

The Broken Tradition **Tradition's Mode of Being between Alienness and Familiarity***

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In my contribution I attempt to present and characterise certain aspects of the hermeneutic question related to tradition's mode of being. By both the subject matter and the way of treatment I will try to address the overall topic of the congress as well as the narrower subject of the symposium, namely the issue of translation. In the exposition I will outline some of the related features of hermeneutic way of thinking.

The connection to the general subject of the congress can be characterised in the following way. According to the traditional self-interpretation of Hungarology as national philology (or, in Ernő Kulcsár-Szabó's view, the "Hungarian science of culture... oriented towards the understanding, revealing and mediation of the values and creative achievements of the material and spiritual culture connected to features inherent in mother tongue community formation..."¹), one of its tasks is the preservation and enrichment of national heritage, maintaining connections with tradition, keeping tradition alive and continuing it in a creative manner. From the point of view of the enrichment, revealing, preservation and mediation of national heritage it is perhaps not useless to raise the issue of the mode of being of tradition and survey the conclusions of authoritative and modern 20th century theories. How does tradition "exist"? Does it depend on us or does it exist independently of us? Is it a pre-existing givenness that determines us or is it subject to our arbitrariness and preferences? The issue of tradition, the bequeathing of tradition and historicity which became acute in 20th century philosophy obviously has considerable importance from the point of view of Hungarology or the scientific study of the Hungarian people. That is, Hungarology must study the understanding of tradition, its transformation as well as the issue of the relation to tradition and the bequeathing of tradition, a question which happens to overlap with one of the central issues of 20th century hermeneutics and one of its (main) problems.

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1. See his paper available on the Internet webpage of the Congress: *The Poetics of the Unidentifiable? (Notes to the changes in the concept of Hungarology)*.

At the starting point of hermeneutics and the birth of interpretation as a task there is a certain obscuring of meaning. "...The need for a hermeneutics is given precisely with the decline of self-evident understanding", underlines Hans-Georg Gadamer in his main work of hermeneutics, when making reference to Schleiermacher. The specific place of hermeneutics is between "the extremes of alienness and familiarity".¹ The starting point of the hermeneutic task, the interpretation of texts handed down from the past is the realisation of two considerations. First, that the meaning of texts has become obscure or forgotten. This is due to the distance in time and the difference in circumstances. The above consideration may be called the insight into the difference of historical periods or the *insight into the essence of historicism*. If people and epochs following each other were not different, texts would also preserve their meaning undisturbed and the scientific effort of interpretation would become completely superfluous. On account of the difference between historical periods texts have become estranged, their meaning alienated, although not completely unknown.

The other recognition inherent in the starting point of hermeneutics is that texts passed on to us are important and that we live in tradition – we may call this the *belief in the importance of tradition*. The sensing of the difference between historical periods and the belief in the importance of tradition are necessary moments in the birth of the hermeneutic task.

If we consider hermeneutics in most general terms as the study of understanding and interpretation (be it the understanding and interpretation of texts, actions or human manifestations), if therefore hermeneutics is directed towards understanding and deals with interpretation, then the presupposition here is the situation of non-understanding or disrupted understanding. The completely general presupposition in the case of hermeneutics is always a previous loss of meaning or fading away of meaning, not simply "Nichtverstehen" but rather a certain "Nichtverstandenhaben" which works behind and launches the project of transplanting, moving, re-assessing meaning in today's world. The project of searching for meaning, re-assessing and

¹ See Hans-Georg Gadamer: *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik. Gesammelte Werke*, vol.1, Mohr, Tübingen, 1990, p. 187, 193; *Igazság és módszer*, transl. by Gábor Bonyhai, Budapest, Gondolat, 1984, p.141, 144. Also compare l.c. p.300 and p. 210 in the Hungarian edition.

understanding meaning springs from previous non-understanding *and* its experience as lack or loss.

This project can never be completed. 20th century hermeneutics is a hermeneutics of finiteness at the same time, on account of the sensing of the essential, unremovable temporality and historicity of man. The obscuring of meaning and its experience as a loss, furthermore - and inseparable from it - the project of the search for meaning motivated by this loss is the index of an essentially finite-historical being.

However, the project of transplanting, moving or re-assessing past meanings in the present - and I am signalling here the possibility of connection with the subject of the symposium - is an issue of translation in Gadamer's view. Considering the essentially linguistic nature and linguistic constitution of tradition the task is to translate a past language or conceptuality into the present. When during our interpretive work we say, "what this or that author said, what he wrote in this or that place, means this or that", we are dealing and wrestling with such a task of translation.¹ This is not only the case when we have to translate a text from a foreign language into Hungarian, or from old Hungarian into contemporary Hungarian. Whenever we say "if I understood you right, you wanted to say that...", we make some sort of translation. We try to understand what others say, that is, we try to reconstruct it in our own words. It is hardly accidental that Gadamer introduces the third part of *Truth and Method* on language with comments on translation. His conviction is that understanding and the language of understanding is nothing else than some task of translation.² We must translate what we have understood in the language of some present.

