgements, and perhaps also the position of authority or expertise of the teacher.

Further prescriptions about the conducting of actual 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogues might be forthcoming from a more thorough analysis of the implications of the description of them as 'inclusive', 'critical', and always possibly 'divergent'. However, it is only in the actual contexts of dialogue that participants will find themselves in a position to fill out the notions of 'inclusivity', 'criticality', and openness to 'divergence'. The detail requires consideration of the conditions of the particular dialogue, the power relations, the aims, the cultural differences and similarities of the participants, and so on. The sense and extent of 'inclusivity', 'criticality', and openness to 'divergence', like the virtues and vices of 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogues are not objective measures nor rules to follow. They don't tell us how to conduct ourselves, but they do inform us of the possibilities for engaging in 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogues rather than other sorts of dialogue, and for having better rather than worse 'practical-critical' hermeneutic dialogues.

Chapter 7 Reflections and Conclusions

In this final chapter I do not intend to put forward any further substantive arguments or proposals. Rather, I am concerned to attempt to make sense of what has gone before in light of the understanding gained through the process of producing the thesis. When I say 'reflections' I refer to reflections on the character or form of the text of the thesis. What sort of text is it, how did it come about, what is it for, does it work, how could it work, and so on. This can be contrasted with the final section that I term 'conclusions'. This latter section reviews the substantive content of the thesis and highlights questions raised both internally, for the thesis itself and, more generally, for liberal educational research.

7.1 Reflections on the thesis as a text

Perhaps the principle question, in the judgement of the worth of this thesis, is whether it is helpful in the articulation and promotion of liberal educational aims in late modernity. Answering this question however may be affected by not only the content of the thesis, but also by the character of the text of the thesis. This is because if the text has worked, then the reader, in judging the text, will be drawn into consideration of the hermeneutical framework of interpretation. That is, it is the author's intention that, after engaging with the text, the reader will be sensitive to some of the complexities of interpretive understanding, and that these considerations might affect how the text is described or judged. The argument here is that the text is intended to be educational, and that the form of the text is integral to that educational process. It is the form as well as the content that is used to try to engage the reader in a dialogue with the text.

In terms of form, the educational strategy is twofold. Firstly the text tries to describe, explain, and examine hermeneutic phenomenology, and secondly it tries to provide insights into the hermeneutical character of understanding by exemplifying some of the salient features of hermeneutic understanding. That is to say, the text attempts to illuminate some of the processes of hermeneutic understanding through showing them in action. This claim however, that the text attempts to exemplify the hermeneutic understanding process, needs some qualification. Firstly, the text is for the most part what Gadamer might call 'metahermeneutical', it consists of discussion about hermeneutics rather than of hermeneutic practice. Secondly, the text is monological rather than dialogical, and is certainly not in a straightforward sense a 'dialogue of difference'.

Having warned against taking too seriously the idea that the text should be taken to exemplify the processes of hermeneutic dialogue, it may nonetheless be helpful to think about ways in which the text may be thought to be hermeneutical. One sense in which the text might be thought hermeneutical is in the relation of whole and parts. It is

not straightforwardly apparent that the meaning and significance of the text as a whole cannot be understood without the parts, nor that the parts can only be understood in relation to the whole. What is true though is that in response to my researching of particular sections and chapters, the aims of the thesis as a whole have changed significantly. Likewise, the revisions to the thrust of the thesis have brought about significant changes to the parts. The relationship is not strictly one of means and ends, the indeterminacy of the final outcome has made the process feel more like a practical conversation than like a theoretical or technical exercise. A second sense in which the text may be said to exhibit hermeneutical traits is in its capacity for self referentiality and reflexivity. Specifically, the thesis is consciously hermeneutical in its attempts to divulge its own prejudices and limitations. Furthermore, the constraints on ambition that attend the hermeneutical framework have informed the work itself. A third sense in which the text appears to show hermeneutical qualities is in the change of perspective of the author that has resulted from engaging with the various texts cited, and through reflection on the thesis itself.

