



Prejudice Reconsidered: From Psychological Bias to Hermeneutical Horizon

Dennis N. Tion,^{a, 1}; Danilo S. Alterado ^{b, 2}

^a Saint Louis University, Philippines

^b Panpacific University, Philippines

¹ dntion@slu.edu.ph

² alterado.danilo@panpacificu.edu.ph

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Submitted: May 8, 2026

Revised: September 1, 2026

Accepted: September 3, 2026

Keywords:

Prejudice;
Hermeneutics;
Tradition; *Bildung*;
Historically effected
consciousness;
Dialogue; Temporal
Distance

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.53396/media.v7i2.925>

ABSTRACT:

This essay revisits Hans-Georg Gadamer's notion of *prejudice* (*Vorurteil*) as a legitimate condition of understanding, offering a complementary perspective to psychology's prevailing treatment of prejudice as bias or distortion. Psychological approaches have illuminated the harmful effects of entrenched prejudice in perpetuating exclusion and injustice, yet they often emphasize its negative dimensions. Gadamer, by contrast, situates prejudice within the hermeneutical process as historically inherited orientations that shape interpretation. This article uses philosophical hermeneutics as an approach, drawing on *Bildung* (formation), tradition, and historically effected consciousness. The analysis highlights how prejudices function as initial frameworks that open the way for dialogue and meaning-making. Legitimate prejudice is marked by openness, receptivity, and the capacity for transformation through encounter, while illegitimate prejudice manifests as rigidity or ideological closure. The aim is to clarify and further articulate what constitutes legitimate prejudice that can be constitutive to the horizon of human understanding, one that calls for ongoing engagement with history, tradition, and difference. The article concludes that prejudices can be legitimate. Rather than advocating for the eradication of all prejudices, Gadamer's framework encourages critical discernment and ethical humility, recognizing prejudice as both inevitable and potentially productive.

ABSTRAK:

Esai ini mengkaji kembali gagasan Hans-Georg Gadamer tentang *prasangka* (*Vorurteil*) sebagai kondisi yang sah bagi pemahaman, sekaligus menawarkan perspektif pelengkap bagi pendekatan psikologis yang menekankan prasangka

sebagai bias atau distorsi. Meskipun pendekatan tersebut menjelaskan dampak buruk prasangka yang mengakar dalam melanggengkan eksklusi dan ketidakadilan, Gadamer menempatkan prasangka dalam proses hermeneutis sebagai orientasi yang diwariskan secara historis dan membentuk penafsiran. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan hermeneutika filosofis, khususnya konsep *Bildung* (pembentukan diri), tradisi, dan kesadaran yang dipengaruhi sejarah, esai ini menelaah bagaimana prasangka menyediakan kerangka awal bagi dialog dan pembentukan makna. Kajian ini bertujuan memperjelas kondisi yang memungkinkan prasangka dipandang sah dan bersifat konstitutif bagi pemahaman manusia. Prasangka yang sah terbuka untuk dipertanyakan, ditinjau ulang, dan ditransformasikan melalui perjumpaan, sedangkan prasangka yang tidak sah menghambat keterlibatan tersebut melalui kekakuan atau ketertutupan ideologis. Perbedaan ini menuntut keterlibatan berkelanjutan dengan sejarah, tradisi, dan perbedaan. Esai ini menyimpulkan bahwa prasangka tidak terelakkan dan berpotensi produktif, meskipun keabsahannya tidak dapat diterima begitu saja. Alih-alih menganjurkan penghapusan seluruh prasangka, kerangka pemikiran Gadamer mendorong penilaian kritis dan kerendahan hati etis dalam menelaah orientasi yang diwariskan dan memungkinkan berlangsungnya pemahaman.

Copyright © 2026, Authors



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

INTRODUCTION

The human project is essentially an effort to interpret the past and apply such discoveries to the transformation of the present.¹ This means that the whole of human life is a hermeneutical endeavor. Man's quest for meaning is a quest for understanding. Since philosophy is an inquiry into the coherence and the sense of human life as a whole, it is no wonder, then, that "hermeneutics" has become one of the dominant interests of philosophical discourse today. Philosophy and psychology, though distinct in their methods, have a common interest. Both disciplines like to understand the human mind and the ways people make sense of the world. One area where these two disciplines may overlap, but not completely, is human judgment. People interpret their experiences and make decisions based on what they believe to be true. These decisions can be shaped by traditions and personal experiences that brings forth prejudices. The question is whether people can still be fair or reasonable given that people possess prejudices. In psychology, prejudice is generally seen negatively as it is described as a *complex human problem*.² It should be either eradicated³, reduced, or regulated⁴ as it can be harmful.⁵ This may rightly be so, for the prejudice referred to is the entrenched bias that distorts perception, excludes others, and perpetuates injustice.

