

## **Situated Reason, Contextuality, and the Limits of Formalism: A Critical Hermeneutic Perspective**

Paul Healy  
Philosophy  
Swinburne University of Technology

Of the several possible meanings of formalism, I relate to it here as pertaining to the justification of knowledge claims and/or the making of socio-political decisions using strictly rule-determined procedures, often in response to systems imperatives. Of particular concern with reference to the workshop theme are the ways in which such restrictive formalism negatively impacts life-world decision-making, denies a role to judgement, and erodes intersubjective communication and responsibility. I address these concerns from a critical hermeneutic standpoint, drawing on the complementary insights of Jürgen Habermas and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

With regard to Habermas, I contend that while his critiques of positivism and of instrumental/systems rationality constitute a major contribution to diagnosing the limitations of formalism and to validating the need to accommodate ethics and intersubjectivity as indispensable factors in reclaiming the life-world, his response is marred by its failure to do justice to the reality of reason's situatedness. To correct for this, we need to have recourse to key themes in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics; in particular, his recognition of the ways in which our hermeneutic situation conditions the possibilities at our disposal, his emphasis on the indispensability of *phronesis* (or good judgement) in attuning us to what the situation requires by way of a response, and the importance of conjoint dialogical inquiry as a basis for deciding a way forward that is appropriately attuned to the situation both ethically and epistemically.

It is hoped that elaboration on the foregoing themes will pave the way for fruitful dialogue about the convergences and differences between critical hermeneutics and phenomenology in regard to the limits of formalism and the corresponding importance of judgement, responsibility and intersubjectivity for responding effectively to the challenges posed by formalist intrusions on the life-world.

### **Introduction**

The present paper seeks to foreground the important role that critical hermeneutics<sup>1</sup> has to play alongside phenomenology in testing the limits of formalism. The strength of this approach derives from its contribution to formulating a response that recognises the need to factor in situatedness and contextuality, along with judgement and responsibility, as correctives for the excesses of formalism. To this end, it focuses on the phenomenon that Habermas terms the "colonisation of the life-world". In critically assessing the adequacy of Habermas's communicative response to this, it contends that notwithstanding its merits, it falls short of what is required. Indeed, given its acontextuality and proceduralism, the Habermasian discourse model ultimately threatens to replicate the abstract formalism it is intended to counteract. As a corrective, it needs to draw on key hermeneutic insights, most notably, the indispensability of *phronesis*, the significance of differences in hermeneutic standpoints, and the situated mutuality and responsiveness of genuine I-Thou interactions.

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<sup>1</sup> As employed here, "critical hermeneutics" is intended to connote an expanded conception of hermeneutics encapsulating the work of contemporary theorists such as Jürgen Habermas and Michel Foucault alongside that of more established hermeneutic thinkers like Gadamer. Palmer, amongst others, confirms the tenability and value of such an expanded conception, which aspires to embrace cultural critique alongside other, more traditional, hermeneutic endeavours. See Richard Palmer, "What Hermeneutics Can Offer Rhetoric", in *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics in Our Time*, ed. Walter Jost and Michael Hyde (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1997). Kögler provides a prototype of what is at issue. See Hans Herbert Kögler, *The Power of Dialogue: Critical Hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996); see also Paul Healy, *Rationality, Hermeneutics and Dialogue* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

The paper thus highlights the merits of reading Habermas and Gadamer as complementary rather than as oppositional in the interests of formulating a response that would truly assist with reclaiming the life-world from the formalist intrusions that impede life-world decision-making, deny a role to judgement, and erode intersubjective responsibility. Albeit reappropriated in socio-cultural terms, the Husserlian concept of “life-world” is thus seen to have a central role to play in the hermeneutic diagnosis of and response to the contemporary limits of formalism.