The search for meaning, that is, the effort towards its reassessment and the project of understanding is also underlined in the continuation of Gadamerian hermeneutics today. As Günter Figal has recently underlined in one of the studies in the *Festschrift* published on the 100th birthday of Gadamer, the relationship of hermeneutics to tradition is not a self-evident but rather a *broken relationship*. This may sound surprising,

¹ The formulation "it means this" tempts us to think that what we say leads to a "self-sufficient" meaning, a meaning above history.

² "In situations where coming to an understanding is disrupted or impeded, we first become conscious of the conditions of all understanding. Thus the verbal process whereby a conversation in two different languages is made possible through translation is especially informative. Here the translator must translate the meaning to be understood into the context in which the other speaker lives." (*Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1., p. 387; *Igazság és módszer*, p. 269.)

given the well-known “tradition-friendly” nature of hermeneutics. However, it is the recognition of tradition as a model and measure that articulates a consciousness of tradition which is very far from the naivety and continuity-hopes of unbroken traditionalism. “Tradition can never be experienced without the break in tradition”, says Figal about this paradoxical state of facts.¹ Philosophical hermeneutics shows itself and exerts its influence in the tension between historical determinateness and the breaking of tradition. Authoritative tradition and the distance from it or, more precisely, the *consciousness* of the authoritativeness of tradition and the *consciousness* of the distance from it, of the impossibility of a naive identification with it: this double *consciousness* manifests itself with the same weight here, at the starting point of hermeneutics.

We could exemplify this by the following: if we were to experience the life-world of the ancient Greeks, and from this position ask about the way in which Olympian Gods constituted a tradition for them, then we could probably be condemned of asking an erroneous question. The Olympian gods were probably a *reality* for the Greeks in the most complete sense of the word rather than a live *tradition*, for the gods lived together with them, appeared among them, spent their days with them. (Not least the consciousness of tradition presupposes the experience of the uniqueness and irreproducibility of history which enters the consciousness of European culture with Christianity). The continuity or unbrokenness makes invisible the tradition in which we live. Unbroken tradition viewed from here appears as reality rather than tradition. And vice versa, tradition becomes visible only when there is a previous break. Problematizing our relationship to tradition – the possibility, need or

¹ G. Figal, “Philosophische Hermeneutik - hermeneutische Philosophie”, in: *Hermeneutische Wege. Hans Georg Gadamer zum Hundertsten*, ed. G. Figal, J. Grondin, D. Schmidt, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2000, p.336. (Tradition erfährt man ausdrücklich nie ohne Traditionsbruch (...); see also: “Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics is (...) reflected, broken in its relation to tradition as it is characteristic to modern theories. Considering the obviously tradition-friendly nature of Gadamerian hermeneutics, this statement may sound surprising. However, this tradition-friendly nature is connected within Gadamer’s theory with the recognition that there is a tension between tradition and modernity and these two relate to each other in tension.” (Gadamer’s philosophische Hermeneutik [...] ist reflektiert, in ihrem Verhältnis zur Tradition gebrochen wie es zu einer modernen Konzeption gehört. Das mag angesichts der offensichtlichen Traditionsfreundlichkeit der Gadamerischen Hermeneutik überraschend klingen. Aber diese gehört in Gadamer’s Konzeption mit der Einsicht zusammen, daß Tradition und Moderne in Spannung, gegenstrebig aufeinander bezogen sind.”)

constraint of problematization - is a sign that experiencing and living it as reality is no longer possible; the naive, natural relationship to it has ceased and the unreflected relationship is no longer possible.

This broken relationship is very well characterised by the following words of Gadamer's speech (entitled *Hegel's Heritage*), the speech given when taking over the Hegel award in 1979: "We look with admiration at the great Hegelian synthesis of Christianity and philosophy, nature and spirit, Greek metaphysics and transcendentalist philosophy, the synthesis that Hegel sketched as absolute knowledge. Nevertheless, we cannot accept it. The one and a half century that separates us from Hegel cannot be neglected."¹ In spite of this painful knowledge, this broken relationship, Gadamer still connects to Hegel at certain decisive points of his hermeneutics.

It may not be useless to find a way back from Gadamer to Heidegger. The hermeneutic space of tension between the essential dimension of being of historicity and the broken tradition is already present in Heidegger's main work, *Being and Time*. In view of the essentially historical dimension of being it is understandable that Heidegger pointed to *heritage* as the primary and sole source of authentic existence² when considering its real possibilities – the heritage which is

¹ H.-G. Gadamer, *Das Erbe Hegels*, in: H.G. Gadamer - J. Habermas: *Das Erbe Hegels. Zwei Reden aus Anlass des Hegel-Preises*. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1979, p.56. See now *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 4, p. 473.

