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Source: *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, New Series, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1992), pp. 25-66

Published by: Penn State University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25670015>

Accessed: 04-10-2015 12:09 UTC

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VICTOR KESTENBAUM

“Meaning on the Model of Truth”:
Dewey and Gadamer on Habit and
Vorurteil

The need of reason is not inspired by the quest for truth but by the quest for meaning. And truth and meaning are not the same. The basic fallacy, taking precedence over all specific metaphysical fallacies, is to interpret meaning on the model of truth.

Hannah Arendt
Introduction to *The Life of the Mind*

I

That “truth and meaning are not the same” was, I think, the central principle and vision of Dewey’s philosophy. In habit Dewey believed he had found the concept best suited to challenge the view that meanings are apprehended only through actual or presupposed judgments about truth. For Dewey, not all meaning, certainly not all habitual meaning, anticipates truth; the intentionality of habitual meaning overflows truths and claims to truth at every turn. For Gadamer, on the other hand, reason and understanding are inspired by the quest for truth. I believe there is little doubt that Gadamer does, in Arendt’s phrase, “interpret meaning on the model of truth.” Truth for Gadamer is the standard or measure of understanding, and it is through *Vorurteil* that this measure is situated in the experienced world.

Now many would say that if Gadamer is read as a Heideggerian then not only is his interpretation of meaning on the model of truth acceptable but indeed it constitutes a major part of his philosophical achievement. In

THE JOURNAL OF SPECULATIVE PHILOSOPHY, Vol. VI, No. 1, 1992.
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effect, my paper challenges the view that Gadamer has gone beyond epistemology, that he has transformed or transfigured the standard conception of knowledge and truth built around theories of correspondence, validation, justification, etc. Regardless of what he has extended or transfigured in Heidegger (itself not a wholly easy matter to determine), I do not think his rehabilitation of *Vorurteil* can serve him well in an attempt to “discover what is common to all modes of understanding. . . .”

In many respects my paper deepens a criticism of Gadamer made by Hubert L. Dreyfus over ten years ago. This criticism constitutes a very small portion of his article “Holism and Hermeneutics,” so I should like to quote it in its entirety (including Dreyfus’s own quotes):

Much of the confusion concerning hermeneutics in the current literature stems from the fact that Gadamer, who claims to be working out the implications of Heidegger’s notion of hermeneutics, never seems to have taken a stand on Heidegger’s claim that there is a level of everyday practice (the *Vorhabe*) beneath our theoretical presuppositions and assumptions (the *Vorsicht*). Gadamer often employs the right rhetoric, as when he says:

We always stand within tradition, and this is no objectifying process, i.e., we do not conceive of what tradition says as something other, something alien. It is always part of us . . . a recognition of ourselves which our later historical judgment would hardly see as a kind of knowledge [*Truth and Method*, p. 250].

But at times he seems to side with cognitivists like Quine. In describing the hermeneutic pre-understanding, instead of speaking of *Vorhabe*, he speaks of *Vorurteil* (prejudice or pre-judgment), which seems for him to be an implicit belief or assumption:

The isolation of *prejudice* clearly requires the suspension of its *validity* for us. For so long as our mind is influenced by a prejudice, we do not *know* and consider it as a *judgment* [*Truth and Method*, p. 266].¹

Dreyfus makes, I think, an important criticism of “Gadamer’s claim to be expounding Heideggerian hermeneutics, when, in fact, he fails to distinguish practice and theory. . . .”² Gadamer is not consistent, in Dreyfus’s view, in his portrayal of the background: Are the structures of pre-understanding more like belief (propositional knowledge, rules, representations) than practice (habits, customs, skills)? Dreyfus is sure that “the background is not beliefs, either explicit or implicit. . . .”³

While Dreyfus's criticism is sound as far as it goes, it does not go far enough. He is prevented from doing this for two reasons. First, his entire discussion of the nature of the background is in terms of practices, what he variously calls "background of practices," "cultural practices," "shared background practices," etc. This is too narrow, even if it does accurately represent what Heidegger means by *Vorhabe*. As I hope my discussion of Dewey will make clear, there is no particularly good reason to limit primordial understanding to practical meaning. We must turn to Dewey the pragmatist to learn the limits of practice. Second, Dreyfus is simply mistaken when he asserts that "Heidegger is the first, as far as I know, to have noted this non-cognitive precondition of all understanding, and to have seen its central importance."⁴ A decade before *Being and Time* was published, Dewey had already formulated his position that "the intellectual element is set in a context which is non-cognitive and which holds within it in suspense a vast complex of other qualities and things that in the experience itself are objects of esteem or aversion, of decision, of use, of suffering, of endeavor and revolt, not of knowledge."⁵ My approach to deepening Dreyfus's criticism of Gadamer will not be to extend his brief analysis of Gadamer's flawed grasp of Heidegger, but rather to view Gadamer in the context of Dewey's theory of habit, a theory that is at least as powerful as Heidegger's in accounting for the "non-cognitive precondition of all understanding."

Thus, I wish neither to challenge Gadamer's Heideggerian credentials, nor to accept them as if the general understanding that Gadamer is extending Heidegger is above criticism. My argument will be that *Vorurteil* interprets "meaning on the model of truth." The result is that Gadamer's theory of *Vorurteil* shrinks or constricts the concept of understanding by requiring meaning to be fitted to the world in the interstices of truth and the promises of truth. In opposition to this view, Dewey would agree with Arendt that the "need of reason is not inspired by the quest for truth but by the quest for meaning." Habit, I think, better captures reason's inspiration than does *Vorurteil*.

