

**The Ninth Study**

**The Theory of the Philosophical  
Hermeneutics and Its Criticism**

By

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**Abstract**

This research discusses and criticizes the theory of the philosophical hermeneutics. This theory is one of the hermeneutical theories that emerged in the twentieth century, and Heidegger laid its foundations and Gadamer completed it. It is concerned with the philosophical reflection on the nature of understanding and interpretation, and it describes how they occur. This theory is one of the arbitrary and extreme theories of understanding and interpreting the text. This is because it ignores the author's intention since it considers that the meaning of the text is independent of the author's intention. Also, it considers that subjectivity is an inevitable part of every understanding and interpretation. It also considers that any understanding or interpretation of the text is affected by the historical conditions and that it changes according to their change. In addition, it confirms the productivity, dialectic and infinity of understanding and interpretation of the text. This research consists of three sections. The first section presents the principles of this theory, the second section criticizes its principles and the third section discusses the consequences of its principles. The research concludes that this theory is an arbitrary and extreme theory. This is because it focuses excessively on the recipient making him a participant in producing the meaning of the text, and it excessively neglects the author making the meaning of the text independent of his intention. Also, it leads to subjectivity, relativity, multiplicity and infinity of understanding and interpretation of the text.

**Keywords:** The Theory of The Philosophical Hermeneutics , Understanding, Interpretation, Author, Text, Recipient.

## نظرية الهرمنيوطيقا الفلسفية ونقدها

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المخلص :

تناول هذا البحث دراسة نظرية الهرمنيوطيقا الفلسفية ونقدها. وهذه النظرية هي إحدى النظريات التأويلية التي ظهرت في القرن العشرين، وقد وضع هيدجر أسسها وأتم جادامر بنائها. وتهتم هذه النظرية بالتأمل الفلسفي في ماهية الفهم والتأويل وتصف كيفية حدوثهما. وهذه النظرية هي إحدى النظريات المتعسفة والمتطرفة في فهم النص وتأويله. إذ أنها لا تبالي بقصد المؤلف حيث أنها ترى أن معنى النص مستقل عن مقصد مؤلفه. وترى أن الذاتية حتمية في كل فهم وتأويل. كما أنها ترى أن أي فهم للنص أو تأويل له يتأثر بالظروف التاريخية ويتغير بتغيرها. كما أنها تنص على إنتاجية وجدلية ولا نهائية فهم النص وتأويله. يشتمل هذا البحث على ثلاثة مباحث. يعرض المبحث الأول مبادئ هذه النظرية، وينقد المبحث الثاني مبادئها، ويناقش المبحث الثالث نتائج مبادئها. ويخلص البحث إلى أن هذه النظرية هي نظرية متعسفة متطرفة. وذلك لأنها تفرط في التركيز على المتلقي فتجعله مشاركاً في إنتاج معنى النص، وتفرط في إهمال المؤلف فتجعل معنى النص مستقل عن مقصده. كما أنها تؤدي إلى ذاتية ونسبية وتعددية ولا نهائية فهم النص وتأويله.

**كلمات مفتاحية:** نظرية الهرمنيوطيقا الفلسفية، الفهم، التأويل، المؤلف، النص، المتلقي.

## Introduction:

The theory of the philosophical hermeneutics is attributed to the two philosophers Heidegger and Gadamer. Heidegger has laid its foundations and Gadamer has completed it. This theory focuses on understanding the nature of understanding itself and the circumstances of its occurrence. It does not aim to establish rules and criteria for correct and objective understanding, but rather it aims to explain and describe what happens in the process of understanding. It pays special attention to describing and analyzing the process of understanding and interpreting texts.