² It is not unimportant that Heidegger anchors authentic existence – which corresponds to good life, that is, the traditional problematics of ethics – in historicity. Such a relationship between ethics and history which is unusual in traditional approaches - had been largely prepared by neo-Kantians. (See István, Fehér M., *Az élet értelméről. Racionalizmus és irracionálizmus között* (On the meaning of life. In-between rationalism and irrationalism), Kossuth, Budapest, 1992, p.42 and the following, as well as my references at the end of this writing.) Typically, introducing the dimension of history into ethics has been tending to revive the phantom of relativism up to the present. If there is something such as good, if ethical standards have a certain frame, then that must be, so it seems, absolute, above history. If we adopt history as the overall frame of our investigations (as Hegel did, for example), then the ethical perspective dwindles and there remains something like the right of the "world spirit". Ethics is ahistorical, history is not ethical, according to this view. We must choose which of these two shall we set in the forefront - their reconciliation is impossible. While neo-Kantianism, going beyond Kant, tried to connect ethics and history, we must observe that the concept of *authenticity* in *Being and Time*, that corresponds in Heidegger's work to the Kantian problematics of ethics, is accomplished in the history-chapter: history provides the final frame of the

eo ipso historical and is freely undertaken by man despite of his being thrown into it.¹ If all cultural goods are given as heritage, writes Heidegger, and these goods create the possibility of authentic human life, then in this latter the handing down of heritage goes on. Connection to tradition in this context is essentially *repetition* (*Wiederholen*), that is, *bringing back* or *regaining* at the same time. It follows from Heidegger's views that in grasping the inherited or handed down and undertaken possibility of existence there can be no such thing as the restoration or restitution of the past or the "realization of tradition." In case of a basically historical being such "realization" is impossible. The endeavour of simply restoring the past and the project of this endeavour – bringing back the past and realising some heritage – completely misunderstands the mode of being of an essentially historical being. "... the essential nature of the historical spirit", says Gadamer in a very similar manner, "consists not in the restoration of the past but in *thoughtful mediation with contemporary life*."² Gadamer expresses the importance of the *thoughtful mediation with contemporary life* in connection with Hegel – and distances himself from Schleiermacher in this respect. This explains, on the one hand, the reevaluation of the moment of *application* in his philosophical hermeneutics. On the other hand, repetition means that there is no beginning and no end. In other words, in the beginning there was repetition. Tradition is the process of an endless talk, says Gadamer, in which there is no first word and no last word.³ From this perspective, the moment of applied understanding is expressed by tradition becoming alive for the present.⁴ Gadamer's primary criterion in the analysis of tradition is the preliminary role of "what tradition represents for the present".⁵ Gadamer's criticism refers to historical consciousness, because

realisation of authentic human life for Heidegger. This is about beings who have resolutely acknowledged their finiteness and therefore became authentic, and authentic communities formed of such individuals, communities the content of which is formed in its realisation by the connection to tradition, its resolute continuation, transmittance or *repetition* as Heidegger calls it.

¹ Cf. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 15th edition, Tübingen, Niemayer, 1979, pp. 183ff. and the following (*Lét és idő*, Budapest, Gondolat, 1989, p.615. and the following)

² *Igazság és módszer*, p. 129.; *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, p. 174.

³ See *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 8, p. 408 and cf. pp. 430, 434.

⁴ See for example *Igazság és módszer*, pp. 218ff., 227ff.; *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, pp. 312ff., 322ff.

⁵ *Igazság és módszer*, p. 149; *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, p. 201.

this “severes its bonds with life, creates distance from his own history”¹ and brackets the preliminary role of “what tradition represents for the present”², “reflects himself out of a living relationship to tradition”.³ Thus historical consciousness enforces tradition, but only “historically”, in its otherness, not as something that *has an impact on us and is continued in us*.⁴

This historical consciousness is therefore nothing else than the reverse of the Enlightenment and thus it partakes in all its one-sidedness. According to the Enlightenment, says Gadamer, tradition considered meaningless by reason can only be understood by returning to the perspective of the past. “...the Enlightenment tends to accept no authority and to decide everything before the judgement seat of reason. (...) It is not tradition but reason that constitutes the ultimate source of all authority.”⁵

Behind the counterpointing of authority and reason in the Enlightenment there was the privative antithesis of accepting a view *either* on the basis of reason (sovereign opinion formation) *or* authority (blind obedience). Enlightenment thus did not only discredit authority but in order to achieve this goal it had previously reinterpreted the concept of authority by underlining the moment of blind obedience in it. If we view this issue unbiassed, without the exaggerations or “prejudices” of the Enlightenment, we can acknowledge that authority “is ultimately based not on the subjection and abdication of reason but on an act of acknowledgement and knowledge – the knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence – i.e., it has priority over one’s own.”⁶ Acknowledging authority “is always connected with the idea that what the authority says is not irrational and arbitrary but can, in principle, be discovered to be true. This is the essence of the authority claimed by the teacher, the superior, the expert.”⁷

¹ See *Igazság és módszer*, p. 29; *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, pp. 12f.

² *Igazság és módszer*, p. 149; *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, p. 201.

³ *Igazság és módszer*, p. 253; *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, p. 366.

⁴ “When it reads its texts ‘historically’ [historical consciousness] has always thoroughly smoothed them out beforehand, so that the criteria of the historian’s own knowledge can never be called into question by tradition.” On the other hand, real historical consciousness always sees its own present (L.c. pp. 253, 216. *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, pp. 367, 310).

⁵ *Igazság és módszer*, p. 195; *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, p. 277.