However, prejudice in its broader sense can also be understood as a pre-existing orientation of the human mind that, while it can be harmful, is also an inevitable part of how people interpret or navigate the world. The challenge, then, is not to deny prejudice altogether, but to discern between destructive prejudice that closes off dialogue and the provisional judgments that can be reshaped through openness and encounter. There are legitimate prejudices and they are described as prejudices that have undergone critical examinations.⁶ Legitimate prejudices are those that, when tested against the text or *text-analogues*, endure, continuing to orient our effort to understand.⁷ This essay agrees with this understanding of legitimate prejudice but sets out further what legitimate prejudice means by deducing the conditions under which such

¹ Ronald Mc Kinney, "The Hermeneutical Theory of Bernard Lonergan", *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 24 (Spring 1978), p. 287.

² Becky L. Choma, Arvin Jagayat, David Sumantry, and Vashisht Asrani, "The 'Complex Human Problem' that is Prejudice: A Review of *The Cambridge Handbook of the Psychology of Prejudice*," *Social Justice Research* 30, no. 3 (2017): 278, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-017-0287-0>.

³ Mary E. Kite, Bernard E. Whitley Jr., and Lisa S. Wagner, *Psychology of Prejudice and Discrimination*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367809218>.

⁴ Teuntje van Heese and Jochem Thijs, "Elementary School Students' Motivations for Responding without Prejudice: The Role of the Student-Teacher Relationship," *Social Psychology of Education* 29 (2026): Article 31, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-026-10196-z>.

⁵ Stina Björkholm, "Praise and Prejudice," *Topoi* (March 18, 2026), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-026-09942-7>.

⁶ Georgia Warnke, "Legitimate Prejudices," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 53, no. 1 (1997): 89.

⁷ Georgia Warnke, "Legitimate Prejudices," 97.

prejudices remain valid guides of interpretation within Gadamer's hermeneutical framework, especially in the concept of *Bildung* and tradition. Legitimate prejudice, far from being the enemy of truth, becomes its necessary companion, guiding us toward a deeper, more dialogical grasp of ourselves and the world. Therefore, given these proposed elements of a legitimate prejudice, one's understanding resists relativism and secures confidence in interpretative progress.⁸

METHOD

This essay uses a philosophical hermeneutic approach. It interprets concepts such as *prejudice*, *Bildung* (formation), tradition, and historical consciousness. By comparing psychology's focus on prejudice as a concern with Gadamer's view of it as an enabling condition, the study shows how hermeneutics offers a broader way to understand prejudice as something inevitable, open to change, and essential for human interpretation. Philosophical hermeneutics may differ in its focus and purpose. Conservative hermeneutics seeks to understand texts, for example, by suspending preconceptions of the interpreters to surface the original meaning or intention of the authors.⁹ Conservative hermeneutics, for example, is employed through a methodic approach in understanding the original meaning of authors.

Critical hermeneutics, wary of the possibility to truly uncover the original intention of the author or the meaning of a situation, aims to expose the historical and ideological presence of the object of the study through the author's expression and reader's interpretation.¹⁰ If critical hermeneutics' concern is the objective interpretation of a text, philosophical hermeneutics emphasizes prejudices and how understanding was formed. Philosophical hermeneutics' is more concerned with the ontology of understanding than methodology which pervades the modern thought.¹¹ Thus, in this essay, it is important to use this hermeneutic approach to be constantly reminded that a prejudice may be applicable to one discipline, but should not encroach in others. For example, the methods of science whose prejudice is objectivity may be appropriate in physical truths, but when it comes to human understanding, a different approach is needed. Human understanding like history, values, and even prejudices is a product of dialogue and encounter and is more nuanced than empirical truths. Philosophical hermeneutics fits in this study because it allows different interpretations to happen, *and it is during the interpretive process*

⁸ Iñaki Xavier Larrauri Pertierra, "Gadamer's Historically Effectuated and Effective Consciousness," *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review / Revue canadienne de philosophie* 61, no. 2 (2022): 261. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217322000178>.

