

Hermeneutics and Communication

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Assignment

Developmental Readings

Create Developmental Readings from seminal sources and scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles. Review the instructions for Assignment #3, the course essential elements, and course readings to identify selections of books and journals to create entries.

- a. Refer to the "Student Guide to Developmental Readings" in the General Helps folder for updated information on sample comments, the grading rubric, and key definitions related to developmental readings.

Source One: Rich, J. (2021). *An introduction to critical theory*. Humanities E-Books.

https://www.perlego.com/book/3051423/an-introduction-to-critical-theory-pdf?queryID=33b77ee334d6bf874f6aaec3acc17a35&index=prod_BOOKS&gridPosition=2

Comment 1:

Quote/Paraphrase: Speaking of Critical Theory, the author writes, “Although their theories differ considerably in methodology, in philosophical outlook, and in expression, they all contain within them one common thread—that is, they no longer believe in a ‘Truth’ free from the compromising complications of the nature of language, culture, power relations, rhetoric, discourse racism and so on. This notion of a ‘Truth’ --outside of culture, outside of language -- is roundly rejected by all the theorists we will study.” (pp. 6-7)

Essential Element: This comment is associated with the essential element approaches of hermeneutics as well as principles of hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is additive to my understanding of the contextuality of understanding as it is adopted within critical approaches to interpretation. The comment demonstrates critical theories adopt the premise all understanding is socially constructed rejecting any claim to absolute truth. This has implications for engaging with others in dialogue within our culture for the Christian community that holds to a paradox, that while understanding is contextual there is yet a truth to be understood that transcends culture and may inform it.

Contextualization: Our contemporary time brings a particular challenge to God's people as we seek to cross the divide created by increasing polarization and tribalization within Western culture. Amid the cacophony of conversations seeking to change and improve society, the voice of the church is being drowned out and discounted as merely one more expression of a "will to power" by a group to exert control over others. This leads to unique challenges for how we not only understand how we understand, but how we understand how we may make ourselves understandable.

Comment 2:

Quote/Paraphrase The author comments on Derrida's reading of the Platonic dialogue "Phaedrus". Derrida recognizes that a division is being established between a written text and a spoken text and that the dialogue is making the point that a written text is more susceptible to misunderstanding and that always being open to interpretation by the reader threatens the authority of the author/text. Derrida here understands that the dialogue is arguing for a communication to have authority it can only be alive when the speaker (here the king) is near it. Derrida interrogates this claim, noting that it is a written claim, and interprets that the concept of authority is itself an interpretation imposed upon the text creating an inherent contradiction that Plato must use writing to declare dialogue a superior form of communication. (pp. 36-37)

Essential Element: This comment is associated with the essential element approaches of hermeneutics as well as the history of hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is variant to my understanding of the conversation regarding subjectivity and objectivity in hermeneutics. The idea of an authority lies squarely within the realm of objectivity as understood in classical times. Understood today, as seen through Derrida, the concept of authority is imposed from a self-interested position to justify the concept and for Derrida. Derrida finds congruence with Plato here that a written text is open for interpretation but disagrees that there can be a non-subjective claim to authority. It seems to me though that Plato/Socrates is one to something here. Engaging a written text is more difficult than engaging in a conversation. In a conversation, as in the Platonic dialogues, when a hearer voices an understanding that is not intended by the speaker, the speaker can respond and add further information and context to clarify his viewpoint. This advantage is lost when interpreting a text and depending on the skill and openness of the reader to truly try to hear the author, can result in misunderstandings. There would seem to be a superior value to conversation. Can it seriously be discounted that the speaker is not an authority of sorts regarding what he or she intends to communicate?

Contextualization: When dealing with the increasing divide in the culture wars that make it far harder to come to a common understanding regarding common problems, there may indeed be value in an approach that focuses on conversation over written communication. It may seem easier, and less threatening, to engage with other's positions through reading them and responding in kind. Our particular horizons are more likely to remain intact when we engage other's viewpoints from a critical perspective. A genuine conversation is more likely to

bring a true understanding, a more effective fusion of horizons, as conversation does more than just convey communication, does more than operate as a hermeneutical spiral of its own, it can generate empathy.

Comment 3:

Quote/Paraphrase The author discusses Foucault's position that even verbal discourse, a conversation, about a cultural subject or issue is paradoxical, enabling and disabling thinking. Foucault argues the rules of discourse "carefully guards" privileged positions through what is considered acceptable. (p. 60)

Essential Element: This comment is associated with the essential element approaches of hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is additive to my understanding of the dialectic nature of understanding as well as the contextual nature of interpretation. Related to comment 2, which places value on conversation, Foucault indicates that even such conversation functioning as a hermeneutical spiral can disable learning and understanding if the rules of the communication game filter what is considered acceptable.

Contextualization: For instance, in engaging with proponents of LGBTQ inclusion arguing for the rights of transwomen to utilize female bathrooms and dressing rooms, it is difficult to have a genuine conversation where the needs and feelings of all involved are heard and understood if one side is considered "transphobic". Likewise, it is difficult for the other side to hear and understand the needs of people with biological disorders resulting in gender dysphoria if the environment of the conversation (such as a very conservative Christian school,

church, or denomination) would immediately assign such discourse as unfaithful and heretical.

Source Two: Tyson, L. (2023). *Critical theory today: A user-friendly guide* (Fourth Edition).