⁶ *Igazság és módszer*, p. 200; *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, p. 284.

⁷ *Igazság és módszer*, p. 200; *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, p.284.

In its basically negative relationship to the Enlightenment Romanticism has only reversed the signs: it has replaced 'primeval stupidity' with 'primeval wisdom' - "the tendency to restore the old because it is old"¹ and thus it did not question the basis of the Enlightenment opposition between "tradition" and "reason". Romanticism also views tradition as "the abstract opposite of free self-determination".²

At a closer inspection we can see however that we cannot decide whether the anti-traditional and anti-historical view of the Enlightenment is better as an *a priori* starting point than the traditionalist standpoint unconditionally believing in the wisdom and superiority of tradition. From this point of view, the opposition between Enlightenment and Romanticism lies in the first one urging the blind rejection of tradition alien to reason, and the other one the adoration of tradition: the first one considers an evidence that we are high above our backward and silly ancestors, the other takes it for granted that we shrink into insignificance as compared to our ancestors whose every word is thus wise and authoritative. However, they agree on tradition being alien and inaccessible to reason: the opposition relying on this common presupposition is thus basically false and rejectable.

The issue of reason and freedom inevitably belong to tradition, underlines Gadamer as a certain *tertium datur*. The romantic faith "in the growth of tradition" in front of which reason subsides into silence is nothing else than an illusion itself resting on the preconceptions of the Enlightenment. For "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."³ Preservation, we may say, is just as free an act as innovation or change.

This is what Gadamer underlined in his debate with Habermas: "Changing the existent means the connection to tradition as well as the defence of the existent." "*Tradition itself only exists in the continuous*

¹ *Igazság és módszer*, p. 196 *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, p. 278

² *Igazság és módszer*, p. 201; *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, p. 286.

³ *Igazság és módszer*, p. 201; *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, p. Preservation here means to keep open, says James Risser: keeping open the possibility of our hearing the extinct voices of the past. (James Risser, *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other. Re-reading Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics*, State University of New York Press, Albany, N.Y. 1997, p. 73)

transformation into another".¹ This latter thesis shows the return of the basic idea of the main work, according to which understanding is always understanding in a different way² and the real task of hermeneutics lies "not in the restoration of the past but in *thoughtful mediation with contemporary life*"³, the integration of the past with the present.

It will be useful to provide an interpreting commentary for the former theses. Tradition is in the state of "continuous transformation into another" because new and new generations must learn it, take possession of it, make it meaningful and alive for themselves. Obviously, due to the changing nature of historical circumstances and the uniqueness and irreproducibility of history, this is only possible through new efforts of understanding and interpretation. The new and new understanding and interpretation of finite-historical beings is always expressed and in a new and new language. The interpretive effort must be embodied in our own words, it must "put in its word" in our own words. Whenever a tradition is hindered in its transformation into another in this sense, whenever people rigorously stick to its identity with itself (linguistic identity, first of all), that tradition sooner or later becomes empty, it stiffens and dies. It does no longer raise thoughts, it does no longer move hearts and emotions; its continuity can only be ensured through power, if at all. However, the question is, whose continuity is thus preserved? It is not "mummification" that is most important. On the contrary. In Gadamer's manner we may say that what can be preserved through mummification cannot in fact be preserved, not even by mummification. Whenever people try to preserve something by mummification this act does not obtain the desired effect, moreover, it quickens the decay of the thing to be preserved. Instead of a live, inspiring tradition and a past meaning connected to the present and revived from the horizon of the present only its dead body is preserved and mediated. On account of our essential historicity as well as the uniqueness and irreproducibility of history it is a hopeless attempt to *transmit or restore tradition in an unchanged form*: the task is rather to revive it, to restore it to a new life.

Viewed from this perspective, and referring to what we have said above, it is easier to evaluate the special place of hermeneutics - commonly known as "tradition-friendly" - "in-between" alienness and

¹ H.-G. Gadamer, "Replik", in: *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1971, p. 307; see as *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. GW 2, p. 268. (my italics)

² *Igazság és módszer*, p. 211; *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, p. 302.

³ *Igazság és módszer*, p.129; *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, p. 174.

familiarity, but also between enlightenment and traditionalism. From this point of view hermeneutics – contrary to earlier views in the history of reception by now considered outdated by the critics themselves¹ – does not so much appear as a conservative-traditionalist attitude standing against, rejecting or withdrawing the Enlightenment for, as we have seen, it criticizes such a position on account of its essential kinship with the absurd prejudices of Enlightenment. Rather, it is an enlightenment consistently applied to Enlightenment itself, in the sense that it informs Enlightenment about itself, its limits, and the illusions, preconceptions and prejudices in it that have not been thought over. It is after all a prejudice against the previous conceptions and thoughts expressed by the voice of tradition. The enlightenment applied to Enlightenment serves with the conclusion that the “surpassing of all the prejudices (...) is itself a prejudice and that the illusion according to which we are free of prejudices can only result in the forces determining us exercising power over us without our knowledge. “A person who believes he is free of prejudices (...) denying that he is himself conditioned by historical circumstances”, writes Gadamer, “experiences the power of the prejudices that unconsciously dominate him as a *vis a tergo*.”² A really unbiased, unprejudiced analysis presents the thoughtless rejection of tradition and the obvious faith in ourselves as new starting points (the mistrust of tradition and the overweening confidence in ourselves) as a dogmatic attitude just like bowing to tradition and the principle of authority, thoughtlessly taking over tradition and depreciating ourselves. Blindly believing in ourselves as opposed to tradition or blindly believing in tradition as opposed to ourselves are no alternatives from a hermeneutic point of view.³ These considerations show that the total

¹ See Appendix 1.

