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DIFFERENCE AND DEFERENCE IN THE TENOR OF LEARNING

ABSTRACT. The critical resources furnished by deconstruction have more than occasionally been turned with negative effect on traditional and more recent conceptions of liberal learning, including the reaffirmation of the humanities associated with philosophical hermeneutics. The first two sections of the paper review the contrasting and mutually opposed stances towards learning represented by early formulations of deconstruction and of hermeneutics. An exploration is then undertaken in the later sections of developments that have taken place in both deconstruction and hermeneutics since the Derrida-Gadamer encounter in Paris in 1981. While not in any sense assimilating hermeneutics to deconstruction or vice versa, this exploration identifies significant shifts in later formulations of both which provide a more inclusive context for understanding learning as a human undertaking, including the identification of tensions that are more promising than negative.

KEY WORDS: deconstruction, deference, Derrida, difference, Gadamer, hermeneutics

INTRODUCTION

The words “difference” and “deference” in the title summarise two currently influential but contrasting standpoints towards how inheritances of human learning are to be understood and studied. More precisely, the contrast is between two recognisably different clusters, or constellations, than between two clearly distinct schools of thought. On the one hand, under the term “deference” stands a range of fresh articulations of traditional ideals of liberal education, ranging from the more conservative presentation of philosophers like Michael Oakeshott and Alasdair MacIntyre to more critical ones like those of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur. On the other hand, under the term “difference” stands an array of “postmodern” standpoints – ones that are variously sceptical of or antagonistic towards traditional forms of learning. These include, most notably, the more influential arguments of philosophers like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean François Lyotard.

In identifying two prominent clusters from the unprecedented plurality of thought in contemporary Western civilisation my intention is to focus on some issues of enduring disagreement which may yet repay the exploratory attempts of a presentation such as this. This is not to relegate the importance of other prominent currents of thought, whether pragmatist,



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feminist or other in character, whether Western or other in ancestry. Indeed the kind of scope provided by a short presentation leads me to narrow the focus even further, to a consideration of some key issues where the contrast in standpoints is most marked, and of greatest practical import. Thus, by adopting a narrower canvas, one may also hope to contribute to a distinct, if modest advance in a thinking about education which is incisive and defensible.

Again, the words “difference” and “deference” in the title provide the point of departure for this more sharply focused exploration. In short, this will be an exploration of how differently the central undertakings of education are to be understood and practised under two approaches which have themselves been continually developing in the last few decades: the “philosophical hermeneutics” of Gadamer on the one hand and the “deconstruction” efforts of Derrida on the other. Let us begin then with Gadamer’s efforts.

PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS: GADAMER’S EARLIER PRESENTATIONS

Unlike the kind of commitment evident in the self-declared conservatism of Oakeshott (Oakeshott, 1962), or in MacIntyre’s anti-modernist criticisms of “the Enlightenment project” (MacIntyre, 1985, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1998), Gadamer views his own work as eschewing “commitments” of this kind. In the course of many references to his formative influences he describes himself as taking up an other-than-metaphysical impetus. This impetus was provided not only by Heidegger but also by Kierkegaard’s critique of Hegel (Gadamer, 1985, p. 63; 1997, p. 46). More surprisingly, he also includes among the abiding influences on his thought a non-Platonist emphasis which his own researches repeatedly discern in Plato (Gadamer, 1985, p. 193; 1997, pp. 33–34). Gadamer stresses that his efforts to provide a philosophical account of human understanding have nothing to do with unphilosophical “commitments,” nor with providing a “technique” of understanding. As he explains in his Foreword to the second German edition of *Truth and Method*:

If there is any practical consequence of the present investigation, it certainly has nothing to do with an unscientific (*unwissenschaftliche*) “commitment;” instead, it is concerned with the “scientific” (*wissenschaftliche*) integrity of acknowledging the commitment involved in all understanding. My real concern was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing (Gadamer, 1975, p. xiv).