⁹ Lisa M. Given, "Hermeneutics," in *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, 2008, p. 386.

¹⁰ Given, "Hermeneutics," 386.

¹¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Trans and ed by David E. Linge (Berkeley u.a.: California University Press, 1976), xi.

*that these influential forces are revealed, and so it is only then that they can be contended with.*¹² Possible deeper or new understanding happens because of these prejudices.¹³ In Gadamer's view, prejudice generally refers to the pre-existing beliefs, assumptions, and historical contexts that individuals bring to the process of interpretation.¹⁴ These prejudices are not merely biases to be eradicated but are integral to our understanding of texts, historical events, and even ourselves. Prejudices are the starting points of interpretation and are shaped by our historical and cultural context. Gadamer argues that these prejudices can be legitimate and even necessary because they provide a framework within which we can make sense of new information.¹⁵ They are not arbitrary but are formed through our engagement with tradition and experience. In his view, it is not about eliminating prejudices but about being aware of them and critically engaging with them to achieve a deeper understanding.

This essay explores Gadamer's concept of *Bildung* as a formative process rooted in German philosophy and enriched by Hegel's idea of self-formation through work.. Within this framework, prejudice (*Vorurteil*) is presented as an unavoidable starting point for understanding, historically inherited through tradition and community, and subject to transformation through *Bildung*. Gadamer critiques objectivist historical consciousness, proposing instead historically-effected consciousness, where tradition is seen as a living, dialogical medium that shapes interpretation yet must be critically examined. At the end of the essay, legitimate prejudice emerges as open to dialogue and transformation, distinguished from rigid bias, historical, ethical, and dialogical.

DISCUSSION

Rejecting Enlightenment ideals of detached objectivity, Gadamer emphasizes the historical and dialogical nature of interpretation.¹⁶ Central to his framework are the concepts of prejudice (*Vorurteil*), *bildung*, tradition, historical consciousness, and temporal distance as integral in the dialectical fusion of horizons.

¹² Given, 386.

¹³ Given, 386.

¹⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 278.

¹⁵ István M. Fehér, Prejudice and Pre-Understanding (ResearchGate, 2017), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316366449_Prejudice_and_Pre-Understanding, 280.

¹⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 279.

Prejudice and *Bildung*: The Hermeneutical Ground and the Dialectical Process of Understanding

Bildung is not exclusive to Gadamer as it was also used by many German philosophers especially during the Romantic Period.¹⁷ *Bildung* is used as a concept that represents the formation of the human, and his understanding of the world.¹⁸ Gadamer sees it as one of the most prevalent concepts in the nineteenth century discussed by Klopstock, Herder, and Hegel, among others.¹⁹ Hegel, living in the milieu of the Romantic period and having influenced Gadamer, viewed *Bildung* as formation:

Through work, however, the bondsman becomes conscious of what he truly is. In the moment which corresponds to desire in the master, the aspect of independence in the object is preserved, since it is precisely through work that the bondsman comes to acquire a sense of his own independence. This formative activity (*Bildung*) is at the same time a spiritual formative process (*Bildung*) of the self.²⁰

In this sense of *Bildung*, formation can happen through the person's experience leading to a heightening of consciousness. Thus, at least in the Hegelian sense of *Bildung*, formation entails an element outside of one's own to bring out in oneself a more educated version. Being educated means having the ability to see things in different angles.²¹ In Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, *Bildung* is understood in several ways - natural form, culture or cultivation, formation.²² This different understanding does not signal confusion but instead signifies the richness of the concept. *Bildung* can be understood as the process of being (the base form), becoming (cultivation), and being again (formation) in the context of understanding. This might find semblance to Hegel's dialectics, but Gadamer deviates particularly in what is being highlighted in the third understanding. As a formative process, *Bildung* does not imply the abandonment or replacement of one's perspective in favor of another. Instead, it involves coming to recognize the limitations or familiarities of one's own standpoint through engagement with what is different or the unfamiliar.²³ What takes place is not a negation, but a transformation where original perspective is neither discarded nor dissolved, but rather expanded and refined. From this standpoint, understanding, articulated by Gadamer as the *fusion of horizons*,²⁴

¹⁷ Jennifer A. Herdt, *Forming Humanity: Redeeming the German Bildung Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 2.