## Habermas

Given his advocacy of the “project of modernity”, that is, of the reconceptualised continuation of the Enlightenment project into the contemporary era, the rationalisation of society has been a pervasive theme in Habermas’s work.<sup>2</sup> In this he follows in the footsteps both of eminent social theorist, Max Weber and of Adorno and Horkheimer, his predecessors at the Frankfurt Institute. But challenging his forebears’ highly pessimistic diagnosis about where the rationalisation of society might lead—as epitomised in Weber’s famous “iron cage” dictum, whereby we become prisoners of the very rational structures that were put in place to foster freedom and emancipation—in true Enlightenment spirit, Habermas remains optimistic that such drastic outcomes can be averted. Nonetheless, he readily concedes that reason is a two-edged sword and that the ineluctable advance of instrumental reason and impersonal systems rationality has resulted in the damaging and debilitating “colonisation of the life-world”.<sup>3</sup> Such colonisation results when impersonal systems, regulated only by the relentless pursuit of systems imperatives such as money and power, intrude on normal life-world decision making processes as well as on everyday interactions in ways that devalue, and threaten to negate, the cognitive, epistemic, and ethical resources available to life-world participants to control their own destinies. It thereby robs them of the ability to tackle the real problems needing to be resolved in ways that meet their legitimate needs and interests. Correspondingly, it cautions against undue optimism about where the rationalisation of society can lead. But refusing to succumb to his forebears’ pessimism, Habermas maintains that although reason may be a two-edged sword, it is not an irremediably destructive force, as the “iron cage” diagnosis might imply. Hence while the colonisation of the life-world by instrumental/systems rationality may dint Enlightenment optimism about the emancipatory powers of reason, it need not extinguish it. On the contrary, once it is recognised that instrumental reason does not exhaust the potential for rationalisation, it can be seen that the latter embodies the seeds of its emancipation in the form of a communicative conception of rationality, a theme to whose elaboration Habermas has consequently

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<sup>2</sup> For a succinct elucidation of prominent Habermasian concepts and related scholarship, see Andrew Edgar, *Habermas: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2006); see also Andrew Edgar, *The Philosophy of Habermas* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005). In what follows, I elaborate only on those Habermasian concepts that are central to the development of this paper, and then only briefly.

<sup>3</sup> Reflecting the influence of a variety of conceptual sources, the Habermasian life-world is an inherently complex and multidimensional phenomenon. Transcending Husserl’s transcendentalism, under the influence of engagement with Mead and Durkheim Habermas also goes beyond Schultz’s socially oriented stance toward a conception that integrates cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialisation. See Jürgen Habermas *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 2: Life-world and System*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), ch. VI.1 and cf., for example; William Outhwaite, *Habermas: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), ch. 6, especially 82-88. Theoretical complexities aside, however, the Habermasian life-world notably centres on the shared common understandings that have been developed over time through ongoing social interactions and that, although typically going unnoticed, form the indispensable backdrop to further successful social negotiations, including the legitimisation of social and political institutions. Correlatively, the negative impact deriving from its colonisation derives essentially from the disruptive effects it has on this ongoing, constitutive mode of social interaction and legitimisation, resulting in loss of autonomy for everyday life-world participants and in their inability to ensure that social and political institutions continue to meet their legitimate needs and interests. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 2: Life-world and System*, ch. VI.2 and cf., for example; Outhwaite, *Habermas: A Critical Introduction*, ch. 6, especially 88f.

devoted a great deal of attention.<sup>4</sup> In essence, Habermas's communicative proposal is intended to redefine rationality as a life-world resource inherent in ongoing communicative exchanges among its participants or denizens, thereby reappropriating this potent resource in the service of life-world needs and interests. Thus reconceptualised, it is intended to function as an antidote to the excesses of formalism by restoring to life-world participants the ability to control their own destinies through participating in interactive decision making processes oriented toward meeting their legitimate needs and interests. But notwithstanding its undeniable strengths in this regard, as elaborated below, Habermas's communicative proposal also suffers from a decisive weakness, namely its neglect of situatedness and contextuality, such that it lacks the traction it needs to truly engage with the life-world needs and interests of the participants in discourse. Hence, there is a need to draw on key Gadamer themes as a corrective. But to set Habermas's communicative response in context, it is also important to mention Habermas's early critique of positivism and scientism which, notably, took its cue from Husserl's related critique in his *Crisis of European Sciences*.<sup>5</sup>