A fourth, and arguably most important, sense in which the text may be thought hermeneutical, is in the intention to bring different traditions and theoretical perspectives into dialogue with one another. That is, albeit rather artificially, I have attempted not merely to appropriate ideas and arguments from various sources, but also to bring them into productive conversation with one another. In practical terms, what this involves is an attempt to interpret positions from different perspectives in order that they may be allowed, as it were, to speak to one another and produce novel accounts through artificial yet productive dialogues. One such dialogue is that between modernism and postmodernism.

On one view the text of the thesis can be read as a straightforwardly modernist enterprise. The text is sequential and each stage forms a necessary platform for that which follows. It is then a structurally manufactured text, it conforms to a constructive metaphor. Furthermore, the text is concerned with finding solutions to particular problems, and with opening up new possibilities. There is also an implicit assumption that the method of presenting the text is in some sense better or more progressive than some possible alternatives. Methodologically the modes of argument and means of evidencing draw heavily on the analytic tradition of philosophy, on logic, on enlightenment reasoning, and on scepticism. The text is impersonal and somewhat detached from the author. It conforms to the norms and traditions of academic writing.

As a sequentially structured problem solving enterprise, and one that regularly employs modernist methods, this text could hardly be thought postmodern. However, the modernist approach is tempered by postmodern attacks on foundationalism, on the universality of enlightenment reason, on abstraction and idealism. What is presented is a version of modernism that has listened to, and learned from, the postmodern critique. The thesis is socially, politically, morally and temporally contextualised. It allows for its

particularity of perspective, knows its foundations are fallible, starts from a position of prejudice, attempts to bring its own form into question, and finds its relevance within a limited time frame. This is 'late modern' rather than modern, the sort of modernism that has come to know itself as a particular project, as a voice among voices, as finite and partial, as human and thus hopeful. For as the modernist voice is tempered by the postmodernist critique, so the postmodernist voice is tempered through listening to the humanist hope of modernity. No humanist can be fully ironical.

A second dialogic encounter set up in the text is that between hermeneutic theory and educational theory. This is an encounter that forms the major material for Sean Gallagher's book 'Hermeneutics and Education', but one which proceeds rather differently in this thesis. Here, hermeneutic theory is invoked in response to the call of educational theory for a theory of understanding that would inform adequately liberal educational aims. From the perspective of hermeneutic theory, traditional liberal aims are theoretically flawed by an over reliance on enlightenment epistemology; from the perspective of liberal educational theory, hermeneutic theory lacks both a critical capacity and practical applicability. Through the dialogue in which each paradigm is appreciated and criticised in terms of the other, novel and compatible positions are found. Hermeneutic theory is worked up into 'practical-critical' hermeneutics, and liberal educational theory is relieved of its untenable theoretical ambitions of absolute objectivity and fully detached criticism. Hence, liberal educational aims can be understood and articulated according to the tenets of 'practical-critical' hermeneutics, and promoted using 'practical-critical' hermeneutics as a way of understanding that informs flourishing individuals. Each theoretical paradigm changes in the process and a potentially practical outcome ensues.

A third and overlapping dialogue is that between hermeneutical practice and educational practice. Gadamerian hermeneutical investigation is undertaken chiefly at the level of 'metahermeneutics'. Gadamer's writings generally focus on describing the limitations and possibilities for understanding rather than with practicalities of understanding. Thus Gadamer can talk about the notion of dialogues between different world views employing different conceptual apparatus, while explicitly eschewing method. From the liberal educator's viewpoint, this theoretical hermeneutics lacks practical applicability. Liberal educators educate persons and need aims and objectives, and means of promoting and judging progress in learners. From the Gadamerian perspective, mainstream liberal educational practice is weak in the area of practical understanding because it too readily adopts the belief that moral, political, social, and self understanding proceeds by learning a method and applying it.