Routledge. <https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/3852581>

Comment 4:

Quote/Paraphrase “The author is no longer considered a meaningful object of analysis. We focus, instead, on the reader; on the ideological, rhetorical, or aesthetic structure of the text; or on the culture in which the text was produced, usually without reference to the author. So, for all intents and purposes, the author is ‘dead.’” (Chapter 1, paragraph 4)

Essential Element: This comment is associated with the essential elements history of hermeneutics and principles of hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is variant to my understanding regarding the role of subjectivity/objectivity in interpretation as well as the importance of authorial intent. The author is correct that the common position of critical approaches would claim the author is dead. However, to discount that the author had a point of view he or she intended to communicate to intended hearers would strip the value of reading or listening to any text if all we are doing is harvesting basic resources to construct our own world of meaning. Using Derrida’s technique of looking for inconsistencies within a communication to deconstruct and disable a premise from having a claim on us, one could point out the inconsistency of claiming the author isn’t relevant by an author who is writing “the author isn’t relevant”.

Contextualization: During the Enlightenment the philosophy of deism became popular in intellectual circles positing a God who creates but is disconnected and uninvolved in our world and lives. In the 1960s the Enlightenment culminated in the modern expression that “God is dead”. Now it is not just God who is dead to us, but the author of written texts is dead to us. One can see it is not a far movement to posit that even living and speaking authors are dead to us, that all that matters is one’s self-interested interpretation as I create the world I want to create within the inner recesses of my mind.

Comment 5:

Quote/Paraphrase “To understand some things clearly we must restrict our focus in a way that highlights certain elements and ignores others,” (Chapter 1, paragraph 7) The author notes the need to adopt a particular methodology because methodology frames how we see our world and our understanding of human experience. (paragraph 7-8) Yet, she notes that even within the arena of critical theorists, competing methodologies are put forward as most accurate competing against one another for dominance. She finds hope in that these theories overlap and are united by the goal of making the world better. (paragraph 13, 15)

Essential Element: This comment is associated with the essential elements approaches of hermeneutics and principles of hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is additive to my understanding of critical hermeneutics as an approach to interpretation. It is also additive to my understanding of the role of the interpretive community within hermeneutics.

While critical theorists have common ground in dismissing any claim of “truth” as

something human beings are accountable to and are united in a desire to “make the world better”, they compete as much against one another as they do against non-critical approaches, for their particular communities have unique understandings of what a better world would look like.

Contextualization: Another aspect that critical approaches and adherents have in common is the belief that the way to make the world better is by exerting power and influence to achieve one’s view of that better world. When any external claim for the shaping of human life (for instance God speaking from His Word explaining what is good for us and what is not) is dismissed as necessarily oppressive, all that is left is self-serving interest. Critical approaches encourage individuals to band together into like-minded tribes to exert influence over the community and culture to achieve their desired ends. Is this making a better world?

Source Three: Voelz, James (2009). *Reading scripture as Lutherans in the post-modern era*.

Scribd. <https://www.scribd.com/document/14229485/Voelz-Reading-Scripture-as-Lutherans-in-the-Post-Modern-Era>

Comment 6:

Quote/Paraphrase “Contemporary post-modern developments should influence us as Lutheran exegetes positively especially with regard to two of the insights which it offers. The first is that there is no objective understanding of anything, including written texts. And the second is that there is no comprehensive explanation of anything under consideration, again, also including written texts. The first insight, concerning objective understanding, contends, on the one

hand, that all data is situated and, therefore, understood and described only within its context, and, on the other, that all consideration of that data entails heavy involvement by the interpreter. This is not to say that "there is nothing out there which we consider," but it is to say that there is no pure, isolated "thing in itself" that we come to understand and to describe, and that there is no immediate, non-observer-affected access to such a supposed "thing in itself." The second insight (concerning comprehensive explanation) contends, on the one hand, that all explanation is partial and perspectival, and that understanding of the reality around us, including texts, can only be achieved through the use of models, which models give an insight into one (or more) aspect of the object of interpretation, and, on the other, that the appearance of the data is affected depending upon which perspective and/or model one uses. This is not to say that no type of large-scale understanding can be achieved, but it is to say that paradox is at the heart of all reality, including the reality of texts. Both of these insights are, I believe, worthy to be embraced." (Section: The Contemporary Post-Modern Context, paragraph 5)

Essential Element: This comment is associated with the essential element approaches of hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is additive to my understanding of the integration of general hermeneutical theory with a Lutheran approach to hermeneutics. Voelz makes the argument that the loss of the modern view of objectivity is no threat to faithful interpretation. Nor is the insight that all understanding is contextual a threat to faithful interpretation.

Contextualization: While this paper is over a decade old, it is seminal as it expresses core elements of Dr. Voelz's view fusing contemporary hermeneutics with traditional Lutheran concerns. I especially appreciate his point that just because we realize there is no appropriation of a "thing in itself" this does not mean "there is nothing out there which we consider". Indeed, the fact that something is out there, an other (or Other/God) who communicates to us gives the possibility of increased understanding as understood by the concept "fusion of horizons". Even if our understanding is "partial and perspectival" it is not necessarily by that point misunderstanding nor suggest that the author/speaker will necessarily be misunderstood or that the only understanding that matters is that of the hearer and not also the intended understanding the author seeks to convey. There is an element of the paradox in epistemology and hermeneutics. Lutherans are comfortable with paradox.