A preliminary look at Dewey's and Gadamer's most basic starting points will help orient the following discussion and establish some of its outlines. Where one might expect Dewey to see understanding as a capacity of beings who have problems, test hypotheses, and seek scientific knowledge as the fullest expression of the cognitive significance of experience, one instead finds Dewey insisting that "what is really 'in' experience extends much further than that which at any time is *known*."⁶ Where one might expect Gadamer to see understanding as a way of addressing the world freed

not only from scientific standards of cognitive significance, but also freed from the epistemological tradition of limiting the experiencing of meaning to decisions about the tenability of a belief and its promise as a knowledge claim, one instead finds Gadamer insisting that “the primordial significance of the idea of understanding is that of ‘knowing about something . . .’”⁷ For Dewey, the world’s meanings and its truths are ascertained independently of each other; habits are not recording devices for the retention and expression of truths. For Gadamer, meaning and truth come into being simultaneously because prejudices establish our initial “hold” on the world and these prejudgements—like judgements—are measured by their validity or legitimacy, their truth. The aim or desire of understanding is correctness, truth, knowledge. The correctness or truth of understanding depends upon the correctness or truth of the pre-understanding contained in one’s prejudices. Thus, Gadamer’s ambition is to show that true understanding—understanding wherein truth is distinguished from falsity—involves a range of truth more comprehensive than the scientific knowledge and truth provided by scientific method. Dewey’s position is that the range of understanding is more comprehensive than that contained in knowledge and truth claims, scientific or otherwise, because habit’s “hold” on the world cannot be measured simply or only by its truth or correctness. Habit and prejudice give us different versions of the nature and aim of understanding, because they provide very different accounts of the historicity of understanding, different accounts of the fore-structures of understanding, and generally different viewpoints on the kind of being it is who understands.

My procedure will be to focus on a limited number of texts relevant to habit and *Vorurteil*. From Gadamer, I will discuss Section II of the Second Part of *Truth and Method*, “Foundations of a Theory of Hermeneutical Experience.” I also will make use of two of Gadamer’s essays, “The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem,” and “The Problem of Historical Consciousness.” From Dewey I will rely primarily on two chapters from *Experience and Nature*: the 1925 and 1929 versions of the first chapter, “Experience and Philosophic Method,” and the eighth chapter, “Existence, Ideas and Consciousness.” In none of these chapters is habit specifically analyzed by Dewey, yet they present some essential features of his understanding of how things are “‘in’ experience” prior to their presence as objects of knowledge. I shall first present Dewey’s views on the habitual and then examine Gadamer’s views on prejudice and understanding in the context provided by Dewey. I shall then draw out some of the implications

of this comparison by examining an example of the hermeneutical experience offered by Gadamer: the reading of a letter. How do we understand a letter?

II

In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey says:

The word habit may seem twisted somewhat from its customary use when employed as we have been using it. But we need a word to express that kind of human activity which is influenced by prior activity and in that sense acquired; which contains within itself a certain ordering or systematization of minor elements of action; which is projective, dynamic in quality, ready for overt manifestation; and which is operative in some subdued subordinate form even when not obviously dominating activity. Habit even in its ordinary usage comes nearer to denoting these facts than any other word.⁸

"We need a word" that will satisfy four conditions. First, it must express the historical character of human experience; it must allow for the endurance of meaning of "prior activity." Second, it must express the ordered, organized nature of human activity. Third, it must be active; it must establish not merely a level of readiness or preparedness, but must project a context. Fourth, the word must express a power that is "operative" though in "subdued form," i.e., the word must suggest both presence and absence, the manifest and the anonymous.

At least as early as 1902, in the remarkable essay, "Interpretation of the Savage Mind,"⁹ Dewey was using habit as the concept best suited to do justice to the historical, organized, projective, anonymous features of experience. Habit is history naturalized, history become a nature. Habits record the outcomes of experience, organize the materials of present experience, and project the horizons within which present and future are specified or delineated, sometimes deliberately through critical reason and other times silently and anonymously. Our original access or opening to the world is founded on the creative, constitutive power of habitual meanings to pre-reflectively establish an accord between self and world. This primordial accord is taken up in many ways by human beings—labor, art, religion, everyday experience, science, etc. All these forms of understanding the world depend upon habit for their sense, because none of them are possible

without history, organization, projection, and the dialectic of presence and absence. Habit makes the world experienceable *as* laboring, appreciating, inferring, etc. Dewey nowhere better captured the centrality of habit than in his statement: "Through habits formed in intercourse with the world, we also inhabit the world."¹⁰

As late as 1949 Dewey was still advancing habit as the best "word" to account for the self and its world, objecting to Adelbert Ames, Jr., that "assumption" was "too *intellectual* a word to cover the active mechanism or apparatus"¹¹ in perceiving rooms as rectangular. We do not experience rooms as rectangular by virtue of acting on the assumption that they are; rather, we have the habit of perceiving rooms as rectangular. Dewey thus concluded that "the *assumption* that they are rectangular is in fact a net *intellectual* outcome of the habit . . ."¹² Dewey wholly rejected any epistemological or metaphysical stance that substituted "intellectual outcome" for lived experience; this rejection is based upon his belief that habit's power to silently record, organize, and project a world cannot be limited or reduced to the knowing subject's organization and projection of a world.