¹⁸ Morten Timmermann Korsgaard, Line Hilt, Merete Wiberg, and Mariann Solberg, "Bildung and the Significance of Place: An Overview," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 58, no. 5 (October 2024), 601.

¹⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 9.

²⁰ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 118.

²¹ Anders Odenstedt, *Gadamer on Tradition: Historical Context and the Limits of Reflection*, Contributions to Phenomenology 90 (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017), 154.

²² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 9-10.

²³ Morten Timmermann Korsgaard, Line Hilt, Merete Wiberg, and Mariann Solberg, "Bildung and the Significance of Place: An Overview," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 58, no. 5 (October 2024), 601.

²⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 305.

cannot be conceived as a form of intellectual contest or domination. It is not a struggle in which one perspective prevails over another, nor does it aim at the erasure of alterity or difference. Rather, it is a dialogical process in which openness to the other allows for a *superseding*²⁵ of horizons. In such encounters, meaning arises through participation and exchange, making understanding an event that is at once relational, dynamic, and productive.²⁶ Gadamer explains that the essence of *Bildung* is found not in the alienation but in the return to oneself.²⁷ Though Hegel articulates this movement towards the universal as *Aufhebung*²⁸, there is still this legitimate critique of Hegel's *Aufhebung* as losing particular lived experiences for the sake of the absolute or totality. Gadamer highlights the importance of this initial form and should not be eclipsed by the final form. *Bildung* is a continuous life process of experiences that are always in relation and affected by culture, history, and tradition. This *Erfahrung* (experience) Gadamer explains, provides an avenue for understanding and interpretation which are important in the widening of perspectives or fusion of horizons.²⁹ To put *Erfahrung* into context, Gadamer argues that knowledge or even truth, does not only come from the senses as what the natural sciences would do but also come from people's experiences especially of art.³⁰ Gadamer defines truth as something that emerges in the event of understanding, especially through art, language, and historical tradition. It is not just a matter of scientific method or objective correctness, but a disclosure of meaning that occurs dialogically when our own historical horizon fuses with that of the text, artwork, or tradition.³¹ When something is understood in a way that transforms us and makes sense of the world, it reveals truth even if it cannot be verified in a laboratory.³²

Like his mentor Martin Heidegger, Gadamer adopts a fundamentally historicist stance.³³ Heidegger's account of the existential constitution of *Dasein* in *Being and Time* represents a decisive shift in the trajectory of hermeneutic thought.³⁴ By presenting the phenomenology of *Dasein* as intrinsically hermeneutical, Heidegger elevates interpretation from a methodological concern to an ontological condition of human existence. Hermeneutics, in this sense, is no longer limited

²⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 103.

²⁵ In the English translation, this was the used word to describe the coming together of two horizons. See *Truth and Method*, 306.

²⁶ Chris Lawn and Niall Keane, *The Gadamer Dictionary* (London: Continuum, 2011), 31.

²⁷ Lawn and Keane, *The Gadamer Dictionary*, 31.

²⁸ In Hegelian philosophy, it describes how contradictions are resolved: the old idea and its opposite are both overcome and retained in a higher unity. This unity is transformation, not destruction.

²⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 319.

³⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 84.

³¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, xxii–xxiii.

³² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 103.

³³ Dmitri Shalin, "Hermeneutics and Prejudice: Heidegger and Gadamer in Their Historical Setting," *Russian Journal of Communication* 3, no. 1–2 (2010): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19409419.2010.10756760>.

³⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 293.

to the interpretation of texts but becomes integral to the very structure of understanding itself. Hans-Georg Gadamer situates his own work within this Heideggerian framework, understanding it as a continuation of the latter's rearticulation of the question of Being. Yet, rather than directly pursuing Heidegger's fundamental ontology, Gadamer advances the hermeneutics of Dasein along a different trajectory - one that is more explicitly concerned with the concrete conditions of human understanding. His inquiry turns toward the ways in which understanding is shaped by tradition, mediated through language, and realized in lived experience. In this respect, Gadamer deepens Heidegger's claim that language is the "house of Being" by underscoring its historical and dialogical dimensions.³⁵ This development is closely tied to Gadamer's concept of *Bildung*.