As a result of setting up a dialogue between hermeneutics and education, the follower of the hermeneutic paradigm is invited to consider how phenomenological hermeneutics might be modified to render it practical in everyday life. It is conceivable that hermeneutics can be developed to be applicable within the context of educating

persons within a liberal democratic society. One practical thing that liberal educators can learn from the processes of hermeneutic understanding is that particular forms of dialogue can have particular merits in the quest for the sorts of understanding needed for living the liberal 'good life'. Another practical notion that educators can learn from Gadamerian hermeneutic practice is that it is not necessarily the case that a method of understanding must be learned then applied. Rather, in 'genuine dialogues', the moments of: learning how to talk and listen, of interpretation, and of application, go together in an integrated action. In the dialogue about practice that takes place between hermeneutics and education then, hermeneutic practice is invited down to the level of practical discourse between persons, educational practice is invited to take account of the complexities of the interpretive understanding of practical life.

A fourth dialogic encounter in the text of the thesis is that between Gadamer and Aristotle. More specifically, the conversation set up is between a hermeneutical approach to understanding and an Aristotelian conception of practical wisdom (phronesis). A version of this dialogue can be found in Gadamer's 'Truth and Method', and in the body of this thesis. Here again, it may be helpful to see the relation of the Gadamerian and Aristotelian conceptions as conversational rather than appropriative. Gadamer modifies the hermeneutic paradigm after listening to what Aristotle has to say about the differences between practical, technical, and theoretical knowledge or understanding. From the hermeneutic perspective, Aristotle's conception of 'phronesis' is of interest partly because it is explicitly practical, and partly because it faces, and tries to find solutions to, problems of interpretation and judgement that parallel those of hermeneutics. From the hermeneutic viewpoint however 'phronesis' is weak in that it cannot take into account the complexities of a late modern context, for example cultural diversity and institutional reflexivity, and is insufficiently critical for the task of understanding in a liberal educational context. What the Aristotelian conception of 'phronesis' does though is to question the practical, moral and political possibilities and limitations of hermeneutic understanding. Through listening to Aristotle's account of 'phronesis', those working within the hermeneutical paradigm can begin to see the need to develop hermeneutics into a contextually situated practical reason.

Another encounter that can be usefully understood as dialogical is that between the English speaking philosophical tradition and the German tradition. What are increasingly brought into dialogue in late modern practical philosophy are two theoretical paradigms, each of which has its roots in classical Greek philosophy. More specifically, the dialogue brought out here is between, on the one hand, a rationalist and empiricist Enlightenment paradigm that seeks detached objective truth, and, on the other, a phenomenological interpretive paradigm that seeks understanding within the limits of a particular account of the human existential condition. Each tradition has witnessed, in its own terms, extensive methodological reflection and a great deal of building of conceptual apparatus. From the German phenomenological perspective, the English

speaking tradition suffers from the illusion that it is possible to see reality as it is, objectively, rather than from a particular human perspective. From the English speaking perspective, the German phenomenological tradition is weak in its generating of a practical moral and critical theory. Through the dialogue between the two paradigms, it is emerging that each has worth, each is fallible, and that each can learn from the other. Many varieties of hermeneutics currently available to the English speaking audience: radical, conservative, 'practical-critical', and so on, as well as, for example, critical theory and Habermasian ethics of communication, owe their production to this fertile conversation. Each paradigm has responded to the critique of the other, has learned from the other, and co-operated with the other in developing new approaches to understanding.

One final sense in which this thesis exhibits the productivity of dialogic relations is in terms of personal dialogues, both between the author and the author's research community, and between the text and the reader. With respect to the former, it is through both informal and formal dialogues that the thesis as a whole and particular elements have been appreciated and criticised. Through innumerable conversations, the positions and arguments put forward have been modified and adapted. These conversations have helped to expose the grounding assumptions of the thesis and to modify the perspective of the author. In the absence of these dialogues this thesis would not have been produced. With respect to the latter, the text invites the reader to engage in a 'genuine dialogue' with the thesis. That is, the reader is invited to allow the thesis to expose and question his or her own assumptions through his or her appreciation and criticism of the claims of the thesis, so to speak, to move forward by bringing one prejudice to bear on another.