Briefly stated, the intent of Habermas's Husserl-inspired critique is to enable him forcefully to contest a set of interrelated misconceptions to the effect that: (positivistic) science can provide ready-made answers to complex policy problems, that values are extraneous to rational inquiry, and that rational (especially scientific) inquiry provides objective solutions that are simply true to the facts and hence immune to contestation. As a corrective, the intent is to establish that rational, or indeed scientific, inquiry is not self-validating in a sense that would immunise it from scrutiny on ethical as well as epistemic grounds regarding its potential uses or life-world applications. On the contrary, while science qualifies as an autonomous domain of inquiry, as with other policy interventions, the appropriate application of scientific findings needs to be subject to critical scrutiny in communicative forums which include participants who stand to be affected by the outcomes. Notably too, in this connection Habermas vindicates the significance of an "emancipatory" knowledge-guiding interest. His later communicative proposal can be seen as advancing the emancipatory interest by shedding light on how we can reclaim life-world autonomy and self-direction in the face of formalistic intrusions. As already indicated, it is intended to do so by relocating the locus of rationality as a life-world resource inherent in ongoing communicative exchanges, and hence capable of being marshalled to counteract impersonal systemic forces through fuelling an interactive and accountable decision-making process. More specifically, communicative reason is intended to counteract instrumental reason's inherent scientism and decisionism—and correspondingly dehumanising effects—firstly, by making the justification of knowledge claims conditional on cogent life-world argumentation rather than on restrictive and exclusive positivistic criteria; and secondly, by further enshrining an ethical dimension as an ineliminable component of rational inquiry and decision making. In short, the intended net effect is that so-called systems imperatives can no longer be deemed self-justifying but can be held to account, ethically as well as epistemically, in argumentatively constituted forums wherein their life-world benefits, or lack thereof, can be critically assessed by those who stand to be affected by the outcomes. Moreover, in stressing the inherently intersubjective character of communicative rationality, Habermas aspires not only to correct for the modernist preoccupation with "the philosophy of the subject" and its dubious foundationalism, but also to further contribute to de-colonising the life-world by putting the socio-political decision making process, as well as responsibility for its outcomes, back in the hands of those who must live with its consequences. In effect, then, Habermas's intent has been to

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<sup>4</sup> See especially Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 1: Reason and the Rationalisation of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon press, 1984); see also Jürgen Habermas "Discourse Ethics", in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990); and Jürgen Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), especially pp. 301-17. See also David Detmer, "Habermas and Husserl on Positivism and Philosophy of Science", in *Perspectives on Habermas*, ed. Lewis E. Hahn (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 2000).

counteract the colonisation of the life-world by the instantiation of a vibrant “public sphere”, constituted by an engaged, concerned, and informed citizenry committed to reclaiming the life-world from the intrusions of instrumentalism and formalism, through vigorous rational argumentation and debate in the service of the needs and interests of its denizens.

On the debit side, however, the problem is that, for want of greater attention to reason’s situatedness and contextuality, the Habermasian proposal lacks the life-world traction it needs to carry through on its intended aims. More specifically, the limitations of the Habermasian proposal can be epitomised as deriving from a preoccupation with an “ideal speech situation” and a correlative emphasis on the “generalised” other to the neglect of the “concrete other”. As elaborated below, these defects mean that Habermas’s communicative response inadvertently mimics the disconnection between reason and life-world that characterises impersonal systems rationality and whose effects it is specifically intended to counteract. In effect, this undermines its intended aim of fuelling a rationally-grounded dialectical learning process capable of redressing the limitations of formalism and instrumentalism and hence its potential to reclaim the life-world from domination by instrumental/systems rationality. To correct for this lacuna, recourse is needed to Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics and in particular its textured embrace of situatedness.

### Gadamer

As noted from the outset, the present paper defends the merits of reading Habermas and Gadamer as complementary in the interests of securing the communicative proposal’s emancipatory intent. Given that Habermas and Gadamer are typically read as oppositional, it is important to begin by registering the legitimacy of reading them as complementary. The tendency to read these thinkers as oppositional derives, of course, from Habermas’s explicit advocacy of a revitalisation of the Enlightenment project and its inherent faith in the powers of abstract reason, in contrast to Gadamer’s emphasis on reason’s finitude and situatedness and his inherently ontological orientation. But, as prominent contemporary commentators attest,<sup>6</sup> a more textured reading reveals their complementarity about key themes such as rationality. In particular, notwithstanding Gadamer’s alleged antipathy to such epistemological considerations, significant convergences are discernible not only in these thinkers’ concerns about the dominance of instrumental rationality but also in their comparative “optimism” about the possibility of counteracting it. Specifically, as epitomised by Madison, these theorists are united in their unwillingness to “to subscribe to Weber’s pessimism” as reflected in his “iron cage” thesis. On the contrary,