In the process of understanding, on top of the concept of *Bildung*, Gadamer recognizes a condition before understanding even occurs. He calls it *prejudice*. It may be similar to Kant's *a priori* in a sense that both *a priori* and *prejudice* are conditions for the possibility of knowledge, but they differ in ways. First, unlike Kant's *a priori*, prejudice is not something inherent; rather, it is something that is inherited through tradition, community, and language.³⁶ Our prejudices are not something abstract or purely ontological but are products of history. It is for this reason that we must engage historical tradition, which does not simply mean appealing to the past as the source of our subjectivity; rather, it is recognizing in history those elements of tradition which are present and rational. Tradition, is not an irrational burden but a rational authority that speaks through the accumulated and deliberated insights of a community.³⁷ To acknowledge tradition is to recognize its reasons and tested meanings, allowing them to confront our own assumptions. Second, prejudice can undergo revisions as it is faced with other perspectives. Because there is prejudice, there is an anticipation whether one's understanding is denied or confirmed.³⁸ Prejudice, in other words, makes this initial receptivity of understanding. It is not like a switch that can be readily turned off or on. Gadamer explains:

The prejudices and fore-meanings that occupy the interpreter's consciousness are not at his free disposal. He cannot separate in advance the productive prejudices that enable understanding from the prejudices that hinder it and lead to misunderstanding.³⁹

Prejudices, though possibly imperfect, are starting points for understanding. Gadamer recognizes the importance of prejudices but at the same time reminds that they also have limitations and difficulties.⁴⁰ This is one of the reasons why people must continue in the process of *Bildung*. It is through *Bildung* that prejudices move from silently

³⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 385.

³⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 270.

³⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 282-285.

³⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 269-270.

³⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 295.

⁴⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 271.

and subconsciously shaping one's understanding (which can be dangerous or productive) to having them tested and possibly transformed in the process. Prejudice and *Bildung* are foundational in the process of understanding. Prejudices provide the initial horizon from which interpretation begins; *Bildung* allows that horizon to expand through dialogical encounter.

Historical Consciousness and the Hermeneutics of Tradition

Gadamer critiques the modern notion of historical consciousness as overly objectivist - treating history as a distant object to be mastered.⁴¹ The modern notion of historical consciousness supports the idea that one can “unearth” historical fossils from the past as though they were buried objects waiting to be excavated, voided of impurities, and reconstructed in its original form free from the historians' interpretation. Gadamer's concern lies in the appropriateness of the methods of science being applied to historical knowledge and human understanding in general. For example, science has these methods: observation, recognition, definition, hypothesis, prediction and hypothesis.⁴² Observation, dependent on the five senses, already appears to be inappropriate as a method in the study of history because the object of study is ideas expressed in language. Recognition and definition risk oversimplification, for the reason that events in history are products of unique movements and choices by particular cultures and communities. In no way is Gadamer against the methods of science and their means towards disclosing truth, but he is critical with the assumption that only logic or science can provide genuine knowledge.

The methods of science have the prejudice to be objective when it comes to its truths, but for Gadamer, such objectivity is not possible especially when it comes to human understanding. Instead, he proposes the concept historically-effected consciousness which acknowledges that our understanding is shaped by the historical effects of tradition.⁴³ Note that the word used is “effect,” (*Wirkung*).⁴⁴ It must be historically-*effected* consciousness because Gadamer's point is ontological and experiential, not psychological. History constitutes consciousness and understanding. It doesn't merely influence them externally. The term “affected” gives the impression that one has the ability to bracket external factors such as history to achieve understanding, but in reality, this is impossible. The term “effected” emphasizes that we are always already shaped by history and tradition, and this shaping is what makes hermeneutical understanding possible. In other words, whether one acknowledges it or not, there

⁴¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 284.

⁴² Don K. Mak, Angela T. Mak, and Anthony B. Mak, *Solving Everyday Problems with the Thinking like a Scientist* (2nd ed.; Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd., 2020), 16.

⁴³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 284.

⁴⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 284.

is always something (a perspective, a ritual, a custom, a language, or a practice) that has already formed the horizon which understanding occurs. History and tradition, in a way, are not an optional inheritance but are part of human understanding. It is not just a background condition but an active partner in dialogue. It is not merely shaping us once and for all; it continually addresses us.