In the course of pursuing this concern Gadamer has drawn a range of distinctive conclusions, many of which have decisive implications for how teaching and learning are to be understood and practised. In summary, these include: (1) that, over and above our wanting and doing, what happens to us as humans whenever understanding of any kind takes place involves preconceptions more than conceptions, prejudgements more than judgements; (2) that these prior influences have invariably predisposed in one direction or another all our efforts to understand; (3) that we are frequently unaware of the presence of such prior influences, or, even when we are, of their extent; (4) that such prior influences cannot be finally overcome and set aside by any method or technique, or by some objective philosophical overview; (5) that as human beings in a world shared with others, we unavoidably find ourselves in the midst of linguistically constituted cultural inheritances that have already significantly shaped our lives; (6) that a proper awareness of the predisposing effects of linguistically constituted inheritances highlights the priority of being-consciously-among-others, over any priority epistemology might claim (with Descartes) for subjective consciousness; (7) that a historically alert disciplining of this being-among-others might provide the best starting point for critical philosophical enquiry and the best safeguards against making excessive philosophical claims; (8) that the hermeneutic account of human possibilities and limitations might apply not just to this or that instance of understanding, but universally to human understanding as such.

In this representative selection of points from Gadamer's writings we can recognise themes that are also prominent in one form or another in other contemporary philosophical writings, including those Wittgenstein, Popper and some American pragmatists. But where the forces of continuity and those of critique are concerned, Gadamer somehow seems to grant to those of continuity – including their inbuilt biases – a weight of influence which dwarfs the best efforts of critique. This suspicion has led to criticisms of philosophical hermeneutics for passing over, all too silently, the distortions embedded in inherited traditions. It has also led to criticisms that hermeneutics is a form of "closet essentialism." The former charge followed the publication of the first edition of *Truth and Method* in 1960 and was led by Jürgen Habermas, arguing from the standpoint of critique of ideology (*Ideologiekritik*). This charge is not my main concern here. Still it is worth remarking in passing that the lively, and largely fruitful exchange which followed between Gadamer and Habermas has led to a more evident concern with critical and practical issues in Gadamer's later

works and to a greater hermeneutical alertness in Habermas' later writings on communicative action and discourse ethics.

The more recent charge of "closet essentialism," or that philosophical hermeneutics is a covert metaphysics, is a "Derridean critique" of Gadamer's work. It has been led not by Derrida himself, but by one of Derrida's chief interpreters and most faithful advocates in the English language, John D. Caputo. At the start of his essay "Gadamer's Closet Essentialism: A Derridean Critique," Caputo quotes a passage from *Truth and Method* which has also been selected for particular attention by other critics of Gadamer. That passage (as quoted in an edited way by Caputo) is as follows:

That which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless, and our finite historical being is marked by the fact that always the authority of what has been transmitted – and not only what is clearly grounded – has power over our attitudes and behaviour The validity of morals, for instance, is based on tradition. They are freely taken over, but by no means created by a free insight or justified by themselves. That is precisely what we call tradition: the ground of their validity . . . tradition has a justification that is outside the arguments of reason and in large measure determines our institutions and attitudes (Caputo, 1989, p. 258).

From this passage, a deep-seated deference towards tradition would seem to characterise Gadamer's basic philosophical orientation, despite his own disavowal of the kind of "commitment" involved in such a stance and despite his emphasis on the "scientific" (*wissenschaftliche*) character of his enquiries. Deconstruction is deeply sceptical of such deference, as it is of any conception of liberal education which views tradition primarily as a repository of riches, or hallowed names, or authoritative canons. For deconstruction, such deference, including all its institutionalised routines and scholarly paraphernalia, fixes in place decisive hierarchies which marginalise or exclude minority voices. Deference, in short, forecloses precisely those questions which must be kept open in an unceasing and active engagement. This brings us to the heart of Derrida's concern.

DECONSTRUCTION: DERRIDA'S EARLIER PRESENTATIONS

Though he has made few specific references to Gadamer's writings (though plenty to Heidegger's), the critical stance adopted by Derrida towards hermeneutics is evident in a striking way in his earlier works. Derrida is keen to undermine any quest for an original meaning which might furnish humankind with a sense of origins, foundation, ground, or what he calls *arche*. In particular, Derrida attacks what he calls the "logocentric" character of Western philosophy for privileging this concern

with origins and foundations. By “logocentric” Derrida means the assumption – which he associates with the Greek word *logos* – that there is fullness of truth and stability of meaning to be disclosed through philosophical enquiry. According to Derrida, not only has this assumption been embraced by the main traditions of Western philosophy, it has also pervaded the more significant traditions of Western learning and civilisation. For Derrida however, such disclosure is already a *closure* of questions which should remain radically open. It is a hunt for definitive accounts and meanings which has the consequence of establishing invidious hierarchies and canons. It marginalises whatever remains “other” or different; whatever the hunt has failed to assimilate, or to subject to its assured grasp. On Derrida’s account then, whatever has been established as authoritative by philosophical arguments must be “deconstructed” to release the play of alternative possibilities: to keep open the play of differing perspectives which the philosophical search for “truth” seeks to restrict or to assimilate in “logocentric” traditions of learning.