Dewey's use of the idea of habit in *Experience and Nature* is particularly important not merely because it occurs at roughly the half-way mark of his half century use of the concept, but because it unmistakably shows that habit was the basis of his theory of experience and not merely a component of a more restricted area of inquiry, for example, in *Democracy and Education* or *Human Nature and Conduct*. Dewey does not devote a chapter to habit in *Experience and Nature*, yet Chapter 1, "Experience and Philosophic Method," and Chapter 8, "Existence, Ideas, and Consciousness," constitute the rudiments of what might be called a metaphysics of habitual being. These chapters develop a theory of consciousness, meaning, and understanding that is in effect an elaboration of Dewey's theory of habit. What Dewey explicitly says about habit in these chapters is in turn an amplification or deepening of his metaphysical intent to discover some of the "general features of experienced things," particularly those connected with consciousness, experience, and understanding. This conceptual reciprocity is fundamental to Dewey's entire philosophical effort. Habit as historical, organized, projective, and anonymous is experience, is consciousness, is understanding.

Perhaps the strongest claim made in the first chapter of *Experience and Nature* is that being and being known are not equivalent. We understand the world as habitual beings, and because we do, our relationship to the world is not primarily an affair of knowledge or intellect. Dewey was

untiring in his criticism of epistemological and metaphysical positions that subscribed to this identification:

Being and *having* things in ways other than knowing them, in ways never identical with knowing them, exist, and are preconditions of reflection and knowledge. *Being* angry, stupid, wise, inquiring; *having* sugar, the light of day, money, houses and lands, friends, laws, masters, subjects, pain and joy, occur in dimensions incommensurable to knowing these things which we are and have and use, and which have and use us. Their existence is unique, and, strictly speaking, indescribable; they can *only be* and be *had*, and then be pointed to in reflection. In the proper sense of the word, their existence is absolute, being qualitative. All cognitive experience must start from and must terminate in being and having things in just such unique, irreparable and compelling ways. And until this fact is a commonplace in philosophy, the notion of experience will not be a truism for philosophers.¹³

For Dewey, understanding “must start from and must terminate in being and having things in just such unique, irreparable and compelling ways.” The fore-structures provided by habit cannot be restricted to epistemological functions and values.

Heidegger was right: Understanding establishes my world openness in ways that go far beyond knowledge, information, and assertions. As Glenn Gray has so well said, “We are attached to the world in a thousand ways.”¹⁴ The fore-meanings projected by habit are not simply underdeveloped, incomplete beliefs, assertions, or propositions. What appears or presents itself in experience is not necessarily a belief seeking validation as a candidate for knowledge. The profundity of the following statement is disguised by its brevity: “What is really ‘in’ experience extends much further than that which at any time is *known*.”¹⁵ A metaphysics of understanding must from the beginning disclaim the “intellectualism” Dewey identifies:

By “intellectualism” as an indictment is meant the theory that all experiencing is a mode of knowing, and that all subject-matter, all nature, is, in principle, to be reduced and transformed till it is defined in terms identical with the characteristics presented by refined objects of science as such. The assumption of “intellectual-

ism" goes contrary to the facts of what is primarily experienced. For things are objects to be treated, used, acted upon and with, enjoyed and endured, even more than things to be known. They are things had before they are things cognized.¹⁶

The ways in which I "have" the world are not all modes of knowing. If a theory of understanding is not to be prejudiced from the outset in favor of objects of knowledge and judgment, and not even necessarily scientific knowledge and judgment, it must recognize with Dewey that "unless there is breach of historic and natural continuity, cognitive experience must originate within that of a non-cognitive sort."¹⁷ Reflective experience is not the norm for all experience simply because reflective habits are not the standard or measure for all other habits.

The "being" and "having" that Dewey so respected are based upon habit; our "being" and "having" the world through habit compels us to acknowledge that "knowing is a connection of things which depends upon other and more primary connections between a self and thing."¹⁸ The "primary connections" to which Dewey refers are established in and through habit; failure to attend to these knowledge-transcending "primary connections" is the result of what he calls "selective simplification" or "selective emphasis."¹⁹ Dewey notes that "too often . . . the professed empiricist only substitutes a dialectical development of some notion about experience for an analysis of experience as it is humanly lived."²⁰ This tendency is not restricted to empiricists: "The commonest assumption of philosophies, common even to philosophies very different from one another, is the assumption of the identity of objects of knowledge and ultimately real objects."²¹ Because the field of habitual meanings and its projected horizon is not simply an epistemological field, experience must be respected as a concatenated, complex field composed of an enormous variety of habitual meanings:

Now the notion of experience, however devoid of differential subject-matter—since it includes all subject-matters—, at least tells us that we must not start with arbitrarily selected simples, and from them deduce the complex and varied, assigning what cannot be thus deduced to an inferior realm of being. It warns us that the tangled and complex is what we primarily find; that we work from and within it to discriminate, reduce, analyze; and that we must keep track of these activities, pointing to them, as well as to

the things upon which they are exercised, and to their refined conclusions.²²

To see knowledge as a simplification of experience will seem strange as long as knowledge is separated from the “primary connections between a self and thing,” connections founded upon habit. Habits fuse, dissolve, splinter, become stable and unstable, contradict and disagree with each other, confirm and agree with each other. Habit gives me a world of hues, intensities, shadings, hesitations, confidences, withdrawals, and openings. Habit’s grasp of the world, its understanding of it, cannot be reduced to the “refined conclusions” of knowledge.