7.2 Conclusions

There is something that sounds not quite right about trying to deduce conclusions concerning liberal educational aims, and their practical promotion, by reflecting on the structures, processes, and personal relationships associated with 'practical-critical' hermeneutics. The main problem is that in the post-Heideggerian tradition of hermeneutics, conclusions, insofar as the term carries connotations of finality and termination, are to be avoided. Perhaps one could argue that what is produced, through the process of hermeneutic understanding, is something better described as another hypothesis, or, in good old fashioned 'dialectical' terms, a synthesis that will in turn become a fresh thesis to be opposed by a new antithesis. This latter notion of a dynamic conclusion that is both an endpoint and a beginning, certainly comes closer to describing the results of the endeavour of 'practical-critical' hermeneutics. However, the outcomes of 'practical-critical' hermeneutic enterprise must be described in appropriately practical, rather than idealist, terms. 'Practical-critical' hermeneutic understanding generates not

simply novel ideas, but rather a combination of novel interpretations, novel possibilities for action, and novel questions about such actions. Added to this is the constant need to leave open the possibility for reflecting on the fundamentals of the methodological framework.

When we attempt to draw conclusions from this thesis then, we should expect neither finality nor precision. Rather, in summing up, we should be faithful to the partial, ongoing, and imprecise, yet helpful character of 'practical-critical' hermeneutic understanding. We should welcome further questions raised by the thesis as indicators of the open-endedness of the arguments, indeed such questions might be thought to constitute important outcomes. As a sort of final 'anti-conclusion' then I will endeavour to indicate some questions raised in the attempt to generate a 'practical-critical' hermeneutics for the articulation and promotion of liberal educational aims. Before this however, I will briefly re-describe the substance of the thesis in summary.

Summary

In putting together some concluding comments, it might be helpful to begin by describing again the guiding questions and proposed solutions that constitute the thesis. The quest was for a means of conceptualising and promoting liberal educational aims within a series of overlapping contexts that are rapidly changing, and that are markedly different to those in which liberal values and policies were first generated. A context that for shorthand I term 'late modernity'. Specifically, this late modern context is described as global, and populated by an increasingly interactive diversity of cultures. There is held to exist a plurality of values and beliefs strongly held by members of different cultures and sub-cultures. Social practices and institutions, and our understanding of them, are argued to be increasingly reflexively configured. Seen as interwoven with these cultural, political, and ethical contexts is an epistemological context in flux. It is argued that the epistemology of the enlightenment can no longer be assumed to be more than merely one particular framework for knowledge, in Gadamer's terms, one particular prejudice. Enlightenment epistemology, appears methodologically inadequate for the task of deliberating about values and their practical promotion through educational systems and structures. In practical terms, Enlightenment method appears inadequate for the task of informing liberally flourishing individuals. The rejection of the possibility of a 'view from nowhere', or, in other words, the absence of a reputable account of substantive objectivity or universality in late modernity, is seen as undermining of familiar ways of justifying, generating, and promoting liberal educational aims, and leaves gaps that need to be filled in liberal educational theory and practice.

The response has been to look into the possibility of finding or generating an alternative mode of reasoning that might be helpful in the generating and promoting of liberal educational aims in the contexts of late modernity. A way of coming to knowledge

or understanding that can proceed in the absence of the foundationalist and universalist assumptions that have been undercut by the hermeneutical critique of the enlightenment model of knowledge. One that, though unable to claim neutrality or objectivity in the traditional senses, remains useful, and also compatible with the liberal requirement for autonomous thought and action. That is a reasoning that is both practical and critical. A mode of reasoning that stops short of the nihilistic or 'ironist' consequences entailed by the more robust postmodernist critiques, and leads not into a world of 'anything goes' relativism, nor into an ongoing struggle of the 'will to power'. Instead, a way of reaching understanding that grants us the possibility of generating procedures and means of judgement which enable us to aim at human flourishing in the absence of moral, religious, and epistemological absolutes.