Derrida has held that “logocentric” assumptions inhabit the spoken word in a more intractable way than they do the written word. Accordingly, in his early work *Of Grammatology* (Derrida, 1976), he suggests that the overcoming of metaphysics, which he claims Heidegger failed to accomplish in the poetic turn taken by his later philosophy, might be more successfully undertaken by a “deconstructive” reading of texts and canons. For Derrida, such an enterprise takes the following form.

[I]t inaugurates the destruction, not the demolition but the deconstruction, of all significations that have their source in that of the *logos*. Particularly the signification of truth. All the metaphysical determinations of truth, and even the one beyond metaphysical ontotheology that Heidegger reminds us of, are more or less immediately inseparable from the instance of the *logos* (Derrida, 1976, p. 10).

Central to this enterprise is what Derrida calls the play of “*différance*.” In a 1968 address carrying the title *Différance*, Derrida announced that this coinage of his described neither a concept nor a word, but rather a two-fold strategic theme. Firstly, *différance* (in the sense of a deferral) seeks to counter philosophy’s preoccupation with definitive meanings by putting off until later, by deferring indefinitely, any definitive disclosures of meaning or “presence” in the relation between human beings and Being. Secondly, *différance* (in the sense of difference) seeks to keep in play an unsecured plurality of possibilities, even an endless undecidability, with a view to resisting all attempts at an authoritative pinning down, all efforts to give certain meanings the status of a canon, or of “truth” (Derrida, 1984, p. 7ff).

The radicalness of Derrida's "strategic theme," and its iconoclastic import for any conception of education as an enlightening encounter with cultural traditions, emerges strongly in his 1967 book *Writing and Difference* (1978 English). Here Derrida attacks what he perceives as philosophy's failures to overcome metaphysics, including the mistaken paths he believes Heidegger's later philosophy to have taken in its attempts to reclaim a more original understanding of the relationship between beings and Being. It is just this sense of deference towards eclipsed origins that Derrida's *différance* wants to break apart, as he detects in it a totalising gesture which recalls metaphysical attempts to bring everything under the sway of a unitary understanding. Derrida's "theme" then is one "which is no longer turned towards the origin;" his "strategy" is one which, in his own words,

affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology – in other words through his entire history – has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play (Derrida, 1978, p. 292).

In pursuing the theme of *différance* Derrida takes inspiration from what he regards as a deliberate plurality of stances in Nietzsche's writings – which he insists hermeneutic philosophy (Heidegger and Gadamer) missed. He champions a kind of play which highlights difference as the radicalisation of "otherness." He rebukes philosophy, including humanistic learning more generally, for its saddened nostalgia for "the lost or impossible presence of the absent origin." In an idiom which betrays more than a little of the Dionysian, he celebrates instead

the Nietzschean *affirmation*: that is, the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation (Derrida, 1978, p. 292).

AFTER CONFRONTATION – DECONSTRUCTION IN A NEW KEY

These explorations of the earlier positions of Gadamer and Derrida flesh out a little the contrasting stances to inherited traditions of learning summarised by the terms I have used in the title: "deference" and "difference." The contrast at this point is most striking as an opposition, or a confrontation, between hermeneutics and deconstruction rather than as a contrast of emphasis, or a contrast between approaches which might yet be compatible in important respects. Where hermeneutics suggests an

embrace of tradition, deconstruction reveals an attitude of suspicion, even of subversion. Or so it would seem from our explorations so far. Yet, there is something of cross-purposes, of opposition based in reciprocal misapprehension, between the positions of Gadamer and Derrida as outlined in the previous two sections. Although the record of their interchange in Paris in 1981 (Michelfelder and Palmer, 1989) shows that Gadamer made renewed efforts to attend to the heart of Derrida's arguments, it also reveals the myriad of classical allusions and associations which throng Gadamer's own rather elaborate thinking. These form something of a bulwark when it comes to allowing a voice of an altogether different kind, with altogether different resonances than classical ones, to be heard. This may go some way towards explaining Derrida's curtness in the exchange. The record also shows that Derrida was not at this time prepared to give ear to the heart of Gadamer's points (Michelfelder and Palmer, 1989, pp. 52–54, 58–71).