Comment 7:

Quote/Paraphrase "All of this may be viewed in yet another way. Readers/receptors are themselves complexes of beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, ideas, experiences, and so forth. When they interpret, these are brought into connection with the text as interpretation takes place and proceeds. The readers' beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, ideas, experiences, and so on, become part of the matrix for textual interpretation so that nothing is interpreted in a text unless it is part of a matrix with what the interpreters are as persons. They are, as it were, texts themselves, complementary "second texts," we might say, which are always a factor in textual interpretation." (Section: Concerning Objectivity, paragraph 7)

Essential Element: This comment is associated with the essential element principles of hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is additive to my understanding of the “fusion of horizons”. The idea of a matrix generates a picture of a reader bringing not just a wide but limited view of his/her world to bear, but a constellation of existing understandings, conscious and unconscious, strong and weak, formed from many sources (as the stars of a constellation are themselves of differing types). A belief is different from an experience, a value different from a belief, and so forth. As stars exert influence on one another through gravity forming into large systems of clusters and even galaxies, our constellation of understandings, emotions, beliefs, expectations, hopes, dreams, and so forth has a strong influence over the outcome of our understanding.

Contextualization: This recognition opens a broader awareness of the complexity of understanding with implications for the goal of making oneself and one’s community understandable. This also suggests a possible approach for qualitative and quantitative research as emotions, beliefs, preferences, values, and so forth can be examined across a range of people looking for similarities and differences regarding specific subjects.

Comment 8:

Quote/Paraphrase

Voelz suggests that readers will interpret authors as making broad generalized statements but later will qualify their previous thoughts with restrictions. For instance, Paul will proclaim in Christ there is no male nor female but argue that

women should not be pastors. Some interpreters will see in these proclamations an internal inconsistency suggesting prejudice or hypocrisy. Voelz suggests that these interpretations are missing and that the so-called general statements are themselves contextualized to a specific issue. For instance, Paul is addressing the question of status regarding salvation before God in the former statement, something different from the issue of who can be a pastor. (Section: Concerning Objectivity, paragraph 5)

Essential Element: This comment is associated with the essential element principles of hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is additive to my understanding of contextual understanding and the importance of historical context in understanding authorial intent. Here we see that a lack of appreciation of historical context can lead to a preunderstanding that a certain Scriptural teaching must be a broad general premise governing all that falls within its orbit.

Contextualization: Here we find in the traditional approach of Lutheran exegesis and two of its principles (Scripture interprets Scripture, Scripture is understood in its historic context) suggesting that traditional hermeneutical values in understanding the historic context can elaborate on the authorial intent of the statement helping the reader as he/she interprets seek a genuine understanding as their horizon fuses with the horizon of the author. Lack of knowledge (here lack of historical knowledge) or a predisposed preference to hearing a text a certain way (I would like to see women pastors) leads to seeing a contradiction in the author where contradiction did not exist. This dynamic leading that can lead to

misunderstanding of another is operative not just in our examination of the Biblical text, but in our reception of any communication from another human being.

Comment 9:

Quote/Paraphrase “More positively expressed, adequate interpretation of a text is not to have no assumptions; rather, it is to proceed with the proper assumptions. Readers are not to have no involvement; rather they are to be involved in the proper way.” (Section: Concerning Objectivity, paragraph 8)

“A corollary can be seen when we further ask where one finds the implied readers of the Bible or any other text. The answer of post-modern criticism is, and the answer of the church traditionally has been that one does not find them by looking for an individual, for a reader is not alone. Readers are taught to read” ... “A valid interpreter of a text, then, is that person who assumes the role ‘required,’ as it were, by a given text, who becomes the reader ‘implied’ or called for by that very text. And such a one is formed to assume that role by a community, a community which has assumed that role itself.” (paragraph 9)

Essential Element: This comment is associated with the element principles of hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is additive to my understanding of the role of the interpretive community in coming to a valid interpretation of a given text or communication. This comment also has a variant element. Voelz is here elaborating on the importance of a shared tradition as a shared framework for it is impossible to come to a text without assumptions. A tradition helps us to

have the “proper assumptions” which implies that a proper understanding of the text will commence. This would argue that a community with a shared tradition that is congenial toward a text will be more likely to interpret that text as the author intended it to be heard. This is a valid point. But the extension of this point is worthy of consideration. Does this imply that a community (or individual) that has a non-congenial view of a text cannot possibly engage that text in a way that his or her assumptions and prejudices could not be overcome by the text fusing the horizon of text and reader without the aid of a congenial interpreter from the community?

Contextualization: My first reaction to this concept regards the sufficiency of Scripture. Historically the position of the conservative side of the Lutheran church has held that faith and practice are informed by scripture alone. Conservative Lutheran theologians have been critical of Christian traditions which proclaim understanding comes from a combination of sources such as scripture, reason (or experience), and tradition. I have observed in recent years an increase in conversation within my conservative Lutheran denomination, the LCMS, regarding the value of tradition for enabling and framing understanding, especially the Lutheran Confessions. Is this a conflict or a paradox?

But to the other point, what is the implication for communicating to someone outside the community of the church, for witness and evangelism, for making our proclamation understandable? Is a shared tradition absolutely necessary for a fusion of horizons, for seeing another’s viewpoint, for true understanding? This is something I need to ponder and consider. At this point, I

have mixed feelings on the subject. This is one of the areas of hermeneutics that troubles me. I see the value of tradition for enabling and framing but also the danger that it can impose meaning and restrict proper understanding if applied with equal authority to Scripture.