The proposed solution is a 'practical-critical' hermeneutics. A form of generative understanding derived principally from Gadamer, but which, in its ancestry, draws explicitly on both Socratic dialogue and Aristotelian 'phronesis'. The Socratic roots should not be forgotten in that the modus operandi of 'practical-critical' hermeneutics is a specific form of dialogic interaction. Typically, dialogues of difference that are perspective changing, prejudice revealing, and generative of new understanding. However, the connection with Aristotle is at least equally important. On one description, what is proposed is something like a 'phronesis' for late modernity, a practical wisdom for a late modern context. Further to these roots an extra critical capacity is added. This is needed in order to rule out pernicious interpretations and to make hermeneutic understanding amenable to public critique. Given the epistemological constraints, this critical edge can be forged only within the parameters of practical reason. This requires a form of criticality that is context sensitive. The candidate proposed here is an ethics of communication given through an account both of norms of interpretation, and in terms of virtues and vices of 'genuine conversation'.

Put together, this package aims to provide a description of a non foundationalist, non universalist way of reaching understanding that may help us to conceptualise, and to act upon, liberal educational aims in a late modern context. It is however a mode of reasoning that is complex. Some of the complexity arises out of the hermeneutical notion that forestructures play an important role in understanding. The methodological incorporation of one's forestructures of understanding generates reflexivities and circularities, and forces reflection on relationships of the multiple sources of perspective. Such is the complexity that understanding social and personal phenomena hermeneutically requires also self understanding and an understanding of understanding itself. At the limit, and to meet the liberal democratic ideal of transparency, full understanding involves not only the generation of perspective and of interpretive understanding of self, other, and society as phenomena, but incorporates 'framework awareness', that is a grasp of the metahermeneutical conditions of understanding.

A second reason why 'practical-critical' hermeneutics is complex is that the practicality of this mode of reasoning brings the context of understanding into the story. A mode of reasoning that is appropriate to the domain of practical life in general must also be appropriate to the particular contexts of thought and action. Those engaged in practical reasoning then require an understanding of contexts. The sort of future oriented practical reasoning associated with educational aims requires an understanding of not only a plurality of contexts, but also of trends within those contexts. This to some extent explains the need for raising questions about the nature of educational aims, about the changing epistemological environment, and about the sociological changes associated with late modernity. The consideration of these contextual phenomena to some degree informs the derivation of the mode of reasoning proposed, but at the same time the interpretation of the contexts is to some degree shaped by the methodology of hermeneutic understanding. What makes this possible is the conversational 'to-ing' and 'fro-ing' between successive conceptions of both context and mode of understanding.

In the latter stages of the thesis, the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach, and more specifically the model of 'practical-critical' hermeneutic understanding is, as it were, pressed into service in order to see if it might be of value in the articulation and promotion of liberal educational aims. In order to evaluate this approach we can ask two sorts of questions. The first sort are those concerned with what difference a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach could make to how we think about some key ideas in liberal educational theory. Linked in here is the suggestion that hermeneutic understanding itself might be thought of as a liberally justifiable educational aim. The second sort of questions are those that address the processes and outcomes of liberal educational practice that seeks to incorporate hermeneutic understanding as an educational aim.

The responses to the first sort of questions are somewhat radical in that a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach involves something of a reinterpretation of the idea of education itself. Educatedness according to the particular hermeneutic-phenomenological approach consists at least partly in recognising and changing ones perspective. This approach also has major implications for the liberal educational aim of autonomy with an attendant model of 'informed desire satisfaction'. What it is to be informed is rendered problematical, the ideas of reflection and criticism are reinterpreted, the understanding necessary for personal flourishing appears more complex, the idea of distancing oneself from one's cultural influences is brought into question, and the possibilities for, and the limitations on, individual liberty are put into the melting pot. The hermeneutic-phenomenological approach begins then as a theory about how understanding is achieved, but goes on to question fundamentally, to reinterpret, and to suggest additions to the liberal educational aims it seeks to support. Furthermore, in addition to informing the conception of liberal aims of education, 'practical-critical' hermeneutics informs the process by which we derive educational aims. The suggestion

being that the manner in which educational aims are generated might usefully be understood as 'practical-critical' hermeneutics.