Through studying and analyzing the process of understanding, the theory under discussion has reached the following results: (1) Understanding is existential because the existence of the human being is conditioned by understanding and it is an essential ingredient for the human existence<sup>1</sup>; (2) Understanding is subjective because it is affected by the understanding subject<sup>2</sup>; (3) Understanding is historical since it is a historical event that is affected by history<sup>3</sup>; (4) Understanding is dialectical since it is based on the dialectic of question and answer<sup>4</sup>; (5) Understanding is productive because it is not merely a reproduction of the original production<sup>5</sup>; (6) Understanding is linguistic because there is no thinking nor understanding without language<sup>6</sup>; (7) Understanding is infinite because it undergoes renewal and change and it never comes entirely to an end<sup>7</sup>; (8) Understanding implies application since it always includes application<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger,*

*Gadamer* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1969), pp. 42, 131, 132.

<sup>2</sup>Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, rev. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 484.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 299-300.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 370.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 296.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 390, 391, 469.

<sup>7</sup>Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley, Calif.:

University of California Press, 1976), p. 211.

<sup>8</sup>Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 306-307.

The theory under discussion reveals that interpretation has a fore-structure which affects it. This fore-structure consists of fore-having (something we have in advance), fore-sight (something we see in advance) and fore-conception (something we conceive in advance). Heidegger states, "Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception."<sup>9</sup>

According to this theory, the hermeneutical process consists of understanding, interpretation and application. Each of these components forms an integral part of the hermeneutical process. Gadamer says, "We consider application to be just as integral a part of the hermeneutical process as are understanding and interpretation."<sup>10</sup> In addition, this theory considers that understanding is always interpretation and that interpretation is the explicit form of understanding. Gadamer states that "interpretation is not an occasional, post facto supplement to understanding; rather, understanding is always interpretation, and hence interpretation is the explicit form of understanding."<sup>11</sup>

This theory rejects the foundations of the theory of the traditional hermeneutics, namely: (1) the methodology of the interpretation of the text; (2) the meaning of the text is nothing but the meaning intended by the author; (3) interpretation is the reproduction of a meaning previously produced by the author; (4) the possibility of an objective interpretation of the text; (5) the possibility of arriving at the final meaning of the text; (6) the interpretation is restricted to what the text says.

The theory under discussion holds that reading and interpreting the text must be done in isolation from its author and his intention. This is because the written text from its perspective becomes separated and isolated from its author and his intention.

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<sup>9</sup>Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell

Publishers Ltd, 1962), p. 191.

<sup>10</sup>Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 307.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p.306.

Gadamer states, "The reading and interpreting of what is written is so distanced and detached from its author – from his mood, intentions, and unexpressed tendencies – that the grasping of the meaning of the text takes on something of the character of an independent productive act."<sup>12</sup>

This theory also sees that the interpreter is the one who gives the meaning to the text because only through the interpreter the written marks are converted into meaningful marks. Gadamer says that "texts are 'enduringly fixed expressions of life' that are to be understood; and that means that one partner in the hermeneutical conversation, the text, speaks only through the other partner, the interpreter. Only through him are the written marks changed back into meaning."<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to the traditional theory of hermeneutics which considers that the text must be understood in the light of the conditions in which it appeared to be understood properly and objectively, the theory of the philosophical hermeneutics considers that the text must be understood in the light of the current conditions. Moreover, this theory considers that reconstructing the original meaning is merely bringing a dead meaning to the present. Gadamer says, "Similarly, a hermeneutics that regarded understanding as reconstructing the original would be no more than handing on a dead meaning."<sup>14</sup>

Also unlike the traditional theory of hermeneutics which sees the necessity of isolating the interpreter's horizon from that of the text in order to reach an objective interpretation, the theory under discussion sees the necessity of merging the interpreter's horizon with that of the text and this is what Gadamer calls the fusion of horizons. Gadamer describes the fusion of horizons as follows: "the interpreter and the text each possess his or her and its own horizon, and each moment of understanding represents a fusion of these horizons."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>13</sup>Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 389.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p.160.

<sup>15</sup>Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, ed. and trans. Richard

Palmer (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p. 62.

Thus, according to this theory, the interpretation of the text is done by fusing the horizon of the present (the interpreter's horizon) with that of the past (the horizon of the text).