What specifically binds Habermas and Gadamer together ... is the way in which they seek to contest the dominance of technocratic rationality. ... What both Habermas and Gadamer have in effect sought to demonstrate throughout their work is that instrumental rationality is only *one* form of rationality—and not the highest (or most basic) at that ... Reason is not, fundamentally, mere instrumental rationality.<sup>7</sup>

It can thus be seen that Gadamer’s trenchant critique of methodologism in *Truth and Method* mirrors and reinforces Habermas’s disaffection with positivism’s scientism, decisionism, and objectivism as outlined above. Moreover, paralleling the intersubjectivity of Habermas’s communicative stance and its disaffection with “the monological ‘philosophy of consciousness’”, Gadamer has also “sought to rehabilitate reason”, on an inherently intersubjective basis, “not as

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Gary B. Madison, “Critical Theory and Hermeneutics: Some Outstanding Issues in the Debate”, in *Perspectives of Habermas*, ed. Lewis E. Hahn (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 2000). See also Richard Palmer, “Habermas versus Gadamer?: Some Remarks”, in *Perspectives on Habermas*, ed. Lewis E. Hahn (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Madison, “Critical Theory and Hermeneutics”, p. 464; italics in original.

monological technique but as *dialogue* or ‘conversation’”.<sup>8</sup> A commitment to discourse and intersubjectivity thus represents another major point of convergence.

But while such convergences underpin the possibility of complementarity, the differences between these two thinkers remain at least as striking as the similarities. With regard to our focal theme, the differences crystallise around the respective conceptions of discourse (Habermas) or dialogue (Gadamer) proffered as necessary to underwrite a conception of critical reason capable of counteracting the excesses of instrumentalism and formalism. More specifically, their differences revolve around Habermas’s relatively idealised, decontextualised, and procedural account of discursive reason as epitomised by his emphasis on the “ideal speech situation” and the related discourse conditions, compared to Gadamer’s advocacy of situated dialogue on the Socratic model.<sup>9</sup> Epitomising the extent of his disaffection with the ideality of the Habermasian proposal, Gadamer uncharacteristically castigates Habermas’s “ideal speech situation” as a “highly abstract concept of coercion-free discourse which totally loses sight of the real conditions of human praxis”.<sup>10</sup> Gadamer’s strong reaction to Habermas’s idealised discourse model is thus attributable to the fact that it fails to take due account of critical reason’s inherent situatedness and contextuality, of the hermeneutic recognition that: “Reason exists for us only in concrete historical terms, i.e., it is not its own master, but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates”.<sup>11</sup> But in postulating complementarity, the point is not to minimise or negate such differences in orientation, but rather to make the case that it is only by reading Habermas in light of Gadamer that discursive reason can provide an effective bulwark against the formalistic excesses of instrumental reason. In this regard two interrelated problems warrant particular attention here, namely, the discourse model’s ideality and its effective negation of differences in hermeneutic standpoint.

The ideality problem is aptly epitomised in the criticism that “the basic weakness of Habermas’s project is its lack of agreement between ideality and reality, between intentions and their implementation”, such that what results is a “utopia of communicative rationality”.<sup>12</sup> Although the ideality objection can be overestimated given that Habermas has always emphasised the counterfactual (and regulative) status of both the ideal speech situation and the related idealised rules of discourse,<sup>13</sup> his position is nonetheless clearly open to charges of acontextuality and abstract proceduralism. In essence, the point is that while Habermas provides worthwhile ground rules for inclusive argumentative debate designed to re-empower life-world participants, his model cannot bridge the gap between their theoretical articulation and their contextualised life-world application. This acontextuality is exacerbated by Habermas’s abstract proceduralism, effectively his reliance on procedural rules to solve the problem of their own application. In both cases, these problems severely limit, if not negate, the ability of his discursive model to gain traction with the situated needs and interests of life-world participants. Instead, ironically, they threaten to replicate the excesses of formalism at another level. Hence the need to invoke key Gadamerian insights as a corrective.<sup>14</sup> Thus, firstly, the futility of relying on an abstract proceduralism has been fore

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<sup>8</sup> Madison, “Critical Theory and Hermeneutics”, 464; cf. Paul Healy, “Hermeneutic Rationality: A Contradiction in Terms?”, in *Hermeneutic Rationality/La Rationalité Herméneutique*, ed. Maria L. Portocarrero, Luis A. Umbelino, and Andrzej Wiercinski (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> For example, see Healy, *Rationality, Hermeneutics and Dialogue*, chs. 1 and 2.