The second sort of question springs from the argument that hermeneutic understanding is a necessary condition for the flourishing of individuals, liberally conceived, and should thereby be an aim of education. The response is a discussion of the practical implications of attempts to teach persons to understand hermeneutically, including the objective of rendering the structures and processes of the mode of understanding transparent through cognition of the framework of understanding In neo-Aristotelian terms, this understanding of understanding, including its potentialities and limits, constitutes practical wisdom. The teaching of persons both to understand hermeneutically, and to come to understand the structures and processes involved in understanding, is discussed in terms of its implications for the curriculum, for educational institutions, and for learning and teaching methods.

Questions

The questions raised here are some of those which issue from the attempt to generate a practical-critical hermeneutics, which is suited to the articulation and promotion of liberal educational aims, from the theoretical resources of Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutic phenomenology. Perhaps they are members of a class of questions that tend to appear when we try to transpose neat philosophical theories into the messy actualities of practical life. They are in one sense questions for further research, certainly they are questions that would need more reflection and argument if a practical-critical hermeneutics were to be a serious voice in liberal philosophy of education. However, in another sense, they are questions that might be of some relevance to other 'late-modern', 'postmodern', and 'pragmatic' approaches in the philosophy of education. For it seems increasingly common that upcoming educational theories have at their centre highly contentious accounts of knowledge and/or understanding that seek to be both practical and critical. Forms of knowledge and/or understanding that beg serious methodological questions, and that would benefit from serious critical reflection. That is not to say that the particular problems and questions raised in the attempt to derive an educationally relevant practical-critical hermeneutics need necessarily arise for all other post-enlightenment practical educational thought. It may be the case however that raising such questions might help to illuminate questioning in research that is going on elsewhere.

One such question is that of the practicality of the concept of 'horizon'. In short, can the concept 'horizon' be made to work in practice as well as in theory? This is a question that has already been paid some attention in this thesis. However, in the section on 'practical hermeneutics' in chapter four the discussion was restricted to consideration of the existence of the 'horizons' needed to get hermeneutic understanding off the ground

in late modernity. That is to say, arguments were put forward concerning the availability of the structures that are necessary for the possible operation of 'practical-critical' hermeneutic understanding. What I want to raise now is the sort of question that might need to be addressed in thinking about the process of actual 'practical-critical' hermeneutic understanding.

One question arises when we consider the plurality of traditions that go into forming the concepts of understanding with which we view the world. For example, one might be variously informed by a masculine tradition, by the traditions of the working classes, and those of the English, of Europeans, of the Enlightenment, and so on. Do these various strands of tradition that inform one's perspective weave together in such a way as to grant one a single horizon, or do we live in a constant flux of different horizons? Do these different strands interact with one another? Can contradictory perspectives be held by one person at the same time? Are their different levels or qualities within horizons? How are they bounded? If I am to understand a particular phenomena, what decides which tradition is drawn upon for my sense making concepts?

To some degree the questions raised in the attempt to make practical the Gadamerian notion of 'horizon' parallel those that would be encountered in trying to make practical use of a notion like that of 'social practices' as used by Macintyre and his followers. (MacIntyre, 1985). In theory the concept of a social practice is attractive, particularly in light of the helpful account of constitutive goods, or goods internal to a practice. When such a concept is put into practical use in actual situations, we have, however, to confront further questions as to where practices begin and end, how different practices relate, whether they overlap, at what level to describe them, and so on. For example, if we want to give adequate answers to the question of what philosophers of education ought to be doing, we need to think about whether philosophy of education is part of the wider social practice of education in general, or whether it lies beyond the boundaries of the practice we call education. As well as being drawn into thinking about where a practice begins and ends, we need also to consider the quality of the relationship between the general practice and sub-practice, and amongst various sub-practices, and between one social practice and another. Furthermore, we should take into account the notion that the identity or integrity of a social practice is not fixed, given or objective. Our interpretation of what constitutes a social practice will vary according to context, according to presuppositions, and according to the purpose or aims at hand. Questions about the practicalities of social practices or horizons then cannot be definitively answered, responses will be interpretive, made from contextually located perspectives, and valid for only a limited duration.