Íráság és módszer, p. 253; *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, pp. 366f.

² Hermeneutics considers itself as being in tradition, however, it relates to it critically. It does not challenge the fact of being in tradition but its manner. Cf. Heidegger, *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles (Anzeige der hermeneutischen Situation)*, in: *Dilthey Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Geschichte der Geisteswissenschaften* 6, 1989, p. 249; “Fenomenológiai Aristotelés-interpretációk (A hermeneutikai szituáció jelzése)” (Phenomenological interpretation of Aristotle (The significance of the hermeneutic situation), in: *Acta Scientiarum VI-VII, 1996-97, Supplementa*, vol.II., 23. “(...) criticism is not about the fact that we stand in a tradition but to the way we are standing in it. What we do not learn in our original interpretation and do not express in the corresponding linguistic form, is only superficially ours (...). (...) if life renounces the originality

rejection of tradition and the corresponding radical wish to begin everything anew is an untenable illusion, disappointment, self-deception, a dim thought unconscious of itself – a narrow-mindedness which, like every narrow-mindedness, by definition cannot see its own limitations. Thus, taking into account this latter disillusioning “enlightenment”, hermeneutics is not so much the rejection and revocation of Enlightenment but its consequent carrying out (which here means an illusion-free carrying out.)¹

Finally I will try to summarize and relate to each other what has been said about tradition and language.

1) *The linguistic nature of tradition.* The greatest part of cultural inheritance is linguistic-textual, moreover, the non-linguistic part of tradition (buildings, monuments, objects), *access* to it and what is the same, the *meaning* and *interpretation* of this part of tradition also necessarily takes a linguistic form. Access is always linguistic; it cannot avoid or go around the linguistic universe. This means that we cannot come in contact with the monument itself, only the *meaning* of the monument, more precisely, what is almost the same, its present meaning for us.² The linguistic form appears as a result of the efforts of understanding-interpreting the present.

2) *The mode of being of tradition and historicity and the issue of historicism (historic knowledge).* Schelling's words may serve as a motto in this context: “History only exists for he who has been influenced by the past and only to the extent to which he has been influenced.”³ This means that history is not the predetermined, fatal series of events

of interpretation it renounces the opportunity of completely taking possession of itself (...)” (italics in the original).

¹ See Appendix 2.

² Naturally, we can figure out – following the line of the history of effect - what meaning a previous (linguistic or non-linguistic) tradition had for a following later period which is already past for us. Only it is advisable to avoid the idea that the period in question or we ourselves own the *correct* (inherent, superhistorical) meaning, of the tradition in question.

³ F.W.J. Schelling, *A transzcendentális idealizmus rendszere* (The system of transcendental idealism) transl. By Zoltán Endreffy, Budapest, Gondolat 1983, 357.

independent of us to which we blindly submit ourselves. History only exists for he who knows about it. On the other hand, the mere *knowledge* of the history of our tradition is not enough: the free *commitment* to it is also necessary. Michael Gelven's commentary on Heidegger's conception of history is also illuminating in this respect: the *knowledge* of the ancestors' deeds does not yet constitute a *heritage*.¹ The essential openness and undecidedness of history and the future, the lack of knowledge of this dimension of being is a necessary negative condition and this is the point where the history-directedness of the neo-Kantian system of thought did important epistemological preparatory work for hermeneutics. "If we could indeed calculate the future in its individuality, says Rickert, if we knew about *everything* that *must* come, then *will* and *acting* would immediately lose their meaning (...) it is a merciful hand which hid the future (...) behind an intransparent veil. *If in its individuality and strangeness the future were object of our knowledge it could never be object of our will.*"² "A metaphysical idealism which thinks it knows the general law of development of the world makes the single course of history meaningless and superfluous just like a metaphysical naturalism does, which considers absolute reality an eternal circulation. (...) *only as long as we fail to grasp the world metaphysically ... is history possible.*"³

3) *Tradition, history, freedom.* As there are free, but finite beings in history, tradition is only present in the commitment of these free individuals. Tradition is therefore necessarily broken, as its bearers are thinking beings who have a will. Every decision and connection leaves behind the possibility of another decision. Tradition's transformation into another, that is, its application to the present creates a new situation. James Risser, American researcher of hermeneutics drew attention to the same issue in his recent lecture: "The moment of application that constitutes the understanding of history, accordingly, repeats the character of the moment of application in *phronesis*. In both cases the moment is the moment of dissolution that in its peculiar way brings life before itself. For Gadamer, the kairological event brings historical life to its (particular) time. This means, to state the obvious, that the happening of tradition is not a continuum of ebbing present

¹ Michael Gelven, *A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time. A Section-by-Section Interpretation*. Harper&Row, New York, 1970, pp. 212ff.