This tendency to confuse habit and its intellectual outcomes is a characteristic of many philosophical orientations, some with distinctly different and seemingly incompatible perspectives. The range of possibilities solicited by habit cannot be restricted to the offerings of reflective experience, yet the tendency of philosophy is to do precisely this. Dewey says of the philosopher that:

instead of seeing that the product of knowing is *statement* of things, he is given to taking it as an *existential equivalent* of what things really are “in themselves,” so that the subject-matter of other modes of experience are deviations, shortcomings, or trespasses—or as the dialectical philosopher puts it, mere “phenomena.” The experiential or denotative method tells us that we must go behind the refinements and elaborations of reflective experience to the gross and compulsory things of our doings, enjoyments and sufferings—to the things that force us to labor, that satisfy needs, that surprise us with beauty, that compel obedience under penalty.²³

“The gross and compulsory things of our doings, enjoyments and sufferings” is not an epistemological foundation for Dewey, but rather the context within which historically situated practices can be interpreted in the light of the prevailing habits of mind that give these practices their sense and import. The historicity of understanding requires not merely a respect for context, practice, and purpose, but a grasp of how history is embodied in the individual: “A human being carries his past in his habitudes and habituations, and we can rightly observe and understand the latter only as we are aware of the history which is included within them.”²⁴

Habit and history motivate each other and embody each other. The

selective emphasis on known objects—the decontextualization of knowledge—distorts the human condition, not because it omits feeling, intuition, etc., but because it makes knowledge impossible: “Knowledge that is ubiquitous, all-inclusive and all-monopolizing, ceases to have meaning in losing all context; that it does not appear to do so when made supreme and self-sufficient is because it is literally impossible to exclude that context of non-cognitive but experienced subject-matter which gives what is *known* its import.”²⁵ Because we are habitual beings and not simply epistemological subjects seeking to reach agreement about the objects of the world, philosophers must resist the “exaggeration of the features of known objects at the expense of the qualities of objects of enjoyment and trouble, friendship and human association, art and industry. . . .”²⁶ Habit’s hold on the world—and understanding’s—exceeds the grasp of “traits characteristic of objects known.”

Because we are habitual beings, experience cannot be reduced to the known nor can it be reduced to consciousness:

Experience is something quite other than “consciousness,” that is, that which appears qualitatively and focally at a particular moment. The common man does not need to be told that ignorance is one of the chief features of experience; so are habits skilled and certain in operation so that we abandon ourselves to them without consciousness. Yet ignorance, habit, fatal implication in the remote, are just the things which professed empiricism, with its reduction of experience to states of consciousness, denies to experience. It is important for a theory of experience to know that under certain circumstances men prize the distinct and clearly evident. But it is no more important than it is to know that under other circumstances twilight, the vague, dark and mysterious flourish. Because intellectual crimes have been committed in the name of the subconscious is no reason for refusing to admit that what is not explicitly present makes up a vastly greater part of experience than does the conscious field to which thinkers have so devoted themselves.²⁷

To properly understand experience, one must understand “twilight, the vague, dark and mysterious”; one must understand, in other words, the sense-giving powers of the horizontal field of habitual meanings within which the “conscious field” has its life.

Precisely because habitual, pre-reflective meanings are already at work,

already anticipating the outlines of my world prior to any form of conscious, deliberate regard, my world has a depth which transcends its particular states of consciousness:

When disease or religion or love, or knowledge itself is experienced, forces and potential consequences are implicated that are neither directly present nor logically implied. They are "in" experience quite as truly as are present discomforts and exaltations. . . . Experience is no stream, even though the stream of feelings and ideas that flows upon its surface is the part which philosophers love to traverse. Experience includes the enduring banks of natural constitution and acquired habit as well as the stream. The flying moment is sustained by an atmosphere that does not fly, even when it most vibrates.²⁸

The sort of background or horizon that habit provides is not simply a warehouse of sedimented beliefs or a stock of knowledge at hand, or, for that matter, anything "at hand." The habitual background is a vibrating or resonating "atmosphere" that sustains the "flying moment" of determinate, conscious states. Dewey thus would agree entirely with Dreyfus that the background "is *not* beliefs" and further that it cannot be made the object of an objective analysis. In the same manner that atmospheric perspective presences by itself receding, habit brings meaning to focus by itself receding from focus. Thus, consciousness and the products of presencing consciousness—information, agreement, clarity, determinateness, coherence—cannot be identified with experience when its habitual and transcendent character is accorded proper weight. To understand experience, its depth in habitual meaning must be addressed and in a manner that does not selectively simplify the sustaining atmosphere. Experience has a "deep structure" governed by habit; a theory of understanding must account for habit's manner of understanding the world.