The theory under discussion ousted the author and replaced him with the interpreter. This is because it makes the interpreter the focus of the hermeneutical process rather than the author. It also considers that the purpose of interpreting the text is not to grasp the author's intention, but rather to grasp the meaning that comes to the mind of the interpreter when he encounters the text and merges his horizon with that of the text.

According to this theory, every age must understand a traditional text in its own way. Gadamer mentions that "every age has to understand a transmitted text in its own way."<sup>16</sup> Moreover, this theory considers that the text must be understood at every moment and in every situation in a new and different way. Gadamer states, "This implies that the text, whether law or gospel, if it is to be understood properly—i.e., according to the claim it makes—must be understood at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way."<sup>17</sup>

### **Principles of the Theory of the Philosophical Hermeneutics**

With regard to understanding and interpreting the text, the theory of the philosophical hermeneutics lays down the following principles:

- 1. Understanding the text is independent of its author's intention:** This theory considers that the text is independent of its author and his intention; consequently, it understands the text in isolation from its author and his intention. When the text is written, it becomes an independent entity of its author. Gadamer declares, "What is fixed in writing has detached itself from the contingency of its origin and its author and made itself free for new relationships."<sup>18</sup> Moreover, he states that "the real meaning of a text, as it speaks to the interpreter, does not depend on the contingencies of the author and his original audience."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 296.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 307-308.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 397.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 296.

- 2. Understanding the text is influenced by the understanding subject:** This theory holds that there is no objective understanding of the text. This is because there is no understanding without prejudices and presuppositions. Gadamer states, "Thus there is undoubtedly no understanding that is free of all prejudices, however much the will of our knowledge must be directed toward escaping their thrall."<sup>20</sup> In addition, Heidegger declares that "an interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us."<sup>21</sup>
- 3. Historicity of understanding the text:** This theory sees that understanding the text is a historical event that is influenced by the historical conditions and factors and that it changes in accordance with the change in the horizons of reception and the experiences of recipients. Gadamer mentions that "understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event."<sup>22</sup> He also says, "But that we should learn to understand ourselves better and recognize that in all understanding, whether we are expressly aware of it or not, the efficacy of history is at work."<sup>23</sup>
- 4. Infinity of understanding the text:** According to the theory under discussion, there is no final and fixed understanding of the text. This is because understanding is renewable and changeable because it is an ongoing process. Gadamer states, "Certainly every understanding is only "underway"; it never comes entirely to an end."<sup>24</sup> Therefore, this theory believes that the discovery of the true and final meaning of the text never comes to an end because new sources of understanding are constantly emerging which reveal unexpected elements of meaning. Gadamer states:

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 484.

<sup>21</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp.191-192.

<sup>22</sup>Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 299.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p.300.

<sup>24</sup>Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 211.



But the discovery of the true meaning of a text or a work of art is never finished; it is in fact an infinite process. Not only are fresh sources of error constantly excluded, so that all kinds of things are filtered out that obscure the true meaning; but new sources of understanding are continually emerging that reveal unsuspected elements of meaning.<sup>25</sup>

**5. Understanding the text is a productive activity:** According to this theory, understanding the text is a productive activity because it is not merely a reproduction of the author's meaning, but rather it is participation in producing a meaning that goes beyond the author. This is due to the participation of the interpreter's intellectual horizon and his current situation in producing the meaning of the text. Gadamer mentions, "Not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well."<sup>26</sup>

**6. Understanding the text is a dialectical process:** This theory considers that understanding the text is a dialectical process that depends on the reciprocal dialectic of question and answer between the interpreter and the text. Thus, the interpreter addresses questions to the text and the text answers them, then the text addresses questions to the interpreter and the interpreter answers them. Gadamer mentions, "We understand the sense of the text only by acquiring the horizon of the question—a horizon that, as such, necessarily includes other possible answers."<sup>27</sup> He also states, "Thus we return to the conclusion that the hermeneutic phenomenon too implies the primacy of dialogue and the structure of question and answer."<sup>28</sup> Moreover, he believes that when interpreting written tradition, it is restored to the living conversation by the dialectic of question and answer. He states, "When it is interpreted, written tradition is brought back out of the alienation in which it finds itself and [sic] into