The intellectual warfare provoked by the apparent anarchy in Derrida's earlier formulations of deconstruction culminated in the "Cambridge Affair" of 1992 (the controversy over the awarding of an honorary doctorate to Derrida, recalled in Derrida, 1995, pp. 399–421). This warfare remains active on more than a few campuses and its tone is in marked contrast to the more ordered criticisms which have been made by thinkers like Habermas of the alleged conservatism of Gadamer's earlier presentations of hermeneutics. We have already noted briefly that Gadamer, in response to these criticisms, has given a more critical character to his arguments on practical philosophy. The reformulation of Derrida's arguments has been more dramatic. It can hardly be doubted that this reformulation has been provoked, to some extent at least, by the intense divisiveness occasioned by deconstruction and its influence in the campuses of the Western world. In any case the reformulation involves a third element in the notion of *différence*, in addition to the deferral of fixed meaning and the affirmation of difference. This third element, present in a distant and ambiguous way in Derrida's earlier writings, is a unique kind of reverence; a reverence which surpasses what is normally understood by deference. It has been brought to the foreground in later writings like *Specters of Marx* (Derrida, 1994), and "Faith and Knowledge" (Derrida, 1998), where Derrida writes more explicitly of the ultimate point of deconstruction and of its practical import.

Well, what remains irreducible to any deconstruction, what remains as undeconstructible as the possibility itself of deconstruction is, perhaps, a certain experience of the emancipatory promise; it is perhaps the formality of a structural messianism, a messianism without religion, even a messianic without messianism, an idea of justice – which we distinguish from law and right and even from human rights – and an idea of democracy – which we

distinguish from its current concept and from its determined predicates today (Derrida, 1994, p. 59).

This strong emphasis on the messianic has left behind the iconoclastic playfulness that characterises the “Nietzschean affirmation” passage quoted earlier. Caputo comments that this development in Derrida’s thinking is bad news for his “Nietzscheanizing admirers” who thought they had “found in deconstruction the consummating conclusion of the Death-of-God” (Caputo, 1997, p. 158). But Derrida’s emphasis on the messianic is not to be identified with any given religion – with its established institutions or its doctrinal orthodoxies. It is oriented to the future, to that which has yet to come. And on Derrida’s account, that which is yet to come is not something which can be encapsulated in any determinate prophecy. It is rather something which haunts and surprises the present. It is a “ghost that we cannot and ought not do without” (Derrida, 1994, 168 ff).

From a critical point of view it might be said that the earlier charge of anarchy against Derrida must now be dropped in favour of a charge of abstract mysticism. Derrida would probably accept the “abstract” part of this charge, as he declines to give definitive content to what he means by the “other” and also continually calls attention to the abstract character of his own later thought. He would probably reject the mysticism part of the charge *only if* it implied any disengagement on the part of deconstruction from practical concerns of justice. And here it is worth calling readers’ attention to his two-part essay of 1989–1990, “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’ ” (Derrida, 1992).

What Derrida calls “the messianic” identifies a committed, yet a somewhat indeterminate stance towards action, towards religion and towards inherited traditions of thought. If one asks then, what it is for the sake of which deconstruction is carried out, the answer lies not in any aesthetic romp, whether Nietzschean or other in character. Its “emancipatory promise” lies rather in answering a call which is peculiarly religious in character, without being the preserve of this or that religion. On this understanding, deconstruction seeks to bear witness to, indeed to embody, a certain faith; a faith which seeks to be worthy of the respect of *all* while at the same time doing justice to the singularity of each person. In Derrida’s own words:

This abstract messianicity belongs from the very beginning to the experience of faith, of believing, of a credit that is irreducible to knowledge and of a trust that “founds” all relation to the other in testimony. This justice, which I distinguish from right, alone allows the hope, beyond all “messianisms,” of a universalizable culture of singularities, a culture in which the abstract possibility of the impossible translation could nevertheless be announced (Derrida, 1998, p. 18).