<sup>10</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey”, in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis E. Hahn (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1997), 32.

<sup>11</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall, 2nd ed. (New York: Continuum, 1989), 276.

<sup>12</sup> Bent Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 92-93.

<sup>13</sup> See further Paul Healy, “Making Policy Debate Matter: Practical Reason, Political Dialogue, and Transformative Learning”, *History of the Human Sciences* 17, no. 1 (2004).

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted, however, that Habermas himself maintains that problems of application can be resolved without recourse to the kinds of hermeneutic insights invoked here. In particular, see Habermas, *Justification and Application*. But for the kinds of reasons outlined here, hermeneutic theorists vigorously challenge the cogency of

grounded by Gadamer in his reappropriation of Aristotelian *phronesis*. In differentiating between *episteme*, *techne*, and *phronesis* and elaborating with the aid of a judicial analogy, Gadamer convincingly contends that *phronesis* (effectively, the use of informed, contextually attuned judgement) is indispensable for the judicious application of whatever rules and principles are applicable in the actual situation at hand.<sup>15</sup> The cogency of this assessment for rational decision making has been independently confirmed by American philosopher, Harold Brown, in his sustained critique of the abstract universality of what is termed the “classical model” of rationality. In particular, Brown persuasively argues that without recourse to informed, contextualised judgement attuned to the needs of the specific situation, appeal to abstract rules and principles will simply eventuate in an infinite regress of meta-rules rather than in effective adjudication of the case at hand.<sup>16</sup> In short, then, the core insight here at issue is that the acontextuality of Habermas’s discourse model needs to be counterbalanced by contextualised judgement if it is to achieve its goal of attuning the decision making process to the actual needs and interests of life-world participants. Failing this, it is more likely to replicate the errors of formalism than to function as an effective bulwark against them.

Likewise, in his preoccupation with the generalised over the concrete other, compounded by his heavy emphasis on consensus as the anticipated outcome of deliberative discourse, Habermas fails to do justice to the importance of factoring in difference as a crucial stimulus to life-world learning.<sup>17</sup> In hermeneutic terms, the discourse model’s failure in this regard is that it effectively negates significant differences among participants’ hermeneutic situations, as constituted by their prejudgements, prejudices, historico-cultural backgrounds, and lived experience, and hence ends up treating them as interchangeable “ciphers” in a decontextualised and depersonalised discourse process. In addition to reinforcing the problems of acontextuality, this neglect, or negation, of difference deprives the process of discursive interaction of the “contrastive foil” that participants need to cause them to question their initial assumptions, to learn from the contrasts embodied in the other positions, and to spark potentially transformative insights.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, in focusing one-sidedly on an idealised consensual outcome, Habermas also overlooks the *processual* dimension that real world learning actually requires.<sup>19</sup> Here again, in its commitment to situatedness, its correlative endorsement of real differences in hermeneutic standpoint, and its embrace of a conjoint process of situated learning, grounded in interactive dialogue between diversely situated participants and culminating in a potentially transformative “fusion of horizons”, Gadamerian hermeneutics can provide a much-needed corrective, without which the Habermasian critique of formalism and instrumentalism inevitably falls short of achieving its intended outcome.

More generally, as epitomised in his treatment of I-Thou relations, Gadamer’s model of conversation has the potential to correct for the decontextualising and indeed depersonalising influence of the more formalistic and proceduralist elements of Habermasian discourse through

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this contention. For example, see Georgia Warnke, *Justice and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), chs 5, 6; Georgia Warnke, “Communicative Rationality and Cultural Values”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*, ed. Stephen K. White (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 312ff. Cf. Paul Healy, “Situated Rationality and Hermeneutic Understanding”, *International Philosophical Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1996): 156-59.

<sup>16</sup> Harold I. Brown, *Rationality* (London: Routledge, 1990), especially ch. IV. Cf. Paul Healy, “Rationality, Judgement, and Critical Inquiry”, *The Electronic Journal of Analytic Philosophy* 1, no. 3 (1993).