However, Gadamer was able to see that this “effecting” is dynamic. It is dynamic because as history and tradition effect consciousness, consciousness interprets them in turn, too. This dynamism or movement is possible because there is space which Gadamer calls temporal distance.⁴⁵ This temporal gap tells us that our interaction with tradition is never direct; it is filtered through time which both alienates and creates meaning. Temporal distance, then is one of the conditions that allow history and tradition to speak to us anew. This distance is useful because it prevents us from collapsing into mere repetition and enables genuine questioning, offering perspective and clarity. Its advantage lies in creating space for dialogue and transformation, while its disadvantage may be the risk of alienation or distortion, as the past may feel foreign or be misinterpreted through contemporary categories. However, within the hermeneutic process, temporal distance is not a barrier to be overcome but a partner there the past continually addresses us and we, in turn, reinterpret it in light of our present.⁴⁶ Human understanding cannot be reduced to scientific objectivity, because it is always constituted by history through tradition. Scientific objectivity reduces meaning to measurable facts, stripping away historical and cultural context. However, human phenomena - texts, art, religion, law (text-analogues) - cannot be fully grasped this way. Tradition is not a distant past but a living medium that shapes our prejudices and horizons. Historically effected consciousness means that we are always already situated within history, but this situatedness is not a limitation - it is the very condition that makes dialogue and the fusion of horizons possible. Tradition is not a static deposit of the past, like a museum collection of customs or texts.⁴⁷ Instead, it is something that is active, ongoing, and dialogical - a medium through which understanding continually happens. On one hand, this participation of tradition does not automatically legitimize its correctness in the formation of understanding as psychology observes. Tradition, as Habermas observed, *may carry ideological distortions that may require unmasking*.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, 291.

⁴⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 295.

⁴⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 303.

⁴⁸ Pieter Duvenage, “The Tradition of Critique and the Critique of Tradition: Some Ethical Perspectives,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary Ethical Research* 1, no. 1 (2015), 2.

Paul Ricoeur also argued that tradition is not something that we should simply inherit but also to be critical about as we continuously interpret it.⁴⁹ In the social sciences research agenda of Pelizzo, to cite an example, it is shown that societies marked by pervasive traditional beliefs are generally less supportive of democratic values and more inclined toward authoritarian structures.⁵⁰ This finding illustrates the caution Gadamer urges: tradition should not be treated uncritically; if not, it conceals distortions that can shape different aspects of life. On the other, tradition should not be automatically dismissed, for it is a product of rational deliberation, too. Tradition has authority precisely because it contains knowledge that has been deliberated and upheld by people. Gadamer argues:

Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation, and it is active in all historical change. But preservation is an act of reason, though an inconspicuous one. For this reason, only innovation and planning appear to be the result of reason. But this is an illusion. Even where life changes violently, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything than anyone knows, and it combines with the new to create a new value. At any rate, preservation is as much a freely chosen action as are revolution and renewal.⁵¹

So, in this line of thought tradition is not something that is merely handed down to and received by people as the etymology suggests. Gadamer may see tradition as a product of rational deliberation, but he does not idealize it as perfect. Hermeneutics must remain vigilant, not only in the pursuit of understanding but also in discerning distortions shaped by unconscious structures and systemic inequalities.⁵² Tradition can serve as a guide for life in general, but at the same it should be critically studied. Now, this puts our understanding of tradition in a tension. If tradition becomes an object of scrutiny and is the basis (a hermeneutical background) for scrutiny at the same time, will this lead to a vicious circular reasoning? A sort of tradition justifying itself? It is not. Gadamer merely describes how interpretation works. This is the hermeneutical circle. However, if one particular tradition is the basis of interpretation and the same tradition becomes the object of scrutiny, then this leads to vicious circular reasoning. For example, the Christian tradition cannot just justify the authority of the Bible just by stating it is authored by God. It begs the question, how does the Christian tradition know that God exists,

⁴⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 27

⁵⁰ Pelizzo, Riccardo. Abstract of “Traditional Beliefs and Their Consequences: A Research Agenda.” *Current Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 6, no. 2 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.12944/CRJSSH.6.2.01>.

⁵¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 282.

⁵² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, ed. Richard E. Palmer (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 76.

and if the answer is that it is read in the Bible, then the argument becomes fallacious. The argument assumes what it set out to prove.