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<sup>25</sup>Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 298.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 296.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 363.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

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the living present of conversation, which is always fundamentally realized in question and answer."<sup>29</sup>

**7. Understanding the text always includes application:** This theory affirms that understanding the text always includes application to the present. This is because the interpreter understands the text in the light of his current horizon. Gadamer says, "We emphasized that the experience (Erfahrung) of meaning that takes place in understanding always includes application."<sup>30</sup> According to Gadamer's concept of application, it means relating understanding to the hermeneutical situation in which it occurs and adapting it to this situation. This means understanding the text in light of the concepts of the interpreter and his historical horizon and cultural world. This application is done by fusing the horizon of the interpreter with the horizon of the text.

Gadamer says, "In the course of our reflections we have come to see that understanding always involves something like applying the text to be understood to the interpreter's present situation."<sup>31</sup> Gadamer also says, "He [i.e. the interpreter] must not try to disregard himself and his particular hermeneutical situation. He must relate the text to this situation if he wants to understand at all."<sup>32</sup> In addition he says, "Every interpretation has to adapt itself to the hermeneutical situation to which it belongs."<sup>33</sup>

**8. Understanding the text includes discovering what is unsaid:** According to this theory, understanding the text is not restricted to what the text says, but rather it goes beyond what it says. It includes understanding and discovering the hidden meanings that the text did not declare. Gadamer argues, "Thus a person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question. If we go back behind what is said, then we inevitably ask questions beyond what is said."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 362.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 385.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 306-307.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 321.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 398.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p.363.

Heidegger views the task of hermeneutics as bringing out the hidden meaning. Palmer states:

From the beginning, then, Heidegger defined his philosophical task in essentially hermeneutical terms. Hermeneutics, in this context, does not mean simply interpretation in terms of correctness and agreement; hermeneutics carries its deeper traditional overtones of bringing out a hidden meaning, of bringing what is unknown to light: revelation and disclosure.<sup>35</sup>

### **Criticizing the Principles of the Theory of the Philosophical Hermeneutics**

There are many points of criticism that can be levelled at the principles of this theory. Each of the principles of this theory will be criticized separately according to the above-mentioned order as follows:

#### **Criticizing the first principle which states that understanding the text is independent of its author's intention**

The text can not be understood and interpreted in isolation from its author's intention, as this leads to arbitrariness of understanding and interpreting the text.

This is because the meaning of the text is determined according to the author's intention in the light of the rules and conventions of the text's language. Hirsch states, "For if the meaning of a text is not the author's, then no interpretation can possibly correspond to the meaning of the text, since the text can have no determinate or determinable meaning."<sup>36</sup> Both Betti and Hirsch consider that the sole object of interpretation is reconstructing the meaning intended by the author and that this is the only criterion for measuring the correctness of understanding. Bilen states, "Betti and Hirsch maintain that reproduction of the author's meaning is the sole object of interpretation, and it is the sole criterion for the validity of understanding."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, p. 147.

<sup>36</sup>E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 5-6.

<sup>37</sup>Osman Bilen, *The Historicity of Understanding and the Problem of Relativism in Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2000), p. 95.

In addition, the principle of the text's independence of its author's intention contradicts the purpose of writing the text. The text is written to convey a specific message from the author to the reader or recipient. Consequently, it is logical that the meaning of the text is the meaning that the author wants to convey to others, not the meaning that the reader or interpreter understands of the text when his horizon is fused with that of the text regardless of the author's intention.