Source Four: Thistelton, Anthony C. (2019). *Why hermeneutics?: An appeal culminating with Ricoeur*. <https://www.scribd.com/book/442436770/Why-Hermeneutics-An-Appeal-Culminating-with-Ricoeur>

Comment 10:

Quote/Paraphrase “When some Christians approach the Bible, they may commit themselves (even tacitly) to a *covenant of* obedience and direction to the one who, they believe, speaks to them through the biblical text. They come to the text as readers who are already committed to listening and being directed. When they approach a biblical text, they do not wish to hear only themselves or their own opinions bounced back from the text.” (p. 9)

Essential Element: This comment is associated with the element principles of hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is additive to my understanding of the role of the interpretive community in understanding a text. This parallels Voelz when he discusses the importance of the community in interpreting the text. Thistleton suggests that the congeniality toward the text is of a specific flavor, what he calls “a covenant of obedience”. It is a form of humbling oneself under the text. Christians are not just congenial as an interpretive community because they find in the text values and viewpoints in agreement with those held prior, but

accept that the text makes a claim upon the hearer to modify one's viewpoint being directed by God's Word. There is an openness to divine revelation even if it means surrendering cherished points of view.

Contextualization: We are indeed as believers called to humble ourselves before God's Word. But this does not come naturally. As we see in the story of Peter and Jesus in Matthew 16, just after Peter has proclaimed Jesus as the Christ, he rejects what Jesus says that means. He has his mind on the things of men as Jesus says. He is not "open" but "closed". He is not willing to be transformed. He is resistant to the fusion of horizons. This is the natural state of the fallen human being. The Old Adam is ever resistant to the Word of God. Lutheran theology recognizes that only the work of the Holy Spirit can bring us to faith as He works through the Word. So indeed, where we find a faithful Christian community operating to validly interpret the text under a "covenant of obedience" such insight does not help us to make our views understandable. This emphasis may comfort Christians in the face of contemporary regarding the processes of understanding that our understanding can still be valid, but it is not sufficient to help us overcome the gap to communicate to those who are not yet congenial and who are resistant to such "obedience". It is worthy to note though that a reader who is non-congenial or even opposed to the text is likely to not only disagree with the text but misunderstand it.

Comment 11:

Quote/Paraphrase The author notes that Schleiermacher had the goal to relive and rethink the thoughts and feelings of the author utilizing the principle of the

hermeneutical circle. (pp. 17-18) He writes, “The art of speaking and the art of understanding stand in relation to each other, speaking being only the outer side of thinking. . . . Speaking is the medium for the communal thought. . . . Every act of speaking is related to both the totality of the language and the totality of the speaker’s thoughts.” In this respect the scope of hermeneutics is almost limitless, and Schleiermacher was right to stress this. Hermeneutics is much more than a way of coping (contra Rorty), it is something more fundamental. Schleiermacher also stresses that the effects of a communication belong equally to hermeneutics. He writes, “The idea of the work can be understood only by the joint consideration of two factors: the content of the text and the range of effects.” The notion of a lone interpreter giving privilege to a text is not Schleiermacher’s concern. (p.19)

Essential Element: This comment is associated with the essential elements history of hermeneutics, approaches to hermeneutics, and principles of hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is additive to my understanding of the development of classical hermeneutics as well as relating the concepts of the hermeneutical circle to the fusion of horizons. The author finds the possibility of communal thought is found in a shared language. Communication can be effective because of a shared language. As we engage with an author, seeking to understand his point in view of the wider system of his understanding, and as his points help us to grasp his wider understanding, we can come to an understanding of the author because of a shared language.

Contextualization: While the author does not here address tradition, it is taken that language is functioning as a shared expression of a common understanding or culture that enables effective communication even between diverse viewpoints. This suggests that because language is somewhat effective as we observe conversations, within our micro-traditions there must be some wider common ground that informs our language and hence enables conversation. This may point forward to an approach for how we can effectively make ourselves understandable to others who hold divergent views and come to an understanding of others as well.

Comment 12:

Quote/Paraphrase “Dilthey’s major point is that an interpreter should ‘re-live’ (*nacherleben*) the experiences of the other by stepping out of his or her shoes and exercising ‘sympathy’ (*Hineinversetzen*) or ‘transposition.’ Understanding ‘the other’ requires such rapport with the other that Dilthey stated, ‘Understanding (*Verstehen*) is the rediscovery of the ‘I’ in the ‘you.’” (p. 26)

Essential Element: This comment is related to the essential elements history of hermeneutics, principles of hermeneutics, and approaches to hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is additive to my understanding of classical hermeneutics as well dialectic nature of interpretation that can facilitate a fusion of horizons. Understanding requires a relationship.

Contextualization: Years ago, in my undergraduate study of philosophy I began to appreciate the correlational importance to the creation of life and understanding. As Dr. Kim Rogers was fond of saying, it is not enough to say as

Ortega does that “I am myself and my circumstances”, but we make our together making our lives in our circumstances. This would certainly apply to how we make understandings. As we consider the roles of prejudgments, personal horizons, tradition enabling shared conversation, and the impact of the hermeneutical spiral, it is good to be reminded how deeply personal we are. I recall Martin Buber’s belief that for a person to be a genuine “I” he must relate to other people as another “I” rather than as an object or “it”. This requires as Dilthey suggests “rapport”, some connection, some sense of fellowship, and common life so that we can step into another’s shoes and understand with empathy. If as Christians who are increasingly dismissed in our Western cultural wars wish to be heard, we may find ourselves being more productive by pursuing a course toward empathy. We may seek to be more empathetic toward others, and by building relationships hope to find others more empathetic toward us. If we wish others to open the boundaries of their horizons to us, we shall have to open our boundaries to them. We need not necessarily agree with them, fusion does not always mean adopting, but it does mean understanding.