In "Existence, Ideas and Consciousness," Dewey analyzes how habit understands the world. His first step involves consideration of the "sub-conscious" of human thinking:

Apart from language, from imputed and inferred meaning, we continually engage in an immense multitude of immediate organic selections, rejections, welcomings, expulsions, appropriations, withdrawals, shrinkings, expansions, elations and dejections, attacks,

warding off, of the most minute, vibrantly delicate nature. We are not aware of the qualities of many or most of these acts; we do not objectively distinguish and identify them. Yet they exist as feeling qualities and have an enormous directive effect on our behavior. If, for example, certain sensory qualities of which we are not cognitively aware cease to exist, we cannot stand or control our posture and movements. In a thoroughly normal organism, these "feelings" have an efficiency of operation which it is impossible for thought to match. Even our most highly intellectualized operations depend upon them as a "fringe" by which to guide our inferential movements. They give us our *sense* of rightness and wrongness, of what to select and emphasize and follow up, and what to drop, slur over and ignore, among the multitude of inchoate meanings that are presenting themselves. They give us premonitions of approach to acceptable meanings, and warnings of getting off the track. Formulated discourse is mainly but a selected statement of what we wish to retain among all these incipient starts, following ups and breakings off. Except as a reader, a hearer repeats something of these organic movements, and thus "gets" their qualities, he does not get the *sense* of what is said; he does not really assent, even though he give cold approbation. These qualities are the stuff of "intuitions" and in actuality the difference between an "intuitive" and an analytic person is at most a matter of degree, of relative emphasis. The "reasoning" person is one who makes his "intuitions" more articulate, more deliverable in speech, as explicit sequence of initial premises, jointures, and conclusions.²⁹

We stand, Dewey says, in a relationship to the world prior to the predication of distinct objects of inferential, representational thought. "Feeling qualities" project before me a field of implicit and pre-thematic meanings that constitute the horizon within which "our most highly intellectualized operations" perform their task. "Formulated discourse" is a refinement, a specification and articulation of this pre-theoretical understanding of the world. Without this anticipatory grasp of the world, one "does not get the sense of what is said; he does not really assent, even though he give cold approbation." We must have a "sense of" something in order to have a conception of it.

What constitutes this subconscious "sensing" power? "The subconscious of a civilized adult reflects all the habits he has acquired; that is to say, all

the organic modifications he has undergone."³⁰ What Dewey calls "feeling qualities" are habitual meanings that are immediately had or lived; they provide that "context of non-cognitive but experienced subject-matter which gives what is *known* its import."³¹ Positings, reflections, and knowings are contextualized by a habitual background—an horizon of implicit, sensed meanings that foreshadows and prepares their achievements. These habitual, sensed meanings are the sustaining "atmosphere that does not fly, even when it most vibrates." And it is these habitual, sensed meanings that must find a central place in an adequate theory of experience and understanding.

By referring to the background as "subconscious" Dewey was seeking to emphasize as strongly as possible that "context" and "atmosphere" cannot be called "conscious." Dewey prefers to call this habitual context or atmosphere "mind," and wishes to distinguish it as sharply as possible from consciousness. He says:

There is thus an obvious difference between mind and consciousness; meaning and an idea. Mind denotes the whole system of meanings as they are embodied in the workings of organic life; consciousness in a being with language denotes awareness or perception of meanings; it is the perception of actual events, whether past, contemporary or future, in their meanings, the having of actual ideals. The greater part of mind is only implicit in any conscious act or state; the field of mind—of operative meanings—is enormously wider than that of consciousness. Mind is contextual and persistent; consciousness is focal and transitive. Mind is, so to speak, structural, substantial, a constant background and foreground; perceptive consciousness is process, a series of heres and nows. Mind is a constant luminosity; consciousness intermittent, a series of flashes of varying intensities. Consciousness is, as it were, the occasional interception of messages continually transmitted, as a mechanical receiving device selects a few of the vibrations with which the air is filled and renders them audible.³²

The "organic modifications" of habit are denoted by "mind": "the whole system of meanings as they are embodied in the workings of organic life." The field of habitual meanings—mind—"is enormously wider than that of consciousness." The anticipatory and historical foundations of intentional life are located for Dewey in habits of mind.

sion; this no doubt is partly why he sees his effort as one of formulating “an entirely different notion of knowledge and truth,” one which he believes grows out of experience itself. This “different notion of knowledge and truth,” however, does not do justice to Emily Dickinson’s letter. Dewey would not be surprised, for in his view all those philosophical systems must fail—including in this case Gadamer’s hermeneutics—which rest on the assumption that, in Dewey’s words, “everything in its reality . . . is what a knower would find it to be . . .”¹⁰³ As Dewey recognized, this is contrary to our experience of a habit-made world.

V

In contrasting habit and prejudice, I have tried to show that truth-anticipating prejudice foreshortens and renders monochromatic the colors and intensities of experience. My comparison of Dewey and Gadamer has not disclosed any strong grounds upon which Gadamer’s hermeneutics could be called “universal.” On the contrary, meaning that seeks validation as its perfection is, in Dewey’s view, a rather specialized sort of meaning and certainly cannot be the basis of a universal hermeneutics that purports to illumine “what is common to all modes of understanding.”¹⁰⁴ Qualities and properties are specified and grasped—sensed—prior to testing, confirming, argumentation. Gadamer’s theory of *Vorurteil* requires us to say that experience is not experience unless it is “continually confirmed,”¹⁰⁵ unless it is “an encounter with something that asserts itself as truth.”¹⁰⁶ There is little of interest or importance in the mind unless it is before the mind as a belief or argument, as “an event of truth.”