As a matter of fact, understanding the text is not independent of its author's intention as this theory claims, but rather it is closely related to the author's intention. This is because the author's intention is the focus of the interpretative process, and the meaning of the text is nothing but the meaning intended by its author. The purpose of the interpretation is essentially to grasp the author's intention. Al-Kalbayākānī states:

The well-known approach in hermeneutics is based on the premise that the purpose of interpretation is summarized in seeking to extract the author's intention from the text. This is because the meaning of the text is nothing but the meaning that the author intended, and if the exegete or interpreter seeks other than this meaning, he will be mistaken and his interpretation will have no value.<sup>38</sup>

### **Criticizing the second principle which states that understanding the text is influenced by the understanding subject**

Subjectivity is not an inevitable part of understanding the text as this theory claims. Rather, the interpreter can be objective if he wants to adopt objectivity in his understanding of the text. If we concede that the interpreter is subject to be affected by his prejudices, presuppositions and preconceptions, we do not concede that the interpreter can not overcome them and prevent their influence on the objectivity of interpretation.

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<sup>38</sup> Alī al-Rabbānī al-Kalbayākānī, *Al-Hirminūṭīca wa Mantīq Fahm al-Dīn*, trans. Dakhil al-Ḥamadānī

(n.p.: Mu'assasat Ahl al-Ḥaq al-Islāmiyyah, 2013), p.166.

Habermas criticizes Heidegger and Gadamer for their belief in the absurdity and impossibility of getting rid of prejudices, and he asserts that hermeneutics can overcome prejudices. Muṣṭafá mentions, "As for the principle that believes in the absurdity and impossibility of overcoming prejudices, which Gadamer adopted it from Heidegger, it is a false principle in Habermas's view since he confirms that hermeneutics can overcome prejudices through the critical approach."<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, not all prior information which the interpreter has negatively affects understanding the text, but it may help in understanding the text and arriving at its meaning. The prior information does not negatively affect understanding the text unless it is erroneous. In this respect, Rād states:

Not all prior information negatively affects the objective understanding of the work; rather, some of it is necessary for achieving the objective understanding, and some are encouraged to be used for arriving at a correct understanding of the work. Of course, part of the prior information negatively affects the objective understanding, but there is no evidence that it is

inevitably involved in understanding the work. On this basis, the mere possibility that this type of prior information can be involved in understanding the work does not support the claim that all understandings are affected by this information.<sup>40</sup>

### **Criticizing the third principle which states that understanding the text is a historical event**

The objective and correct understanding is beyond historicity because it is not influenced by the historical factors and conditions, and it does not change according to the change in the horizons of reception and the experiences of recipients. As for the subjective and relative understanding that this theory calls for, it is the understanding that is subject to historicity and affected by historical factors and conditions and changes according to the change in the

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<sup>39</sup>Ādil Muṣṭafá, *Fahm al-Fahm: Madkhal ila al-Hirmīnyūfīca Nazariyat al-Ta'wīl min Aflatun ila*

*Gadamer* (Cairo: Roueya, 2007), p.411.

<sup>40</sup>Ṣafdar Ilāhī Rād, *Al-Hīrmīnūfīca: Mansha' al-Muṣṭalaḥ wa Ma'nāh wa Isti'mālātih fī al-Ḥaḍārāt*

*al-Insāniyyah al-Mukhtalifah*, trans. Ḥasanīn al-Jammāl (Beirut: Al-Markaz al-Islāmī li al-Dirāsāt

al-Istrātijjiyah, 2019), p.176.

horizons of reception and the experiences of recipients. This theory aims to relativize understanding the text and make it change and vary from time to time and from one person to another.

Moreover, the meaning of the text is fixed and it does not change from time to time or from one person to another according to the change in historical circumstances, interpretative horizons and personal experiences. Hirsch states, "However, this by no means implies that the meaning of the text varies from age to age, or that anybody, who has done whatever is required to understand that meaning, understands a different meaning from his predecessors of an earlier age."<sup>41</sup>

### **Criticizing the fourth principle which states that understanding the text is infinite**

This theory claims that there is no final understanding of the text, but this claim is invalid. There is no doubt that the text contains a determinate and final meaning. This meaning is arrived at by means of following the methodologies, rules and constraints of understanding and interpreting the text in addition to knowing the conventions and rules of the language in which the text was written.

How does this theory reach a final understanding of the meaning of the text while it flatly rejects the methodologies and rules of understanding and interpreting the text? Had it wanted to reach the final meaning of the text, it would have accepted the methodologies and rules of understanding and interpreting the text. Rather, it rejected these methodologies and rules to make the text open to endless interpretations and multiple readings and to raise doubts about understanding the meaning of the text and make it always speculative.