Comment 13:

Quote/Paraphrase “Ricoeur emphasizes our dependence on a deposit of truth which is given by divine revelation, but which must *not be frozen but interpreted for today*. Many other interpreters, especially of biblical texts, have stressed this point. But here sensitivity is required. Tradition must not be substituted with some construct that some writers in the 1960s and 1970s called the “needs of modern man.” That would be to replace tradition with a human-made construct where

texts simply mirror the interpreter, or perhaps “anything goes.” Ricoeur is robust about the need to avoid “idolatry” (in the sense of making an image of the self and venerating it). He points out that we have not yet finished with doing away the idols; man-made interpretation must be *interpretation*, not simply a new creation by the “interpreter.” And that means taking interpretative tradition seriously. On the one hand, some criterion of *continuity* must be respected; on the other hand, these diverse layers of meaning form part of Ricoeur’s legitimate quest for *creative innovation*.”

Essential Element: This comment refers to the essential elements of the history of hermeneutics, principles of hermeneutics, and approaches of hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is additive to my understanding of contemporary philosophical hermeneutics, critical hermeneutics, as well as contextuality, that all understanding is application (Gadamer), and the role or preunderstanding or prejudice. Ricoeur is normally classed as a critical theorist yet is here making points congenial to a more philosophical approach. Ricoeur, a critic who is very willing to critically appraise contemporary beliefs to overcome oppression for a better future, is seen as recognizing the value of what has come before.

Contextualization: I appreciate that Ricoeur in his critical approach does not as so many do throw out the baby with the bathwater when considering scripture. He stresses that it must be applied to today, “interpreted for today” but cautions against creating idols of our preferences and prejudices as we fit the text into our contemporary context. I appreciate his recognition that the “interpretive

tradition” must be taken “seriously” which leads me to consider a more congenial reading of critical theory. Here again, we see a paradox in that in calling for “creative innovation” “some criterion of continuity must be respected”. He makes a valid point that real understanding is not just “anything goes” but respects what the author seeks to convey. One may not agree with the original author, but true understanding must give place to the author’s voice. To make the author say what we want him or her to say, or to make God say what we want God to say, is the construction of an idol, a false reality upon which we place our trust.

Source Five: Fuchs, S., & Freitas, A. C. (2021). An essay on culture. *Política & Sociedade*, 20(49), 134–162. <https://doi.org/10.5007/2175-7984.2021.83381>

Comment 14:

Quote/Paraphrase “A sign of this arrival is values being suspected as ideological rationalizations and inflations in which class or status interests and the will-to-power present themselves as Truth. In the light of this truth, culture, and values eventually appear as nothing but symbolic objects and cultural capital. The nihilistic erosion of the substance of values means that culture is exhausted and finished, giving rise to, and enabling, its very flourishing as political economics, symbolic industry, and cultural administration.” (p. 134)

Essential Element: This comment applies to the essential element approaches of hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is variant to my understanding of culture as the context for understanding. The author validates the concept that “values” are merely symbolic and capital, that is instruments to be wielded for

power. She is correct that a significant segment of our Western community indeed sees culture as finished as far as establishing universal values (a metanarrative). But the idea that out of such “exhausting” culture can flourish used as an instrument of power is overly optimistic.

Contextualization: While the author is certainly describing a cultural transformation taking place within at least significant segments of our population, I would hardly use the word “flourishing” for what is being enabled. Gadamer and others have discussed the importance of tradition, which I understood as a shared space with at least some measure of shared held understandings, as a significant enabler for further understanding of others, for conversation. The author’s approach to sterilizing culture and turning it into just another instrument to be manipulated for power is hardly conducive to the sustainment of civilization or discourse. We need in my opinion more appreciation of our cultural heritage not just turning the critical lens upon our current culture and its roots in the past, but also being willing to acknowledge where beliefs and values have facilitated human life and where their demise is hurting human lives. We need to look no further than the demise of the nuclear family as a cultural metanarrative.

Comment 15:

Quote/Paraphrase “What, if Bourdieu is right, is art? In itself, in its substance, art is nothing. Art has no, or no longer, a truth of its own. The nothingness of art is indicated in the “whatever”. Art is whatever artists create, and an artist is whoever is recognized by other recognized artists. To be an artist and a work of art, amounts to having accepted, if often controversial, status in the art world. Art

is nothing as such and, as such, no work is a work of art. Art is nothing but that which is recognized as art in the field or system of art: "The work of art is an object which exists as such only by virtue of the (collective) belief which knows and acknowledges it as a work of art" (BOURDIEU, 1993, p. 35)." (p.136)

Essential Element: This comment relates to the approaches of hermeneutics as well as principles of hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is additive to my understanding of how postmodern interpretive approaches are operating as well as expanding my understanding of the role of the interpretive community and the role of tradition.

Contextualization: The author here is using the illustration of art, implying that because the object exists, it is valued, however, only because it is recognized by a community. This illustrates not just a function of a community united by common tastes (such as the art world) suggesting a recognition of the increasing tribalization that Lyotard was talking about in the last 20th century. Do we truly want a society that is operative only at the level of tribal affiliation? Before we exposed students to the arts and humanities to cultivate an appreciative understanding of the medium. Today we see many universities dispensing with the humanities. We can understand how tribalism limits conversation and social connection, inhibiting the hermeneutical enterprise. This leads me to consider a caution with emphasizing our reliance upon tradition and the interpretive community within our Lutheran approach to interpretation and understanding. While I certainly appreciate this as an operative dynamic in human understanding,

do we want to uphold this approach as the best approach? How can we legitimately be critical of tribalism on the one hand and uphold it as having value on the other hand? Certainly, we can recognize that this view can lead to the desire to engineer a fusion of horizons, that is use whatever instruments of power are at hand including the powers that influence and shape culture, to create a kind of engineered common ground that can be oppressive and dangerous. We have here only to consider Orwell's 1984 as a warning in this regard. So while a fusion of horizons is a recognition of how humans understand, it is also recognized this can be abused when one horizon seeks to invade and overpower another by rewriting the rules of the game. This is something I will have to ponder more as my course of study goes on.