Perhaps, though, I still do not do justice to the radical transformation of truth in Gadamer along Heideggerian lines. Although it seems clear that experience for Gadamer is always an occasion for testing our “claim to truth,” perhaps truth is a far more subtle concept in Gadamer than I have made it out to be. That it is elusive there seems to be general agreement. Richard Bernstein’s remark that Gadamer “is employing a concept of truth that he never fully makes explicit,”¹⁰⁷ is fairly representative on the issue of truth in Gadamer. If, however, close attention is paid to the letter-writing example in Gadamer, not as something incidental to his whole project but rather as a consummation of it, it is apparent that the “ideal of truth” is—at least—that of being validly informed, of receiving an “authentic picture” of the “thing itself,” of giving assent to someone who has “validly learned” of an event. A letter transmits a truth and is a truth claim. The letter-writer

should be prepared to defend his statements because they are “not his personal opinions” but rather confirmable reports about the “event itself.” I understand a letter, according to Gadamer, not through an appreciation of the “personal *thoughts*” of the writer, but through “knowing about something.” Letter-writer and letter-reader are united by truth-telling. This example accords with Bernstein’s characterization of Gadamer’s general position on truth: “I am suggesting that what Gadamer himself is appealing to is a concept of truth that comes down to what can be argumentatively validated by the community of interpreters . . .”¹⁰⁸ I think this is a perceptive and fair account of Gadamer’s position. Bernstein’s worry about Gadamer is that he locates the basis of critical judgments and standards, despite numerous qualifications, in tradition. This is not sufficient justification; Bernstein believes “what is required is a form of argumentation that seeks to *warrant* what is valid in this tradition.”¹⁰⁹

Thus, whereas Bernstein sees Gadamer as being insufficiently robust in his validations, warrants, justifications, and arguments, I do not see where Gadamer has transfigured truth in such a way that “reaching the truth”—which is “always our goal”—does not in the end represent an unacceptable deformation of experience and understanding. Dreyfus, who criticizes Gadamer for siding with the “cognitivists,” is going in the right direction; not Bernstein, who wants Gadamer to be more cognitive, more argumentative. But Bernstein’s analysis of Gadamer does succeed in showing that regardless of whatever Heideggerian extensions may occur in Gadamer’s hermeneutics, the idea of truth as what can be “argumentatively validated” is a fair description of how truth functions in Gadamer.

Gadamer’s hermeneutics succeeds in this respect: He establishes how the workings of *Vorurteile* should be conceived so that they immanently structure a world for me. In this respect they govern me (and others, through tradition), yet permit a degree of transcendence that entitles me to say I am the author of my understanding and thus cannot be rendered invisible by objectivity or method; so, in this respect, I govern my *Vorurteile*. Yet, Gadamer’s theory ultimately fails because it rests upon an indefensible premise—that understanding requires the use of truth criteria, reaching its perfection in “knowing about something.” Gadamer wishes to construct “a concept of knowledge and of truth which corresponds to the whole of our hermeneutic experience.”¹¹⁰ Gadamer wants a *better* theory of knowledge, and the way to achieve this is to show that experience is knowledge, is a series of confirmations and revisions, and is thus necessarily open. Dewey also wants a better theory of knowledge but his way of accomplishing this

end is to distinguish knowledge and experience, not to identify them as Gadamer does.

Because Dewey does not require his theory of experience or understanding to serve epistemological definitions of truth and validity, his theory of experience does not take as its measure meanings actually or potentially verified: "The whole wide universe of fact and dream, of event, act, desire, fancy and meanings, valid or invalid, can be set in contrast to nothing. And if what has been said is taken literally, 'experience' denotes just this wide universe."¹¹¹ Thus, Gadamer wishes to construct a theory of knowledge faithful to experience, and accomplishes this by making all experience a knowing experience, and then affirms the necessary incompleteness and openness of experience since our knowledge is forever incomplete. Dewey, however, is both more accurate and more profound in his theory of experience, and what it requires us to be "open" to is far more demanding than Gadamer's openness to "constant confirmation":

When the varied constituents of the wide universe, the unfavorable, the precarious, uncertain, irrational, hateful, receive the same attention that is accorded the noble, honorable and true, then philosophy may conceivably dispense with the conception of experience. But till that day arrives, we need a cautionary and directive word, like experience; to remind us that the world which is lived, suffered and enjoyed as well as logically thought of, has the last word in all human inquiries and surmises. This is a doctrine of humility; but it is also a doctrine of direction. For it tells us to open the eyes and ears of the mind, to be sensitive to all the varied phases of life and history. Nothing is more ironical than that philosophers who have so professed universality have so often been one-sided specialists, confined to that which is authentically and surely known, ignoring ignorance, error, folly and the common enjoyments and adornments of life; disposing of these by regarding them as due to our "finite" natures—a blest word that does for moderns what "non-being" was made to do for the Greeks.¹¹²

The sensitivity Dewey urges upon us is not an epistemological sensitivity, for an adequate theory of experience reveals that our sensitivities are not governed solely by "that which is authentically and surely *known*." Gadamer's universal hermeneutics appeals to our finitude to account for the necessary openness of understanding, i.e., the openness of knowledge.

Dewey affirms finitude as a fact of experience, one urged upon us by the recognition that being and being known are not equivalent.