Moreover, the meaning of the text may be definite or probabilistic. The interpreter arrives at the final meaning when interpreting the text which has a definite meaning and the meaning in this case is certain. Although the interpreter does not arrive at the final and certain meaning when interpreting the text which has a probabilistic meaning, this does not mean that the meaning arrived at has no value<sup>42</sup>. This is because the inconclusiveness of meaning does not prevent the possibility of the validity of the meaning.

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<sup>41</sup> Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, p. 137.

<sup>42</sup> Ahmad Wā'izī, "Māhiyat al-Hirminūṭīqa," *Majalat al-Mahajja* 6 (2003): pp. 55-56.

### **Criticizing the fifth principle which states that understanding the text is a productive activity**

Understanding the text is not a productive activity as this theory claims because understanding the text is a reproduction of the original production, i.e. reproduction and reconstruction of the meaning produced and intended by the author. Thus, the role of the interpreter in understanding the text is restricted to reconstructing the meaning already existent and given in advance in the text. The interpreter's role in his understanding and interpreting the text is limited to reception<sup>43</sup>, not production and creation. The interpreter is not allowed in any circumstances to interfere in producing the meaning of the text. Moreover, if the interpreter interfered in producing the meaning of the text, this would lead to producing and creating a new meaning other than the original meaning of the text intended by the author.

### **Criticizing the sixth principle which states that understanding the text is a dialectical process**

This theory states that understanding the text is the result of the dialectic of question and answer between the interpreter and the text. Given that the text is mute, neither a dialogue nor dialectic takes place between the interpreter and the text. If we accept that it is possible for the text to answer the interpreter's questions, we do not accept that it is possible for the text to address questions to the interpreter. For how does a dumb text address questions to the interpreter? What Gadamer calls the dialogue between the interpreter and the text on which understanding the text depends is nothing more than a monologue. Betti criticizes Gadamer saying, "Dialogue therefore turns into monologue: the interpreter who should inquire into the meaning of phenomena (meaning-full forms) allows himself indeed to be questioned by the text. Is it still possible to regard such a procedure as an interpretation?"<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>44</sup>Josef Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique*

(London: Routledge, 1980), p. 70.

Moreover, the relationship between writing and reading is not based on a dialogical relationship between the writer and reader because dialogue is an exchange of questions and answers, and there is no such exchange between the writer and the reader. This is because the reader is absent at the time of writing the text, and the writer is absent at the time of reading the text. Ricoeur states:

The writing–reading relation is thus not a particular case of the speaking–

answering relation. It is not a relation of interlocution, not an instance of dialogue. It does not suffice to say that reading is a dialogue with the author through his work, for the relation of the reader to the book is of a completely different nature. Dialogue is an exchange of questions and answers; there is no exchange of this sort between the writer and the reader. The writer does not respond to the reader ... The reader is absent from the act of writing; the writer is absent from the act of reading.<sup>45</sup>

### **Criticizing the seventh principle which states that understanding the text always includes application**

If the text is understood in the light of the interpreter's circumstances, experiences, tendencies and conceptions, this will lead to the subjective relativity of understanding the text. This is because each interpreter will understand the text from the perspective of his own circumstances, experiences, tendencies and conceptions. Since the circumstances, experiences, tendencies and conceptions of the interpreters differ from one interpreter to another, this will lead to different and multiple understandings of the text. Betti criticizes Gadamer's call for applying the text to the interpreter's situation and considers that this results in involvement in subjective relativism.

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<sup>45</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and Human Sciences*, ed. and trans., John B. Thompson (Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 2016), p.108.



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Bilen states, "In Betti's view, because of Gadamer's emphasis on how every understanding must apply to the interpreter's situation, Gadamer falls into subjective relativism."<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the text must be understood in the light of its historical context in which it was written and not in the light of the interpreter's current historical context.