For Gadamer, traditions are multiple and diverse. They may overlap in certain practices, values, or interpretive horizons, but this overlap is never complete. Because of this uniqueness, traditions cannot simply be absorbed into one another; they must be engaged with respect for their particularity. The problem sometimes is one tradition entirely and forcefully subsuming another. Thus, this means that different traditions must come into dialogue, to produce a more adequate understanding of reality. In this way the risk of circular reasoning is avoided. Another concern with regard the role of tradition as a hermeneutic background is its seeming tendency to be relativistic and difficulty in establishing whether understanding has genuinely advanced.⁵³ This is a valid point, but it can be addressed by Gadamer's concept of *Bildung*. Traditions bring about prejudices, and these prejudices can acquire legitimacy through the process of *Bildung*.

Legitimate Prejudice within Gadamer's Framework

Gadamer's concept of prejudice (*Vorurteil*) becomes a foundation in his version of hermeneutics. In contrast to the Enlightenment's suspicion of prejudice as irrational bias, Gadamer insists that prejudices are unavoidable conditions of understanding. They are not merely subjective distortions but historically inherited orientations that shape the horizon from which interpretation begins.⁵⁴ Prejudices that undergo *Bildung*, the continuous process of formation and transformation, can attain adequacy if not legitimacy because of its historical and dialogical characteristic.

Legitimate prejudice as discussed in the preceding sections is one that contains openness in the hermeneutical process. It does not foreclose dialogue but rather opens the interpreter to encounter with the other. The other may come in the form not only of a text, but also of a person, a tradition, or a perspective.⁵⁵ Openness does not necessarily mean being able to accommodate all the differences in the other but does entail the posture of attentive receptivity, a willingness to listen, to be unsettled, and to allow the encounter with difference to reshape one's own horizon of understanding. It is less about absorbing or assimilating the other into one's framework, and more about standing in a dialogical space where one's own assumptions are exposed, questioned, and potentially transformed. In Gadamerian terms, this posture is akin to *Vorurteil* being brought into play so that dialogue

⁵³ Iñaki Xavier Larrauri Pertierra, "Gadamer's Historically Effected and Effective Consciousness," *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review / Revue canadienne de philosophie* 61, no. 2 (2022): 261. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217322000178>

⁵⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Repercussions of Hermeneutics*, trans. Bruce Krajewski and James C. Risser (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 39.

⁵⁵ Warnke, "Legitimate Prejudices," 90.

can occur.⁵⁶ It is a hermeneutic humility: the recognition that meaning emerges not from domination or total agreement, but from the fusion of horizons.

As legitimate prejudices are historically grounded, they are dialogical. They arise from tradition, community, and language. They function as enabling conditions for understanding. They are not fixed or immutable. Through the formative process of *Bildung*, they can be tested, refined, and expanded. In this way, prejudice is not an obstacle to truth but a necessary starting point for its disclosure. Illegitimate prejudices, by contrast and as described by psychology, are those that distort or block understanding. They manifest as rigid dogmatism, ideological blindness, or refusal to engage with difference.⁵⁷ Gadamer's idea of legitimacy therefore requires a continual process of discernment. This discernment is also made possible because of temporal distance. Through temporal distance, prejudices can be brought into dialogue, exposed to other perspectives, and transformed through the fusion of horizons. All these require critical reason.⁵⁸ The measure of legitimacy lies not in the content of a prejudice alone but in its posture - its willingness to be questioned and reshaped.

The ethical dimension of Gadamer's account is crucial. If in the first description of legitimate prejudice, one is expected to be open, a sort of an attentive receptivity, the ethical dimension inhibits an interpreter to dominate and destroy the other. Though understanding is not a neutral act but a historically situated and an ethical process, legitimate prejudice entails a recognition of the limits of one's own standpoint, and a readiness to be transformed by encounter. In this sense, prejudice is a posture of receptivity and response. It is this ethicality of understanding that allows Gadamer to argue that hermeneutics is not about domination or erasure of difference, but about mutual reconfiguration of horizons.

In this light, Gadamer's hermeneutics unfolds as a vision of understanding that is always open, historical, dialogical, and ethical. Prejudice, *Bildung*, and historical consciousness are not peripheral but central to this vision. Legitimate prejudice emerges as a concept that enables interpretation rather than obstructs it. This framework discloses understanding as a path of self-cultivation: not a journey away from the self, but a return to it, enriched by the presence of the other. Prejudice, far from being the enemy of truth, becomes its necessary companion, guiding us toward a deeper, more dialogical grasp of ourselves and the world.

⁵⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 104.