² Heinrich Rickert, *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, 2nd edition, Mohr, Tübingen, 1913, p. 464. (My italics.)

³ *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, 578f. (My italics.)

happenings, but a real event marked by discontinuity. There is, in effect, no 'tradition' available as a historical object; tradition is donated, present, only in the moment, whereby it becomes different from itself. That is to say, the moment of application is that place where history and tradition have their future. This is why Gadamer can say that the moment of application makes history. And, only by virtue of this future does history remain or *last*. The lasting, the establishing of which I would say, in a more comprehensive sense, is the task of philosophy, is never a matter for nostalgia. It is rather precisely that to which one is able to bid farewell and thereby preserve it against oblivion."¹

Appendix I

This is first of all about the suspicion of conservatism and anti-Enlightenment voiced by critics of the Frankfurt School in the 1960s and 1970s against the starting point of Gadamerian hermeneutics, as a result of which the psychoanalytic or ideology criticism model of the social sciences has been set against the hermeneutic conception of historical sciences. For the self-criticism of this position and its revision today see K.-O. Apel, *Regulative Ideen oder Wahrheitsgeschehen? Zu Gadamers Versuch, die Frage nach den Bedingungen der Möglichkeit gültigen Verstehens zu beantworten*, in *Ars Interpretandi* 1, 1996, 215. In English, K.-O. Apel, *Regulative Ideas or Truth-Happening? An Attempt to Answer the Question of the Conditions of the Possibility of Valid Understanding*, in *The Philosophy of Hans Georg Gadamer*, The Library of Living Philosophers, vol. XXIV, ed. Lewis E. Hahn, LaSalle, IL, Open Court Publishing, 1997, 67-94: "In the 1971 discussion volume *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik* J. Habermas and I gave the impression - today I would say, wrongly so - that the 'claim to universality' of Gadamer's 'philosophical hermeneutics' could be called into question by such social scientific approaches as *psychoanalysis* and *ideology criticism*. More precisely put, we left the impression that it could be called into question by indicating the possibility and necessity of critical-reflective suspension of the hermeneutic 'fore-conception' by means of an objectifying 'analysis' of the communicative competence of socialized human beings and, therefore also the 'authority' of linguistic tradition; and all this, if

¹ James Risser, *Phronesis as Kairological Event*, lecture given at the international symposium *Hermeneutik und Phronesis*, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 6-8 July 2001. The quotation is from p. 10 of the manuscript given to me by the author, italics mine.

possible, within the framework of a *philosophy of history* as the comprehensively operating discipline.” The volume mentioned by Apel is *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1971, see here J. Habermas, *Zu Gadamers 'Wahrheit und Methode'*, 45-56, first of all 48. (The writing first appeared in *Philosophische Rundschau*, Beiheft 5, 1967, then it was republished several times); K.-O. Apel, *Szientistik, Hermeneutik, Ideologiekritik. Entwurf einer Wissenschaftslehre in erkenntnisanthropologischer Sicht*, I.c. 4-44, here 35 and especially 39 and the following; also Claus v. Bormann, *Die Zweideutigkeit der hermeneutischen Erfahrung*, I.c. 83-119, especially 115.

Habermas lately wrote *Der liberale Geist. Eine Reminiszenz an unbeschwerte Heidelberger Anfänge*, in: *Begegnungen mit Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. G. Figal, Reclam, Stuttgart 2000, 51-54, especially 53. (where he writes about Gadamer that “großzügige Liberalität der Gesinnung” is the characteristic of his way of thinking); also by him, *Wie ist nach dem Historismus noch Metaphysik möglich? Zum 100. Geburtstag Hans-Georg Gadumers?*, in: *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, February 2000, 12-13, 49 and the following (“das Porträt eines ... stets liberalen und selbstkritischen ... Geistes”, “hermeneutische ‘Bescheidenheit’”). See Michael Theunissen’s retrospect (who also belongs to the Frankfurt School): *Philosophie und Philosophiegeschichte. Rückblick eines Lehrers*, in: *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, 46, 1998/5, 849-860; here 852. (“A certain conformity dominates the depths of the liberal self-understanding of our scientific community which is rather unliberal with the allegedly dogmatic positions”), 854. (“I ask whether the critical is a feature of a certain kind of hermeneutics or is hermeneutics as such critical in itself?”)