I have tried to show in this paper that when something is brought to mind and invites understanding, *Vorurteil* and habit respond differently. *Vorurteil* enables me to understand because it enables me to know. For Gadamer, there is no understanding that is not a knowing; to understand is to know. I can understand something because through my *Vorurteile*, I have knowledge of that something or knowledge relevant to it. For Dewey, there is understanding that is not a knowing: "*Being and having things in ways other than knowing them, in ways never identical with knowing them, exist, and are preconditions of reflection and knowledge. Being angry, stupid, wise, inquiring; having sugar, the light of day, money, houses and lands, friends, laws, masters, subjects, pain and joy, occur in dimensions incommensurable to knowing these things which we are and have and use, and which have and use us.*"¹¹³ My understanding of a rose, a poem, an adolescent's moods, an old ironing board, the tone of the Dean's memo, the melancholy of a John Updike short story, the water-stained wallpaper in my bedroom, may occur in "dimensions incommensurable" to knowing these sorts of things. In understanding them, in "being" and "having" them, I am not solving a problem, reaching a decision, giving an answer, settling doubt, or verifying a claim.

This suggests why it is a serious misunderstanding of Dewey's pragmatism to see it as essentially a theory of practical knowledge and practical reasoning. Dewey's metaphysics of "being" and "having" based upon habit must reserve an important place for the practical modes of "being" and "having" and of course it does. "Being" and "having," though, are not limited to the practical. This also suggests why it is beside the point to argue that Gadamer's notions of "application" and phronesis link up with Dewey's thinking on "interest" or the practical character of ideas. Meaning's genesis from pre-reflective "being" and "having"—what Dewey generally refers to as having a "sense of"—through predicative knowledge and truth, and its return to "being" and "having," is not simply a fluid anticipation of a secure, known meaning, a meaning "grown-up" enough to truthfully mediate past and present and to be action orienting.

Meaning does not wait to become knowledge, practical or otherwise, before becoming a real possession of our intentional life. Habit shows how meanings are incorporated into our intentional life, becoming vehicles of understanding in ways other than "knowing about something," indeed, in ways "incommensurable" with such knowing. "What is really 'in' experi-

ence extends much further than that which at any time is *known*."¹¹⁴ Dewey's standpoint is not merely a limiting condition for Gadamer's "universal hermeneutics" which claims to elucidate "the general relationship of man to the world."¹¹⁵ It suggests that it would be a radical misconception of the relationship of human beings to the world to see being "informed," reaching "agreement," and seeking "confirmation" as the essential conditions or aims of all understanding.

The central issue at stake between Dewey and Gadamer and their conceptions of habit and *Vorurteil* concerns how the past is present. Prejudice preserves the past as an achievement of reason; Gadamer believes "preservation is an act of reason, though an inconspicuous one."¹¹⁶ In Gadamer, reason is inspired by the quest for truth. In Dewey, reason is inspired by the quest for meaning. For Dewey, the persistence or preservation of the past accomplished through habit is not solely nor even principally the work of an inconspicuous "act of reason" which can be, in Bernstein's words, "argumentatively validated." What was once experienced as wonderful, interesting, degrading, instructive, caring, or transcendent, is not necessarily (and probably not even most likely) preserved by such a truth-seeking "act of reason" with its interest in knowing and the knowable.

Whether the preserved is an incalculably moving experience of a Beethoven symphony, or the gentle, quiet experience of lying on warm grass on a late Sunday afternoon, these experiences become abiding influences upon me not through the testing of *Vorurteile*, but through emphatic or barely detectable resonances and reverberations of my habits. What is understood in experiences like these has little to do with an expectation that we will be better "informed" about something or that an "agreement" will have been reached. Dewey does not see being "informed" about something or reaching "agreement" as the fulfillment of the historicity of experience, principally because the historicity of experience is achieved through habit, which does not reach its perfection in knowledge.

Dewey says: "Seeing and handling the flower, enjoying the full meaning of the smell as the odor of just this beautiful thing, is not knowledge because it is more than knowledge."¹¹⁷ Dewey's theory of experience and habit permits us to grasp the ways we may be said to understand a flower, an understanding that we do not expect to "inform" us about anything or "decide" a question. If, as Dewey says, a flower is "more than knowledge," how shall Gadamer understand a flower, when, for him, "the primordial significance of the idea of understanding is that of 'knowing about some-

thing'?"¹¹⁸ Habit reveals, and *Vorurteil* obscures, how a rose and rose-like experiences are understandable prior to acts of knowing and other acts of truth-determining consciousness, and why it is a mistake to believe that a meaning or sense has sufficient solidity to become a valuable part of my history only after or until it appears as a judgment, knowledge claim, or candidate for truth. Experienced meaning need not be true in order for it to possess other kinds of merit or importance. In this way, Dewey's theory of habit enables us to see clearly why it is a fallacy, as Arendt says, "to interpret meaning on the model of truth," an interpretation demanded by Gadamer's conception of *Vorurteil* and decisively rejected by Dewey's theory of habit.

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NOTES

I am grateful to Calvin O. Schrag for his critical comments on this paper.