Passages like these have something of a proclamation about them. That they concern something which Derrida regards as crucially important can hardly be denied. What is proclaimed is a direction, even a “pathway,” to use Heidegger’s phrase. But though a general direction for thought and action is indicated, the pathway remains indistinct in central respects, as do the features the cultural landscape through which it passes.

HERMENEUTICS AND DECONSTRUCTION: EXPERIENCING TRADITION ANEW

Acknowledging what Derrida himself calls the “responsibility” of the positions taken in his later arguments, a question must still be asked about these positions: about what warrants them and what they seem to enjoin; about Derrida’s preference for the abstract over the specific, for “an utterly faceless other” over any concrete “other.” This question focuses on how Derrida conceives of human beings’ relationships to inherited traditions of learning and identifies an important area of common concern between deconstruction and hermeneutics.

In addressing this question, the directions evident in Derrida’s later arguments can be partly traced to his own deferential attitude to the thought of the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, especially to the differences drawn in Levinas’ thought between a biblical intelligibility and a philosophical intelligibility. For Levinas, a philosophical intelligibility conceives of God as an ontological presence: as Supreme Being, or Creator of the world. A biblical intelligibility, by contrast, understands God in interhuman and ethical terms: but as that in the interhuman which “points towards the totally Other” (Levinas, 1984, pp. 56–57). The indefiniteness of the “Other” in Levinas’ writing refers to the God of Talmudic tradition and to “the sacredness of man’s relation to man through which God may pass” (Levinas, 1984, p. 54). This illuminates much about the ultimate sources of Derrida’s own thinking, in which the influences of Levinas have continued to grow stronger. “Before a thought like that of Levinas,” Derrida declared in 1986, “I never have any objection” (Caputo, 1997, p. 127).

The “Nietzschean affirmation” in Derrida’s earlier writings tended to cast himself and his legions of followers in the role of disciples who earnestly took up an injunction of Nietzsche’s in §409 of *The Will to Power*: “What is needed above all is an absolute scepticism towards all inherited concepts” (Nietzsche, 1967, p. 221). This early emphasis in Derrida’s work placed it in a hostile relationship with hermeneutics, whose very stock-in-trade is a sustained elucidation of the relation between human

understanding and what addresses it through inherited traditions. Derrida's more recent works contain further declarations which depart from the "Nietzschean affirmation" and which disclose a major return to classical sources: "I feel that, however old I am, I am on the threshold of reading Plato and Aristotle. I love them and feel I have to start again and again and again" (Caputo, 1997, p. 9). And on St. Augustine, he adds "I have enormous and immense admiration for him . . . So there is a love story and a deconstruction between us" (Caputo, 1997, p. 21).

But this deferential turn to tradition in Derrida's case is no more a form of orthodoxy than Gadamer's hermeneutics is a form of conservatism. In my remaining remarks I want to take just two examples to highlight what is distinctive and promising for practices of teaching and learning in the common concerns of both, without attempting to assimilate deconstruction to hermeneutics, or vice versa. The first example focuses on Plato and his influence. The second concerns what Gadamer has called the "fusion of horizons."

Plato is characteristically taken by critics of metaphysics as a progenitor of all that is "metaphysical" in Western traditions of learning, including by Derrida in his earlier writings. It is clear that Derrida has not given up the practice of "playing" with Plato's works, or with those of any other major thinker. The purpose of this play on Derrida's part is now avowedly emancipatory however. Derrida describes this purpose as seeking a "heterogeneity" within the corpus of Plato's works which is at odds with, and which seeks to unsettle, the received wisdom about that corpus. The play is engaged in, in order to open up new spaces which allow Plato to speak in a different voice, or voices: voices that render Plato's works newly challenging and thoughtworthy; voices that are inconsistent with the "supposed system of Plato" which has become canonical in Western traditions of teaching and learning.