Comment 16:

Quote/Paraphrase The author posits that what is happening with culture is described by a movement into nihilism with the collapse of Western metaphysics and values. Nihilism is annihilating culture and the belief in the possibility of a "...higher, moral, just and true world together". (p. 152) She holds that more is occurring than a mere skepticism toward truth. (p. 153) "...Platonic-Christian metaphysics and ethics and aesthetics in their entirety, is nihilist through and through. It is nihilism because it thinks nothing of life. It distrusts and devalues life and the body with its unreliable senses. Nihilism is condescendence and distrust in the will and the appetites. Nihilism is an ending, the ending of its own beginning, the beginning of metaphysics as ontotheology. Nietzsche sees the origin and history of the West as the religious and moral damnation of and

revenge against, this world and this life in it as they really are. All Platonism and idealism condemn this life and this world as a nothing.” (p. 153)

Essential Element: This comment relates to the essential element approaches of hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is additive to my understanding of contemporary cultural processes and their implications as well as leading to considerations of the limitations of prejudgments and the use of tradition by an interpretive community.

Contextualization: The author makes a valuable point about the influence of dualism within the Christian tradition leading me to consider how this has hindered Christianity from seriously engaging in contemporary matters. Various terms are being thrown about to label this contemporary time at the beginning of the 21st century. I have heard post-post-modern, post-secular, and so forth. I prefer the term “the anthropic age”. It seems one of the consistent questions from many differing perspectives relates to how we understand what it means to be a human being and to live a human life. Questions of the body have come to the forefront in the debates regarding abortion rights and transgender issues. These have expanded to include research and discussion of Gen Z’s dependent integration with technology and social media. These questions can be anticipated to become more complex when technology is integrated into the physical body transforming human life. A world view of the dualism of spirit and body which discounts the value of the body is giving way. This has implications for the Christian church as it deals not only with eternal matters but also temporal ones.

Perhaps an awareness should grow that the divide between the two is not as wide as in a Platonic mindset. The corruption of sin infects not only our temporal lives but also our view of eternity. God certainly deigns to operate in the world physically, through the incarnation of Christ, and through the ministry of the sacraments (which is not adopted by Christian traditions heavily influenced by a Platonic worldview). Nihilism may have been the logical outcome of the development of Western culture flowing out of classical Greece into the Middle Ages adoption of Neo-Platonism but it is certainly not a desert that anyone should want to camp in. The idea of the embodiment of human life also points to a potential way forward for understanding and application of the human condition.

Source Six: Sherman, J. H. (2023). Philosophy of religion in a fragmented age: Practice and participatory realism. *Religions*, 14(3), 424. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030424>

Comment 17:

Quote/Paraphrase “However, against post-Enlightenment readings of tradition and prejudice as stumbling blocks on the way to truth, Gadamer sees tradition as truth-conducive, at least within the realm of the humanities. As Gadamer puts it, ‘this distance is also proximity’. Why? What is it that allows tradition to bring us into deeper forms of experience and understanding? Ongoing initiation into a tradition brings one into contact with the meaningfulness of the past through the medium of our own transformed subjectivity.” (p.6)

Essential Element: This comment is related to approaches of hermeneutics as well as principles of hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is additive to my understanding of philosophical hermeneutics and the role that tradition plays in facilitating transformational understanding.

Contextualization: The loss of the belief that reason can give access to and appropriate an object or other in itself, left a vacuum for the possibility of understanding. If all understanding, belief, value, and even knowledge are relative and subjective, it is difficult to find a reason to explain, even less, justify a communal understanding of human life. Indeed, many critical theories flowing out of this postmodern development dismiss tradition as just one instrument utilized for oppression. Gadamer points out the necessity of some common toolbox of ideas and conceptions shaped and shared within the language for even the possibility of communication and understanding. Since human beings do indeed communicate and create understanding by making themselves understood to others, evidence exists that tradition does indeed facilitate productive conversation and is necessary. Can tradition be used as an instrument of oppression? Certainly. Must it always be so? Not necessarily. It can be the grounds for transformation. But it may also point out something of interest, that perhaps those who came before got something correct. We may recognize that the wheel has value, and we don't have to reinvent the wheel in every generation, just come to an appreciation of its value.

Source Seven: Stephenson, B. (2021). Gadamer's appropriation of pietism. *Philosophies*, 6(2), Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.3390/philosophies6020030>

Comment 18:

Quote/Paraphrase “Gadamer’s debt to Pietist thought, examining his appropriation and use of the theology of Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–1782), a leading figure in Swabian Pietism, whose ideas had a significant impact in theological circles and broader cultural life. Gadamer’s critique of the Enlightenment’s ‘prejudice against prejudice,’ owes a debt to the Pietist conception of the *sensus communis* and his practical philosophy to Pietism’s emphasis on ‘application’ as a fundamental aspect of a hermeneutical triad” (p.1)

Essential Element: This comment is associated with approaches of hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is additive to my understanding of how the fusion of horizons does not just require merging one’s understanding with the writer/speaker’s through considering their context in relationship to my own, but that such understanding will have application. This led me to consider the importance of the “triad”.