**Criticizing the eighth principle which states that understanding the text includes discovering what is unsaid**

Basically, understanding the text should be restricted to what the text actually says so as not to attribute to the text what it did not say. If we try to go beyond the text to discover what it did not and could not say, then the discovered meanings will be mere speculations and guesses that are not based on evidence. However, there is no objection to discovering meanings from the text provided that they stem from the text and not imposed on it and that they could be attributed to and supported by the text. Also, these meanings must be based on evidence, not just speculation and conjecture. The meaning of the discourse is limited to what the author intended and mentioned in the text. Beiser mentions that Meier insists that only what the author intends to say belongs to the meaning of his discourse; what he could or should have said does not count as its meaning. Beiser adds that Meier insists that the interpreter must take the sense from the discourse, not put it into it.<sup>47</sup>

**The Consequences of the Theory of the Philosophical Hermeneutics**

This theory leads to several negative consequences, namely relativity of understanding the text, multiplicity of understanding the text and relative validity of every understanding of the text. Each consequence will be discussed separately as follows:

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<sup>46</sup>Bilen, *The Historicity of Understanding and the Problem of Relativism*, p. 89.

<sup>47</sup>Frederick Beiser, "Wolff, Chladenius, Meier: Enlightenment and Hermeneutics," in *The Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics*, ed. Jeff Malpas and Hans-Helmuth Gander (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 59.

**1. Relativity of understanding the text:** According to this theory, understanding the text will inevitably end in relativity that arises from the subjectivity and historicity of understanding the text. This relativity is the aim and aspiration of this theory as it aims at relativizing understanding the text in order not to be there an absolute understanding of the text. According to Gadamer's analysis of the hermeneutical process, there is no an absolute correct interpretation, but there is only a relative interpretation. Gadamer states:

In our analysis of the hermeneutical process we saw that to acquire a horizon of interpretation requires a fusion of horizons. This is now confirmed by the verbal aspect of interpretation. The text is made to speak through interpretation ... There cannot, therefore, be any single interpretation that is correct "in itself," precisely because every interpretation is concerned with the text itself.<sup>48</sup>

As a matter of fact, the interpretation of the text is not relative since there are rules, constraints and criteria that govern the process of interpretation. The interpretation that conforms to the intended meaning is correct and other interpretations are wrong. Although the interpretation may differ from one interpreter to another, this does not mean the relativity of interpretation because there are standard constraints that distinguish the correct interpretation from the wrong one.

**2. Multiplicity of understanding the text:** According to this theory, understanding the text will be multiplied according to the multiplicity of interpreters because each interpreter understands the text according to his situation, preconceptions, prejudices and presuppositions. Thus, interpretations will be multiplied as a result of the multiplicity of the horizons of interpreters, and the single text becomes multiple texts and each interpretation of the text will be a new text.

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<sup>48</sup>Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 398.

Although there may be more than one interpretation of the text, this does not mean that multiple interpretations are of the same degree of validity or that they can not be combined and reconciled. Ricoeur argues, "If it is true that there is always more than one way of construing a text, it is not true that all interpretations are equal. It is always possible to argue for or against an interpretation, to confront interpretations, to arbitrate between them and to seek agreement."<sup>49</sup>

If the text is subject to multiple interpretations or readings, it is possible to identify the meanings that the text supports and the meanings that the text does not support. Eco says, "I shall claim that a theory of interpretation—even when it assumes that texts are open to multiple readings—must also assume that it is possible to reach an agreement, if not about the meanings that a text encourages, at least about those that a text discourages."<sup>50</sup>

No matter how many interpretations there are, there is only one valid interpretation since the correct meaning is only one and does not multiply.

Also, the multiplicity of interpretations does not mean arbitrariness and randomness of interpretation because there are rules, constraints and criteria for interpretation. Moreover, the points of agreement between the multiple interpretations outweigh the points of disagreement<sup>51</sup>.

### **3. Relative validity of every understanding of the text:**

According to this theory, every understanding of the text is relatively valid whatever this understanding is since each understanding is justified. This is because each understanding is the result of fusing the interpreter's horizon with that of the text. Any understanding that results from this fusion is valid and legitimate because it stems from the hermeneutical situation of the interpreter.