In his study entitled *Critical Theory and Hermeneutics: Some Outstanding Issues in the Debate* (in *Perspectives on Habermas*, ed. Lewis E. Hahn, LaSalle, Il., Open Court Publishing 2000, 463-485) G. B. Madison refers to the closeness and coming close of the positions of Habermas and Gadamer. The debates that took place in the sixties have only a historical importance today, says Madison, because Habermas kept in mind the Gadamerian criticism referring to his views on psychoanalysis as the model of social sciences, and, on the other hand, later on he was more inclined to accept the universality need of hermeneutics, than at that time. However, what makes the position of Habermas and Gadamer similar beyond this is the common endeavour of pointing out that instrumental rationalism is only one form of rationalism,

and not even the highest. What both of them protested against was not the universality need of scientific-technological rationalism but the exclusiveness-directed pretension with which this need had been formulated. Either of them considered reason to coincide with instrumental rationality and both of them tried to foreground the dialogic or intersubjective features of reason rather than its monologic feature (see the study quoted above, 463 and the following.) Madison agrees with Jean Grondin's earlier formulation that the debate between hermeneutics and ideology criticism was based on misunderstandings that have already been cleared up. The basic proximity and solidarity of perspectives is decisive here, whereas the differences concern secondary issues (see Jean Grondin, *Einführung in die philosophische Hermeneutik*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1991, 168.) Madison points out in the following that the essential differences between Habermas and Gadamer appear against the background of a basic conceptual solidarity (the stress laid on the ethical and political dimension of human existence). He gives voice to his opinion that although the imbeddedness of human existence in culture and tradition has a greater importance for Gadamer than for Habermas, "the stress laid on 'tradition' and the 'consciousness of the history of influence' does not make Gadamer an anti-Enlightenment 'conservative'. Gadamer protested only against an Enlightenment rationalism which set tradition against reflection." According to Madison's comprehensive opinion, "critical theory and philosophical hermeneutics after the sixties appeared as allied conceptual forms as they were led by common 'emancipatory' interests", therefore the concept of critical theory can after all be applied to both standpoints (see the study quoted above, 471 and the following.) In his study written in the same volume Richard E. Palmer also stresses that "the famous Habermas-Gadamer debate has misled many and resulted in the avoidance of the *commonness* of their points of view." (Richard E. Palmer, *Habermas versus Gadamer? Some Remarks*, l.c. 487-500, quotation: 487; my italics). Finally I would like to mention Hans-Helmut Gander's recently published work which also deals with the Habermas-Gadamer debate and remarks that the opposition of positions has much weakened since (Hans-Helmut Gander, *Selbstverständnis und Lebenswelt. Grundzüge einer phänomenologischen Hermeneutik im Ausgang von Husserl und Heidegger*, Frankfurt am Main, Klostermann, 2001, 57.)

Appendix 2

I have expanded the thesis according to which hermeneutics is not so much a conservative-traditionalist philosophical perspective rejecting or withdrawing the Enlightenment, but rather a consistent Enlightenment applied to the Enlightenment itself. (See my book entitled *Heidegger és a szkepticizmus. A szkeptikus kételyen át a hermeneutikai kérdésig - Heidegger and Scepticism. Sceptical Doubt to Hermeneutic Question*, Korona Nova, Budapest, 1998, mainly chapter VII, *Hermeneutics, Enlightenment, Scepticism*, 157-168.) I consider a confirmation of my endeavour that some writings in the volume *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* mentioned in *Appendix 1* have the same orientation. As David Detmer writes in his study entitled *Gadamer's Critique of Enlightenment*, there is a difference between the so-called “ontologic” and “practical” aspect of Enlightenment (see the volume quoted above, 283.) and this coincides with the differentiation that I made in *Heidegger és a szkepticizmus (Heidegger and Scepticism)* between the Enlightenment as a maxim, an attitude, an anti-dogmatic attitude and the Enlightenment as a content statement, a commitment to a certain doctrine (see the volume quoted above, 164.) The critique of Enlightenment is not identical with its rejection, says Detmer. “The critique of a concept is not identical with the rejection of it, neither does it follow from it. If we do not accept this, we prejudice the outcome of criticism.” (l.c. 285.) We should render Detmer’s statement even stronger by conceiving criticism as critical examination (as it is proper to do), an examination which tries to understand and interpret the given idea or theory. In this sense we may say that the criticism or critical examination (i.e. the understanding and interpretation) of an idea is not only not identical with the rejection of the idea but, as I have already stated in the context of “mummification”, it is the condition of keeping the idea alive. If an idea cannot be criticised or made subject of a critical examination (understanding and interpretation), it stiffens and becomes a dogma, loses its meaning and liveliness since it is accepted on the basis of authority (it is “embalmed”). There is no exception to this, not even the Enlightenment.

In the same volume there is a writing by Robert R. Sullivan (*Gadamer's Early and Distinctively Political Hermeneutics*) in which he speaks about a “distinctly German liberalism” since Wilhelm von Humboldt. While Anglo-Saxon liberalism stresses property, German liberalism foregrounds education and culture. Sullivan formulates the