Contextualization: Here the author suggests that in an encounter between one point of view and another, the third point of intersection is that of application. While it is true that most likely new understanding will result in new applications, it may not necessarily be so. That is a thought to consider for another day. But the idea of the triad leads me to consider that perhaps more essential for Gadamer is the triadic structure of understanding as text, interpreter, and tradition. Ricoeur uses the concept of triad in his approach to hermeneutics linking the text, the interpreter, and the context in which the text and interpreter exist. Here I think his use of “context” as one part of the triad can be misunderstood to not recognize

that the context of the author/text/speaker may and likely will have unique differences from the context of the interpreter. But that said, there is a point where understanding between two parties must be triadic. In the sense of a language game, there has to be some common game that is being played and some common understanding of the rules or there is merely random nonsense.

Understanding is the opposite of nonsense. So likely the author is picking up on something vital by talking about “common sense” as well as application. I would suggest that “common sense” in Gadamer’s approach as expressed in the framework of tradition is a stronger triadic element. The necessity of a triadic element for a fusion of horizons is important. Two people who come together with different viewpoints must have some common set of language and concepts to be able to communicate effectively. As applied to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel, what common set of understanding, what common overlap of contexts can be utilized upon which to stand and begin a conversation that may be understandable? As the author discusses how pietism bridges faith and daily life, what part of daily life can stand as our bridge?

Source Eight: Cibotaru, V. (2023). Interreligious dialogue: a challenge for phenomenology.

religions, 14(3), 302. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030302>

Comment 19:

Quote/Paraphrase “Indeed, interreligious dialogue is problematic if we consider the understanding of religion as a form of absolute truth proper at least for a certain group of religious persons (Basset 1996), or the tension characteristic of interreligious dialogue between openness towards religious alterity and closedness

around a specific religious identity (Moyaert 2011). Hence, interreligious dialogue must avoid the dilemma of complete faithfulness to one's own religious tradition, and on the other hand the betrayal of this tradition. As some scholars argue, it is possible to avoid this dilemma through hermeneutic openness toward the religious other, grounding on interreligious translation (Moyaert 2011). This hermeneutic openness aims at interreligious hospitality (Moyaert 2011, 2014) which could be conceived as a specific form of radical hospitality...openness toward the stranger.” (p. 2)

“This tension can have variable degrees, ranging from rigid and closed identitarian experiences of the interreligious space to fluid interreligious experiences, which can entail belonging to different religious communities and traditions or can be even not structured around the experience of the membership of a specific religious community.” (p.7)

Essential Element: This comment is associated with the essential element principles of hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is additive and variant to my understanding of the role of prejudice and its impact on the fusion of horizons.

Contextualization: The author suggests for interreligious dialogue some middle approach between “complete faithfulness” or “closedness around a specific religious identity” and “betrayal of this tradition” must be found. Such an observation could be extended to any sort of competing worldviews. Her point is well taken regarding the value of “hospitality” and “openness to the stranger”. Such congeniality can generate the proximity needed for genuine conversation

and new understanding. I would discount the idea that new understanding will always mean the loss of some element of one's prior understanding, in this case, some modification of one's religious views. I would posit that it is possible to engage another's viewpoint and come to a better and more genuine understanding of it without having to surrender one's own or even necessarily modify one's own.

That said, this conversation about being open and closed brings up an important additional insight into the fusion of horizons. One's personal horizon could be seen as a system, a complex or constellation of understandings, some near, some far, some exerting more influence, others less. An entire starfield of concepts, values, beliefs, experiences, and understandings lie at our disposal within our minds. The thing about a system, it has a boundary. The boundary serves to filter what comes in and what comes out, what is part of the system, and what is not. When two bubbles of personal understanding encounter one another, the permeability of the border of the person's system factors into the strength and quality of the fusion. A strong boundary pushing its way through a weak one may transform the other without being transformed much itself. Two strong boundaries, two closed ones, may just bounce off one another. Two weak boundaries may flounder in understanding disconnected from the realities of the world. The point is that how open or closed one's own boundary in one's own horizon can be measured and hence an empirical insight into the possibility for understanding could be determined between examined parties. Perhaps.

Source Nine: Segura-Ballar, G. (2021). Defending “Western” values: Reactionary neoliberalism in the Americas. *CLCWeb*, 23(1). <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.4016>

Comment 20:

Quote/Paraphrase

“Under the neoliberal order, liberal democratic principles are redefined by market rationality. Wendy Brown analyzes how liberal democracy has been displaced by neoliberal political rationality. The rhetoric of democracy has become just a way to legitimize antidemocratic imperial and domestic policy. Brown argues that “neoliberalism borrows extensively from the old regime to legitimize itself even as it develops new codes of legitimacy” (“Neoliberalism and the End” 47). I argue that one source of legitimacy is the articulation of civilizational discourses around the defense of moral and “Western” values that are utilized not only to justify racist, discriminatory, and exclusive discourses and actions but also to legitimize even more authoritarian neo-liberalization processes. Thus, the defense of “Western” values not only endorses an authoritarian project, but “Western” values have become redefined by and imbricated with neoliberal values themselves. Thus, the defense of the West functions to legitimize old and new forms of authoritarianism and neo-liberalization processes, and, at the same time, it has become a strategy to celebrate essentialized “Western values,” such as capitalist social relations, the heteronormative family, and Judeo-Christian morality against “globalists,” “cultural elites,” “foreign invaders,” and “internal enemies.” (p.7)

Essential Element: This comment is associated with the essential element principles of hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is additive to my understanding of the role of the fusion of horizons in forming cultures and traditions and shaping new understanding but not always in the best of ways. The author here sees a fusion occurring within the West between neoliberalism and Judeo-Christian worldviews. This observation feeds a critical view of Judeo-Christian viewpoints from the author's critical understanding of neoliberalism.