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<sup>49</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, Tex.: The

Texas Christian University Press, 1976), p. 79.

<sup>50</sup>Umberto Eco, *The limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 45.

<sup>51</sup>Ahmad Bahashtī, "Al-Hirminyūṭīqa: Al-Muqtaḍayāt wa al-Natā'ij," *Majalat Qadāyah Islāmiyyah*

*Mu'āshirah* 6 (1999): p. 157.

4. Each understanding looks at the text from a particular situation and a specific perspective; therefore, it is justified. According to Gadamer, there is not only one correct interpretation, but rather there are relatively correct interpretations. Gadamer states, "In view of the finitude of our historical existence, it would seem that there is something absurd about the whole idea of a unique, correct interpretation."<sup>52</sup>

It is logical that not every interpretation of the text is correct, but the correct interpretation of the text is that which reaches the author's intention and observes the rules, constraints and criteria of interpretation. Also, the text is not open to every interpretation, and it does not accept every interpretation. Rather, the text accepts the interpretation that takes account of the linguistic coining (*al-waḍ' al-lughawī*) when interpreting the meanings of words. This is due to the fact that the meanings of words follow the linguistic coining<sup>53</sup>. The text also accepts the interpretation that takes account of the principles that govern communication and the rules and conventions of the language in which the text was written.

Hirsch criticizes the theory of the philosophical hermeneutics for not being interested in setting a principle or a criterion for distinguishing between correct and incorrect interpretation. Hirsch says, "If we cannot enunciate a principle for distinguishing between an interpretation that is valid and one that is not, there is little point in writing books about texts or about hermeneutic theory."<sup>54</sup>

Hirsch puts forward four criteria for verifying the probability of a reading or an interpretation. These criteria are the criterion of legitimacy, the criterion of correspondence, the criterion of generic appropriateness and the criterion of coherence. The criterion of legitimacy states that the reading must be permissible within the public norms of the language in which the text was composed.

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<sup>52</sup>Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 118.

<sup>53</sup>Wā'izī, "Māhiyat al-Hirminūṭīqa," p. 55.

<sup>54</sup>Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, p. 251.

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The criterion of correspondence states that the reading must account for each linguistic component in the text. The criterion of generic appropriateness states that the reading must be appropriate for the text's genre.

The criterion of coherence states that the reading must be coherent.<sup>55</sup>

In conclusion, the theory of the philosophical hermeneutics is an arbitrary and extreme hermeneutical theory of understanding and interpreting the text. This is because it denies the author's intention and considers that meaning is the result of the fusion of the recipient's horizon with the text's horizon, and this means that the meaning does not exist before the fusion of the recipient's horizon with that of the text. It also considers that subjectivity is an inevitable part of understanding and interpreting the text; therefore, it is not possible to reach the objective meaning of the text. In addition, it confirms the historicity of understanding and interpreting the text, and this means that any understanding or interpretation of the text is affected by the historical conditions and that it changes according to their change. Also, it confirms the productivity of understanding and interpreting the text, and this means that the process of understanding and interpreting the text is not a reproduction of the meaning existed in the text, but rather a participation in producing a new meaning. It also considers that understanding and interpreting the text is a dialectical process, and this means the interference of the recipient's horizon in the meaning of the text and its influence on it. In addition, it considers that understanding and interpreting the text is an endless process, and this means that the text is open to an infinite number of meanings and interpretations. Moreover, it sees that understanding and interpreting the text includes discovering what the text did not say, and this means making the text say what it did not say.

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 236.

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Furthermore, it affirms the necessity of relating and adapting understanding and interpretation of the text to the hermeneutical situation of the recipient, and this means relativizing understanding and interpreting the text as well as subjecting the text to the hermeneutical situation of the recipient and its conditions. Therefore, this theory will only lead to subjectivity, relativity, historicity, multiplicity and infinity of understanding and interpreting the text.

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