Gadamer, for his part, has more than once reminded himself, and his readers, that "Plato was no Platonist and that philosophy is not scholasticism" (Gadamer, 1985, p. 193; 1997, pp. 33–34). For Gadamer, all enquiry is already a play, or rather, *at* play, in the to-and-fro of question and answer between human efforts to understand and the active voices of inheritances of learning which address these efforts. Though he would hardly describe his efforts under a term such as "deconstruction," Gadamer points out that his philosophical approach embodies the Heideggerian task of *Destruktion* – i.e., not a destroying, but "a dismantling of what has been covered up" (Michelfelder and Palmer, 1989, p. 121). Indeed many of Gadamer's writings have been devoted to dismantling the Platonism which became associated with Plato's philosophy through Aristotle's presenta-

tion and critique of the theory of ideas; a critique which became decisive for subsequent interpretations of Plato. In one of these studies, Gadamer is more than usually outspoken in criticising the preconceptions which have given Western learning its image of Plato.

With a persistence bordering on the absurd, the prevailing form of interpretation in which Plato's philosophy has been passed on to us has advocated the two-world theory, that is, the complete separation of the paradigmatic world of ideas from the ebb and flow of change in our experience of the sense-perceived world. Idea and reality are made to look like two worlds separated by a chasm, and the interrelationship of the two remains obscure (Gadamer, 1980, p. 156).

This example of Plato and his influence serves to show that any radical rift between Derrida's later deconstruction and Gadamer's later hermeneutics is misconceived. In both cases a deferential attitude to what is addressed by tradition to human understanding is in evidence, but so also is an active critical questioning within that stance. Though carried out with a very different style and in a very different idiom, this is a questioning which discloses, in each case, incisive insights into encounters with inheritances of learning, but which also remains, in each case, an unfinished and unfinished search.

Turning now to the second example, Gadamer argues that a genuine encounter with tradition involves what he calls a "fusion of horizons" (*Horizontverschmelzung*): on the one hand the horizon of understanding the learner brings with him or her to the encounter and, on the other, the horizon of meaning that addresses the learner in this encounter. At first sight this looks like a conservative notion. Unlike Derrida's deconstructive strategy, it seems to dissolve differences into the continuity and ancestral authority of received tradition. "Fusion" (*Verschmelzung*), however, is not the most appropriate word to convey what is meant here. What Gadamer has in mind is not a melting together in which all tensions are laid to rest, but an attentive to-and-fro between the learner and the difference of that which addresses the learner. It is an interplay in which tensions are uncovered and brought to the fore rather than glossed or passed over (Gadamer, 1975, p. 273). In this interplay a particular embodiment of a tradition – scientific, literary, religious etc. – is brought to active articulation, but that articulation and its own presuppositions can also be questioned and re-questioned by the learner. The learner can become in this event a more fluent and more discerning participant. As an event of learning moreover, this engagement alerts the learners to the twin dangers of unquestioning discipleship on the one hand, and on the other, the kind of critique which remains uncritical of its own embeddedness in historical circumstance.

In conclusion, perhaps enough has been said in exploring these two examples to illustrate that the apparent dichotomy in the title “Difference and Deference” might yet be more a contrast in emphasis than a clash of directions – between hermeneutic conceptions of teaching and learning and those which draw their inspiration from deconstruction. Yet, in order to avoid any assimilation of deconstruction and hermeneutics, this contrast of emphasis must itself be clarified. For Derrida, the notion of community, and the related notion of dialogue, must be regarded with some reservation. On his understanding, community emphasises that “gathering” which defines and gathers, and does so by including some and excluding others, or what is “other.” So instead of community, he champions the more formal “universalizable culture of singularities” as the most promising context for engaging the issues which tradition, in its plurality, addresses to human understanding. For Gadamer, “the conversation that we are” (*das Gespräch das wir sind*), is an already existent feature of human life, if a frequently disfigured one. From this starting point, hermeneutics understands tradition not as the burdening force of what has already been institutionalised and now seeks compliance, but as the inescapable and abundant plurality of what lies over us in our inheritances old and new. In human efforts to become fluent in these inheritances, personal identity is disclosed as being already differently influenced and coloured, as being already committed in this way or that, but also, as called to an unfinished search for truth. This is a truth which escapes any efforts to render it uniform, or certain, or absolute. It is a truth which is never possessed by human accomplishments, but towards which the best efforts in teaching and learning are ever on the way.

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