Contextualization: This comment, and others like it, have pointed out how a fusion of horizons is not always a good thing. In the Western culture wars, traditional liberals (understood to represent those who uphold traditional Western values such as individual liberty, meritocracy, and so forth) and traditional Christians may find common ground in anxiety regarding change, even a shared insight into some of shared dangers to their worldviews that postmodern/critical changes may bring. Thus there is pressure to form an alliance and in this alliance, a fusion of ideas is happening. Thus is Christianity becoming something different than it was? In the desire to uphold the core values of our faith, are we absorbing the core values of a secular worldview? This gives the insight that a fusion of horizons can in some cases be more like an amoeba consuming its cousins molding it into itself. While this certainly happens throughout history, it falls to Christian leaders to examine this phenomenon for its faithfulness to our Christian identity and its utility. Do we invite unnecessary criticism as we seek out allies in the culture wars?

Source Ten: Blount, B. K. (2019). The souls of biblical folks and the potential for meaning.

Journal of Biblical Literature, 138(1), 6–21. <https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1381.2019.1382>

Comment 21:

Quote/Paraphrase “To survive in this bifurcated world of imposed Otherness, African Americans, according to Du Bois, had to become bicultural. Because African Americans were not only Othered but dis-empowered and therefore disadvantaged by their Otherness-for theirs was a societally sanctioned, ruthlessly enforced Other-hood-to survive, African Americans had to read and appropriately react from the space of those who had Othered them. ‘We who are dark can see America in a way that America cannot.’ This prescience came with a cost. The necessity to acquire it threatened the very soul of black folks, who had to occupy and absorb the space of those who had Othered them without losing hold of the spiritual mooring of their own space... All are Othered from each Other by its very existence. It is because interpretive power rests on the historical, literary scientific side that cultural hermeneuts are required to become at the very least bicultural, knowing their own space and its influence on text meaning as well as they know the historical and literary principles that allegedly unearth static text meaning. But this prescience comes with a cost. The necessity to acquire it threatens the very soul of the cultural hermeneut, who must occupy and absorb the space of the objective Other without losing hold of the spiritual mooring of his own space.”

Essential Element: This comment is associated with the essential element principles of hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is additive to my understanding of the interplay of contextualization, cultural identity and tradition,

preunderstanding, and the fusion of horizons. The author is speaking of his very personal cultural experience regarding the necessary ground for and the potential cost of interacting with an oppressive culture.

Contextualization: It is well taken to see through the eyes of a black man for this white man to grasp what is asked of him to operate within a wider culture.

African Americans have been “othered” and viewed for generations as somehow less and less valuable to society. It is hoped that this is changing. But the author offers more for our understanding of hermeneutics and life together.

He makes the point that “all are Othered from each Other by its very existence”.

Certain existential philosophers such as Martin Buber make similar observations.

One true insight from a critical theory and postmodern view (Derrida, Foucault, etc.) is that people not only other one another but do this in such a way that we

marginalize and diminish the presence and significance of the other. One

problem with certain critical approaches is the temptation to simply flip the script,

the privilege the non-privileged over the privileged as the social correction

necessary. This simply continues the same human problem. Only the victim

changes. The other point that is well taken regards the potential cost in the fusion

of horizons of community and culture. He speaks of the pressure to “occupy and

absorb” the space (think values, beliefs, way of life) of the ones who othered him

but having to do so without losing his own space and hence his identity. This is

the challenge of when we fuse horizons. How do we maintain integrity as our own

person, as our own community, (i.e., as a Christian community) without losing

ourselves into a greater whole? This is an especially important question for

Christians as our culture becomes increasingly post-Christian and a competing and often opposing worldview becomes dominant.

Source Eleven: Gadamer, H. (1976). *Philosophical hermeneutics*. University of California Press.

Comment 22:

Quote/Paraphrase “This process of interpretation takes place ever we “understand,” especially when we see through prejudices or tear away the pretenses that hide reality...But does this mean, that we “understand” only to see through pretexts or unmask false pretentions? Habermas’s Marxist critique of ideology appears to presuppose this meaning...reflection is not always an unavoidable step. Towards dissolving prior convictions. Authority is not always wrong.” (pp. 32-33)

Essential Element: This comment is associated with the essential element principles of hermeneutics.

Additive/Variant Analysis: This comment is additive to my understanding of the role of tradition and authority in Gadamer’s thought. He explains that his awareness of the role of subjectivity in interpretation and the dynamics of the fusion of horizons, does not necessarily lead to the idea that authority cannot be accurate nor have no claim in our lives.

Contextualization: This is a helpful insight into understanding Gadamer, who has become an instrumental voice in the current conversation regarding interpretation and communal activity. While he adopts and utilizes some of the same insights that are utilized by critical theory, he doesn’t throw out the baby with the bathwater. The world is a real place, it is not just a world constructed in

our minds. While it is true there are many aspects of human life that God has left fluid and moldable, to think that all that exists is playdough is unreasonable.

There are givens in the world that both provide possibility and limitation to the scope of human life, especially human life together. God's Word exists as the premier authority on the design of human life as it is the Word of the Creator Himself. But beyond that, there is certainly humanly acquired knowledge that has proven the test of time (such as the value of the nuclear family for sustaining and growing civilization) that holds its own as an authority. The question when we observe abuse and oppression is not to cast out the notion of accountability to something beyond us, but to ask where our values and norms that we are holding one another accountable to find their source. Are they found in mercurial human society imposing power over others? Or do they reflect something deeper, the truths of nature and the truth of God?

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