A second question, one that arises through consideration of the attempt to promote 'practical-critical' hermeneutics in learners, is that of motivation. 'Practical-critical' hermeneutics draws on a tradition that accounts for the origin and motivation for understanding with reference to Heidegger's ontology of human Being. On this account it

is in the nature of humans to attempt to understand themselves and their surroundings as they seek to survive in the environment in which they find themselves. We might retain a roughly Heideggerian account of the structures that make understanding possible, and perhaps even for explaining how understanding originated, but it seems unlikely that such origins can explain a late modern motivation for pursuing the complexity of understanding demanded by 'practical-critical' hermeneutics. For this, a further motivational explanation is required. An answer is needed to the question as to why individuals should wish to choose to understand in a way that threatens their own beliefs, that might require them to change their disposition, that asks them to recognise their limitations, and ultimately that involves them reflecting on the conditions of understanding itself.

The nature of the answer to the motivational question becomes perhaps clearer when we consider the justificatory order outlined in the thesis. Understanding is here presented as desirable in so far as it is a condition of liberty. That is, understanding is in the service of the conceptualisation and promotion of the liberal educational aim of autonomous well-being. There may be a difficulty in saying coherently that understanding is a means to the end of individual liberty, but understanding can be said to be a necessary part of the life in which liberty features. Liberty and understanding are parts of a complex of goods that cannot survive independently. Motivationally speaking, we can say that wanting to understand is necessary for living a liberally flourishing life. In practice then the question of why and how persons might, or might not, be motivated to understand hermeneutically is linked to the question of the motivation to attend to their own flourishing in general. This is not to say that the motivation to understand hermeneutically simply follows from the motivation to live well. It may need to be addressed in its particularity. However, one might argue that the question of motivation to understand could only be properly addressed as part of a wider motivational complex, and one which must include the idea of living a human life well.

A third sort of question that might arise here is that of universalism. Can there be genuine understanding and genuine criticism without universals? The 'practical-critical' hermeneutics suggested here claims to proceed in the absence of absolutes and universals. This brand of criticality does not draw on universal reason, perspectives are never objective, and understanding is never more than partial. However, one might question whether such a form of practical and critical understanding could really proceed without recourse to universals, or whether, if one digs around, one would find some universalist assumptions.

It might be argued that some universalism slips in by the back door, one candidate being the universality of human culture. Certainly hermeneutic theory displays, and draws on, commonalities that exist between interlocutors. Commonality of language may not be assumed in the theory, but the mutual having of a language is. Furthermore, for 'genuine conversation' each language must be capable of entering into a generative

relationship with the other. A second commonality that might be thought necessary is that of a preparedness or willingness to learn and to change. At a minimum there must be a common capacity for learning and change that could (to some degree and for some persons some of the time) be activated. A third commonality is that of finitude. Every perspective is similar in that each is partial both in the sense that it is perspectival, and in the related sense that understanding reached is always incomplete. In effect, hermeneutic theory argues against the possibility of universal phenomena or beliefs, they could only be ascertained from an untenable transcendent perspective, but it does rely on the assumption of something like a common human condition amongst those who take part in understanding. Although there may be those (such as absolute dogmatists) who stand outside the set of hermeneutic interlocuters, on the inside the common human condition of living in a linguistic community and having an orientation towards understanding can be said to be culturally transcendent. Still on the question of universals, there seems to be nothing in hermeneutic theory that rules out the possibility of generating universally true beliefs. For example, one might foresee a time when members of all cultures, perhaps through participating in hermeneutical dialogues, could come to recognise the partiality of their particular perspective, or the necessary fallibility of belief.