rather bold thesis that German liberalism is the only liberalism worth following. For what is the use of property if not the development of the individual's powers, asks he. "Gaining property for its own sake is mere materialism, the rough and brutal way of increasing power. (...) It is difficult to justify freedom and property as *aims* whereas it is more reasonable to justify them as *means* of attaining certain aims that are close to them, namely, the development of the individual." (*The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 253.) Gadamer is the inheritor and late descendant of this distinctly German liberalism going back to Wilhelm von Humboldt that we may also call "Bildungliberalismus" on the model of "Bildungshumanismus". Individuality, the development of individual skills is most important from this perspective, property is just a means. In his answer to Detmer's writing Gadamer says that he considers shocking that the endeavour to develop philosophical hermeneutics may be discussed as the "criticism of Enlightenment". He adds that what Kant calls Enlightenment is what hermeneutics aims towards. (l.c. 288). See also Robert Sokolowski, *Gadamer's Theory of Hermeneutics*, l.c. 227: "We cannot stand outside all tradition and evaluate them from no committed point of view; the desire for such an inhuman and detached perspective is another of the misleading hopes of rationalism and the Enlightenment." As a completion of this see G.B. Madison, *Hermeneutics: Gadamer and Ricoeur*, in: *Twentieth-Century Continental Philosophy*, ed. R. Kearney (Routledge History of Philosophy, vol. VIII), Routledge, London - New York, 1994, 319: "The fact that we are always standing in a tradition and therefore cannot *at the same time* criticise everything, does not mean that there are things that cannot be criticised, as a cultural conservative may think." Therefore, from a hermeneutic point of view everything can be criticised, but we should bear in mind that during the act of criticism we are not floating in the nothing, but necessarily standing on a certain - culturally and historically determined - ground, the preconceptions of which we can only see if we detach ourselves from it, but then we come to the ground of the preconceptions of another standpoint. The preconceptionless, "objective" judgement which would be protected by positionlessness, is a mere illusion.

I have already mentioned - and written a detailed argument in favour of it in my book *Heidegger and Scepticism* - that the Enlightenment and Romanticism are two sides of a conceptual opposition relying on the same philosophical preconception. In the above mentioned recent study Madison also underlines that there is no legitimate reason for us to *a priori* accept the view, as Habermas did in his early study, that

tradition is necessarily the source of illusions and disappointment. (*Critical Theory and Hermeneutics: Some Outstanding Issues in the Debate*, in: *Perspectives on Habermas*, l.c. 473.) Hans Helmuth Gander's observations point in the same direction: he discusses the issue in the context of the Kantian "Sapere aude!" characteristic of the Enlightenment, just like I did in *Heidegger and Scepticism*. Individual judgment in reading a text is limited to a great extent by the previously formed views of the reader, and we can observe that the reader's own convictions and judgments are always formed against the background of his convictions depending on his education and self-education. This limitation does not however call into doubt individual reasoning and the "Sapere aude!" postulate. It does not mean that we must accept tradition as an unquestionable authority. On the contrary: "hermeneutic reflection shows that autonomous reasoning is tradition-related; and it is exactly this feature that can no longer find an unquestionable support in the authority of tradition, from the point of view of individual thinking." (Hans Helmuth Gander, *Selbstverständnis und Lebenswelt. Grundzüge einer phänomenologischen Hermeneutik im Ausgang von Husserl und Heidegger*, Frankfurt am Main, Klostermann, 2001, 56.)

Finally, let us mention that there is another, much more effective way of fending off the suspicion previously formulated in various forms by the Frankfurt School against Gadamerian hermeneutics. Suspicion is analysed and considered grounded against those who have formulated it. See Jean Grondin's thorough, well-argued study: *Habermas und das Problem der Individualität*, in: *Philosophische Rundschau* 36, 1989, 187-205; reprinted: Grondin, *Der Sinn für Hermeneutik*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1994, 122-146.) Grondin points out the authority elements in the background of the Habermas-Apel conception of the ideal communicational community and the universal transcendental-pragmatism (see *Der Sinn für Hermeneutik*, 124: "unverkennbare Anmaßung"; 130: "privilegiertes Zugang"; 133: "Gewaltstreich") and also that through the ideal-typical idea of the ideal communicational community Habermas in fact tacitly renews the *universality need* of hermeneutics (that he has formally criticised and brought in connection with the charge of authoritarianism) and he does this in a less plausible form than Gadamer. He lays heavier burdens on the universality need than Gadamer does, more universal burdens, we could say. (l.c., 135. and the following.)

The thesis according to which philosophy is the accomplishment of Enlightenment or an Enlightenment applied to Enlightenment itself,

can be found in Hans-Michael Baumgartner's study (*Aufklärung - ein Wesensmoment der Philosophie*) in connection with Kant's philosophy (without being applied to hermeneutics). See also his *Endliche Vernunft. Zur Verständigung der Philosophie über sich selbst*, Bonn, Bouvier, 1991, 72-93, especially 75, 90, 93. If philosophy goes through the Enlightenment, says Baumgartner, it is the accomplishment of Enlightenment: "the task of philosophy is theoretically always the same: to enlighten, but also to enlighten us about the Enlightenment, that is, to mark the place of Enlightenment within the framework of human mind. This is what Enlightenment being accomplished in philosophy means." Enlightenment transcends itself in philosophy. "Kant's philosophy is an excellent example in this respect. It is not accidentally considered the peak of Enlightenment, which is at the same time its transcendence. Kant is the enlightener who accomplishes Enlightenment in itself and surpasses it in this sense." (90.) "Enlightenment, paradoxically speaking, can only remain on its level if it has enlightened itself about itself." (93.)