<sup>17</sup> See Seyla Benhabib, “The Utopian Dimension in Communicative Ethics”, in *Critical Theory: The Essential Readings*, ed. David Ingram and Julia Simon-Ingram (New York: Paragon House, 1991). Cf. Healy, “Rationality, Judgement, and Critical Inquiry”, 297-98.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Healy, “Rethinking Deliberative Democracy: From Deliberative Discourse to Transformative Dialogue”, *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 37, no. 3 (2011): 306-09. Cf. Kögler, *The Power of Dialogue: Critical Hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault*, especially ch. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Madison, “Critical Theory and Hermeneutics”, 467-68 and Healy, *Rationality, Hermeneutics and Dialogue*, ch. 2.

underwriting a situated, interactive, and ethically responsible life-world learning process in ways that the latter alone cannot. Here, the difference is epitomised in the contrast between the Habermasian preoccupation with “symmetrical reciprocity” and the Gadamerian emphasis on mutuality and dialogical reciprocity, as epitomised in Gadamer’s treatment of I-Thou relations. While symmetrical reciprocity encourages us to treat the other effectively as a mirror image of ourselves, *dialogical* reciprocity discourages us from assuming that we can readily trade places with the other, and instead emphasises the need genuinely to listen to and learn from the other in an open-minded way truly attuned to what is stake in the context in question, as a prerequisite for a meaningful and productive learning process capable of yielding a potentially transformative outcome.<sup>20</sup> The potential for dialogical reciprocity to serve as a corrective for the abstract formalism of the Habermasian procedural model is succinctly epitomised in the following characterisation of a genuine I-Thou relationship, whereby:

The I not only recognizes the Thou to be a person but also listens to what the Thou has to say. The I is open to the Thou and to the truth of what the Thou claims. Ready to experience the limitations of its own original understanding of that which is called into question by the Thou, the I is a questioner open to questions; it is open-minded and prepared to change its mind. The truth is that which emerges in the course of this conversation. It is no longer that originally claimed by the I or that originally claimed by the Thou, but rather that which emerges out of the give-and-take of conversation.<sup>21</sup>

As related to present concerns, this passage epitomises in particular how the hermeneutic stance can effectively reinstate the concrete other sidelined by the ideality and abstraction of the Habermasian discourse model, and in so doing imbue the discursive (or better, dialogical) process with the life-world traction it must have truly to counteract the limitations of instrumentalism and formalism, as envisaged by both thinkers.

### **Habermas and Gadamer**

While, as epitomised in his colonisation thesis, Habermas has been to the forefront among contemporary theorists in diagnosing and seeking to combat the limitations of instrumentalism and formalism, it has been contended that his proposed communicative corrective can only be effective when complemented by key hermeneutic insights. Hence, although Habermas and Gadamer have typically been read as oppositional, it is only when Habermas is read in light of Gadamer that the former’s communicative proposal can succeed in achieving its intended outcomes. More specifically, it has been contended that the life-world learning process needed to counteract the excesses of formalism, as envisaged by Habermas himself, can only be effective in so doing when it has factored in the hermeneutic recognition of the importance of *phronesis*, the significance of differences in hermeneutic standpoint, and the mutuality and ethicality of I-Thou relations. Without these, the Habermasian discourse model inadvertently threatens to replicate the abstract formalism it is intended to counteract. In conclusion it should, however, be noted that it is only against the backdrop provided by Habermas’s sustained defence of the need for a rationally-grounded communicative response to the limits of instrumentalism and formalism that the corresponding strengths of the Gadamerian contribution to this project come into clear relief.

**Dr Paul Healy** is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy and Coordinator of the Philosophy program in the Faculty of Life and Social Sciences at Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne. He is the author of numerous publications on postfoundationalist epistemology and socio-political theory. As epitomised in his 2005 monograph *Rationality, Hermeneutic and Dialogue*, he works primarily in the tradition of critical hermeneutics embracing the thought of Habermas, Gadamer, and Foucault. The application of hermeneutico-dialogical thinking to a range of contemporary problems, both theoretical and applied, has been the primary focus of his research and teaching in recent years.

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<sup>20</sup> Healy, “Rethinking Deliberative Democracy”, 303-09.

<sup>21</sup> Kathleen Wright, “Gadamer: The Speculative Structure of Language”, in *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1986), 201.