A further question that may be raised about 'practical-critical' hermeneutics is whether it is an appropriate mode of reasoning for the articulation of educational aims. It might be argued by philosophers of education that thinking about educational aims requires a theoretical or philosophical rather than a practical discourse. One response to this question can be produced from a comparison of two tripartite distinctions: on the one hand distinctions between educational objectives, aims, and ideals, and, on the other, between Aristotelian techne, phronesis, and theoria. Generally, I have argued that the appropriate mode of reasoning for objectives is techne because the ends are set, and the means are what is at issue. For ideals we may say theoria is appropriate because it is a form of reasoning suited to thinking about timeless universals. Aims, because of their 'ongoingness' and 'open endedness' are, according to this schema, best served by phronesis, which can account for their contextualised, practical, and future oriented qualities. On this account, 'practical-critical' hermeneutics can be said to be appropriate for deliberating about educational aims insofar as it represents a modern equivalent of 'phronesis', and is distinguished from the technical and theoretical.

This argument trades off the belief that the articulation of educational aims is part of the wider social practice of education, it presumes that the articulation of liberal educational aims is intimately connected with action. This assumption, that thinking, talking, and writing about the aims of education is a practical activity that needs to be responsive to context and have a bearing on educational policy and practice, is not a given. That aims talk is practical is not true apriori. That it should be needs to be argued for and demonstrated, to make it so requires nurture. Whether or not philosophy of education is practical cannot be judged by philosophical reflection alone, it depends on

whether its voice is heard. This in turn depends on its relevance to the contexts in which lives are lived. Fortunately, the question of whether, and how, discussion of the fundamental aims of education can make a difference to the world outside the academy is, in part, in the hands of those thinking and speaking about the aims of education. The practical nature of aims talk seems therefore to be both an assumption and a task.

Notes

Chapter 1

1. For an influential account of the notion of a social practice see MacIntyre (1985). The concept is employed in the context of educational philosophy by Hirst (1993)

2. see Giddens (1990, 1991) or Vattimo (1988) for references to debates on 'modernities' and distinctions between 'modernity', 'postmodernity', and 'high modernity' or 'late modernity'

3. see Vattimo (1988) introduction on the concepts of 'de-historicisation' and 'post-histoire'

4. see Bell (1974) for an argument in favour of the description of late modernity as 'post-industrial'

5. A phrase used by Weber (1968) to describe the difficulty of escaping from the means-end, or instrumentalist, form of reasoning that he argues is characteristic and dominant in modern rational capitalism

6. The sort of analysis put forward by Bauman (1978)

7. Taylor (1989) and (1992) For further discussion on this hermeneutical point about the relationship between intelligibility and historical continuity see chapter three.

Chapter 2

1. See for example Peters' transcendental justification for knowledge for as educational aim in Peters (1967)

2. Many examples of critiques of positivist methodology and of 'new paradigm' alternatives are available in sociological or psychological theory. They include: Giddens, A. (1976) *New Rules of Sociological Method*, Reason, P. and Rowan, J. (eds) (1981) *Huuman Enquiry: A Sourcebook of New Paradigm Research*

3. Weber's conception of 'verstehen', normally translated as 'understanding' is presented clearly, and criticised, in Outhwaite, W. (1983) *Concept Formation in the Social Sciences.*

4. see for example Garfinkel, H. (1967) *Studies in Ethnomethodology*

5. As evidenced in Winch's (1972) critique of the anthropological sociology of Evans-Prichard

6. An account of the methodological problem of empathy from a phenomenological-hermeneutic perspective is given in Gadamer (1989) p. 242 ff.

Chapter 3

1. Schleiermacher's contribution to the development of modern hermeneutics is given a clear exposition in Bleicher (1980)

2. Perhaps the classic account of this sort of historiography is to be found in Carr (1961)

3. Plato's theory of the Forms can be found (more or less explicit) in a number of the Platonic dialogues, including the Republic. An early version in encountered in Euthyphro and a more critical analysis in the later Parmenides.

4. A phrase used by Weber (1968)

Chapter 4

1. The doctrine of cultural relativism is usefully discussed by authors in the collection of Hollis and Lukes (1982)

2. This critical-hermeneutical approach is summarised in Gallagher (1992)

Chapter 5

1. A discussion of the possibility of understanding the idea of constructing oneself and of choosing one's values can be found in D.Cooper (1983)

Chapter 6

1. I am grateful to John White for raising this question.

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