1. "Holism and Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics and Praxis*, ed. Robert Hollinger (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), pp. 234–35.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 235.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 233. That Dreyfus no longer holds the view that Heidegger was the first to fully appreciate the non-cognitive may be inferred from his approving quotations from Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct* (published in 1922) to be found in his recent book, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991). See pp. 67, 70, 347–348. Further, this superb book makes clear that Dreyfus's preference for the language of "practices" (and "skills") to challenge what he calls the "priority of mental content" (p. 85) is not meant to limit or exhaust the ways in which the world is preontologically or pre-theoretically available to us. Nonetheless, it is equally clear that Dreyfus does not believe he is losing anything by leaving habit unexamined and allowing practices and skills to do the work of revising our understanding of how the subject is related to the object. I, on the contrary, believe that a great deal about the "directedness of the mind" (p. 51) cannot be understood without a phenomenology of habitual meaning of the sort provided by Dewey (and Merleau-Ponty).

5. Introduction to *Essays in Experimental Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916), p. 4. For a fuller account of Dewey's theory of pre-objective, habitual meaning, see the author's book, *The Phenomenological Sense of John Dewey: Habit and Meaning* (Atlantic Highlands NJ: Humanities Press, 1977).

6. *Experience and Nature*, 2nd edition (La Salle IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1929), p. 20.

7. "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," in *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader*, eds. Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 154.

8. *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: The Modern Library, 1922), pp. 40–41.

9. *Philosophy and Civilization* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1931), pp. 173–87. For an

even earlier account of habit, see Dewey's *Lectures on Psychological and Political Ethics: 1898*, ed. Donald F. Koch (New York: Hafner Press, 1976), particularly Chapter 2, "Interests and Habits in the Organic Circuit."

10. *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1934), p. 104.
11. *The Morning Notes of Adelbert Ames, Jr.*, ed. Hadley Cantril (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1960), p. 221.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Experience and Nature* (La Salle IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1925), pp. 18–19.
14. J. Glenn Gray, *The Promise of Wisdom: An Introduction to Philosophy of Education* (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1968), p. 84.
15. *Experience and Nature*, 2nd edition, p. 20.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
18. "Epistemological Realism: The Alleged Ubiquity of the Knowledge Relation," in *Essays in Experimental Logic*, p. 276.
19. *Experience and Nature*, 2nd edition, p. 24.
20. *Experience and Nature*, p. 4.
21. *Experience and Nature*, 2nd edition, p. 19.
22. *Experience and Nature*, p. 13.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
24. "Body and Mind," in *Philosophy and Civilization* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1931), p. 308.
25. *Experience and Nature*, 2nd Edition, p. 22.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
27. *Experience and Nature*, p. 7.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.
29. *Experience and Nature*, 2nd edition, p. 244.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 247.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 248–49.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 249–50.
35. *Essays in Experimental Logic*, p. 6.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
37. *Experience and Nature*, p. 19.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed., David E. Linge (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1976), p. 9.
42. *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1976), p. xiii.
43. *Essays in Experimental Logic*, p. 4.
44. *Truth and Method*, p. 263.
45. *Experience and Nature*, 2nd edition, p. 21.
46. *Truth and Method*, p. 247.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 259.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*, p. 266.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 314.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 311.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 310.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 314.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 320.
56. "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," pp. 159–60.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 108–9.
58. *Truth and Method*, p. 237.
59. For one of the most detailed and careful analyses of Gadamer's theory of *Vorurteile*, see Lawrence Kennedy Schmidt, *The Epistemology of Hans-Georg Gadamer: An Analysis of the Legitimization of "Vorurteile"* (New York: Peter Lang, 1985). Georgia Warnke's discussion of Gadamer's central themes, though not offering such a close reading as Schmidt, is also helpful: *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1987).
60. "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," p. 154.
61. *Truth and Method*, p. 315.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 317.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 319.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 324.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 320.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 263.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 268.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 266.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 325.
71. *Ibid.*
72. *Ibid.*
73. *Ibid.*
74. *Ibid.*
75. *Ibid.*, p. 328.
76. *Ibid.*, pp. 337–38.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 259.
78. *Ibid.*, pp. 261–62.
79. "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," p. 154.
80. "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," p. 9.
81. "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," pp. 151–52.
82. *Truth and Method*, p. 328.
83. *Ibid.*, pp. 261–62.
84. "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," p. 154.
85. *Selected Letters of Robert Frost*, ed. Lawrence Thompson (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), pp. 302–303.
86. "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," p. 154.
87. *Ibid.*
88. *Experience and Nature*, p. 18.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
90. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
91. *Experience and Nature*, 2nd edition, p. 20.
92. *Letters of James Agee to Father Flye* (New York: George Braziller, 1962), p. 101.
93. *Truth and Method*, p. 332.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 247.
95. *Ibid.*, p. 262.
96. "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," p. 152.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
98. *Experience and Nature*, 2nd edition, p. 21.
99. *Experience and Nature*, pp. 18–19.
100. *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, Vol. II, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 440.
101. "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," p. 149.
102. *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, p. 490.
103. "The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism," in *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1910), p. 229.
104. *Truth and Method*, p. xix.
105. *Ibid.*, p. 317.
106. *Ibid.*, p. 445.
107. Richard J. Bernstein, "From Hermeneutics to Praxis," in *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1983), p. 98.
108. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
109. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
110. *Truth and Method*, p. xiii.
111. *Experience and Nature*, p. 9.
112. *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.
113. *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.
114. *Experience and Nature*, 2nd ed., p. 20.
115. *Truth and Method*, p. 433.
116. *Ibid.*, p. 250.
117. "The Experimental Theory of Knowledge," in *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1910), p. 85.
118. "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," p. 154.