⁵⁷ Warnke, "Legitimate Prejudices," 96.

⁵⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 278.

CONCLUSION

The reorientation and rehabilitation of prejudice challenge the tendency to treat it solely as a negative bias, as often emphasized in some disciplines. By situating prejudice within the hermeneutical process, it is demonstrated that it is not simply an obstacle to overcome but a necessary condition of understanding, shaped by history, tradition, and culture. Legitimate prejudice, marked by openness and receptivity, enables dialogue and the fusion of horizons, while illegitimate prejudice closes off interpretation through rigidity or dogmatism. The interplay of *Bildung* and historically effected consciousness underscores that human understanding is always situated, dynamic, and ethical. In this light, prejudice together with temporal distance becomes a constitutive horizon for interpretation - inevitable, yet capable of transformation through encounter. Gadamer's framework thus reframes prejudice as a productive starting point for meaning-making, offering a richer account of human understanding than approaches that seek its eradication.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Björkholm, Stina. "Praise and Prejudice." *Topoi*. March 18, 2026.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-026-09942-7>.
- Choma, Becky L., Arvin Jagayat, David Sumantry, and Vashisht Asrani. "The 'Complex Human Problem' That is Prejudice: A Review of *the Cambridge Handbook of the Psychology of Prejudice*." *Social Justice Research* 30, no. 3 (2017): 278–287.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-017-0287-0>.
- Duvenage, Pieter. "The Tradition of Critique and the Critique of Tradition: Some Ethical Perspectives." *Journal of Interdisciplinary Ethical Research* 1, no. 1 (2015)1-8.
- Fehér, István M. *Prejudice and Pre-Understanding*. ResearchGate, 2017.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316366449_Prejudice_and_Pre-Understanding.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*. Edited by Richard E. Palmer. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007.
- _____. *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Translated and edited by David E. Linge. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.
- _____. *Truth and Method*. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. 2nd rev. ed. New York: Continuum, 2004.
- Given, Lisa M. "Hermeneutics." In *the Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008.

- Grondin, Jean. *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.
- van Heese, Teuntje, and Jochem Thijs. “Elementary School Students’ Motivations for Responding without Prejudice: The Role of the Student-Teacher Relationship.” *Social Psychology of Education* 29 (2026): Article 31. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-026-10196-z>.
- Hegel, G. W. F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Herd, Jennifer A. *Forming Humanity: Redeeming the German Bildung Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019.
- Kite, Mary E., Bernard E. Whitley Jr., and Lisa S. Wagner. *Psychology of Prejudice and Discrimination*. 4th ed. New York: Routledge, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367809218>.
- Korsgaard, Morten Timmermann, Line Hilt, Merete Wiberg, and Mariann Solberg. “Bildung and the Significance of Place: An Overview.” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 58, no. 5 (October 2024): 599–605. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopedu/qhae072>.
- Larrauri Perterra, Iñaki Xavier. “Gadamer’s Historically Effectuated and Effective Consciousness.” *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review / Revue canadienne de philosophie* 61, no. 2 (2022): 261–280. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217322000178>.
- Lawn, Chris, and Niall Keane. *The Gadamer Dictionary*. London: Continuum, 2011.
- Mak, Don K., Angela T. Mak, and Anthony B. Mak. *Solving Everyday Problems with the Thinking like a Scientist*. 2nd ed. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd., 2020.
- McKinney, Ronald. “The Hermeneutic Theory of Bernard Lonergan.” *Philosophy Today* Vol. 24. Spring 1978.
- Odenstedt, Anders. *Gadamer on Tradition: Historical Context and the Limits of Reflection*. Contributions to Phenomenology 90. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017.
- Pelizzo, Riccardo. “Traditional Beliefs and Their Consequences: A Research Agenda.” *Current Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 6, no. 2 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.12944/CRJSSH.6.2.01>.
- Palmer, Richard E. *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. Translated by Denis Savage. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970.
- Safranski, Rüdiger. *Romanticism: A German Affair*. Translated by Robert E. Goodwin. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014.

Shalin, Dmitri. "Hermeneutics and Prejudice: Heidegger and Gadamer in Their Historical Setting." *Russian Journal of Communication* 3, no. 1–2 (2010): 6–18.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19409419.2010.10756760>.

Warnke, Georgia. "Legitimate Prejudices." *Laval théologique et philosophique* 53, no. 1 (1997): 89–102.