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An Enquiry Concerning Kearney's Dialectic and Gadamer's Dialogic Approaches to Ethical Criticism

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to understand the contemporary conversation concerning the relationship between self and the other—and how this relationship is to be interpreted in the nexus of today's postmodern society. This paper also suggests a hermeneutical framework to respond to contemporary needs of ethical criticism, particularly when it comes to resolving conflicting interpretations. Through a critical analysis of Kearney's critique of Gadamer, this paper first aims to identify underlying reasons behind this critique and, second, examine Kearney's "poetico-ethical imagination," which, while being greatly influenced by Gadamer's notion of "fusion of horizon," fails to fully acknowledge the contributions of this renowned hermeneut. Finally, through a comparative analysis between Kearney's dialectic and Gadamer's dialogic approaches, the paper intends to suggest that because Kearney's model is contradictory in its demands for openness that ultimately has to judge between contesting interpretations—and thus limits the free play of meaning—Gadamer's dialogic model, with its insistence on learning from rather than judging the other, is better suited to meet contemporary demands of discerning between diverging discourses.

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1. Introduction

In his *Notes from Underground*, the nineteenth-century Russian writer brilliantly captured the idea of loneliness, still relevant to the postmodern man today, in a single sentence: "I'm alone…and *they* are *everyone"* (Dostoevsky, 2000, pp. 31, emphasis added). The idea of this strange *they,* the unknown, mysterious, undecipherable *other,* who surrounds us, defines us, and at times, even threatens to impose upon our identity, has been a subject of interest for philosophers and literary critics alike. When Chinua Achebe, a Nigerian novelist, wrote *Things Fall Apart* to respond to the problematic representation of his community in Joseph Conrad's canonical novel, *Heart of Darkness*, Ted Cohen, a twentieth-century American philosopher, raised the following question:

"From Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) do we learn the obtuse and culpable racism found in it by Chinua Achebe, or do we learn that the arrogant sophistication of white Christian Europeans has robbed them of that morally essential instinct for restraint, an instinct still alive in native Africans?" (Cohen, 2009, p. 487).

While for Conrad, the Nigerian community was a strange other, the otherness of which he tried to explore in his work, for Achebe, the incorrect, exoticized representation demanded a biting response. For Cohen, this response raised the question whether such works should be acclaimed for their aesthetic merit. Achebe's concern with the problematic representation of self

by (an)other, and Cohen's concern with the ethics of representation and interpretation, remain central to the ongoing debate in ethical criticism in the field of literature and philosophy today.

Today, while we are riddled with identity crisis on the one hand and concern for political correctness on the other, the problematic relationship between ipseity and alterity has further come to the fore. An encounter with the other raises several questions: in a post-truth world, where the undecidability of play has left everything questionable, to the point that even the idea of self is questioned, how would an encounter with this strange other be understood? Indeed, how *should* it be understood? Moreover, when a writer attempts to represent the other, should his work be praised for its aesthetic merit even if the other is (mis) represented?

Questions like these ultimately lead to the enigma of ethics of interpretation: how is a literary critic to interpret works like Conrad's that have been critiqued for misrepresenting the other? To suggest an answer, perhaps one needs an appropriate framework. This paper is an attempt to suggest one such framework by turning to hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation itself. By critically comparing frameworks presented by two hermeneuts, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Richard Kearney, I attempt to answer certain fundamental questions when it comes to interpreting works that (mis) represent the other.

For the purpose of analysis, this paper is delineated into five sections. The first section discusses Gadamer's notion of the fusion of horizons and explains his dialogic approach; the second summarizes Kearney's critique of Gadamer; the third elaborates Kearney's poetico-ethical imagination and his diacritical hermeneutics; the fourth identifies some inherent contradictions in Kearney's ideas and suggests a few reasons behind these contradictions, as well as behind Kearney's misinterpretation of Gadamer's approach; the final concluding section, by comparing dialectic and dialogic approaches, proposes which would be more appropriate to serve as a basis for formulating an ethical framework to help discern between different types of representations.

Born in 1954, Richard Kearney is widely acknowledged as one of the greatest contemporary philosophers in the field of hermeneutics. He received his early education from the Benedictine School of Monks, where, instead of indoctrinating students into a religion, the monks encouraged critical debates and discussions by exposing students to ideas by prominent atheists, and so, Kearney was first introduced to philosophy and dialogue. After completing his Masters in philosophy under Charles Taylor, Kearney started his PhD under Ricoeur. Along with some of his countrymen in Paris, Kearney organized a conference on the philosophy of Heidegger where some of the greatest names of the era were called upon to share their views on God and Being. Despite contradictory views being explained and explored, the conference proved to be a success, and its success further inspired Kearney to initiate and encourage dialogue between conflicting parties. Thus began Kearney's dialogic encounters with Ricoeur, Derrida, Nussbaum, and Caputo, to name a few, and each of these philosophers influenced Kearney to find his own voice to act as a mediator in a world rapidly moving towards conflicts and contradictions.

This explains why, in his paper, *Between Oneself and Another: Paul Ricoeur's Diacritical Hermeneutics,* Kearney (2003) has considered the problematic nature of the relationship between self and other as being central to the hermeneutic discourse. Indeed, according to Kearney (2003, p. 149), the challenge today is to acknowledge a difference between self and other, "without separating them so schismatically that no relation at all is possible."

While Kearney's paper presents a brilliant diagnosis of this problematic relationship, what is perhaps surprising is that Kearney places Hans-Georg Gadamer amongst the romantic hermeneuts, right alongside Dilthey and Schleiermacher, two philosophers Gadamer (1960/2004) himself has critiqued in his book *Truth and Method*. Through a critical analysis of Kearney's critique of Gadamer, and by underscoring certain instances where Kearney might have misinterpreted Gadamer, I first aim to suggest the reason behind this misinterpretation, and second, present a critique of Kearney's 'poetico-ethical' imagination, which, while being greatly influenced by Gadamer's notion of 'fusion of horizons,' fails to acknowledge the contributions of this renowned hermeneut. Finally,

through a comparative analysis of Kearney's dialectic and Gadamer's dialogic approaches, I intend to suggest which of these frameworks is better suited to the contemporary needs of ethical criticism.

I owe a great deal to Geniusas and Madison (2006) for initiating this conversation between Kearney's and Gadamer's approaches in his paper *On the Oneness of the Hermeneutical Horizon*. Since Geniusas has already analyzed instances where Kearney has misinterpreted Gadamer, I intend to first analyze how their concepts are similar or different, before suggesting a reason for Kearney's misinterpretation of Gadamer's text.

2. Gadamer's Dialogic Approach

In a section titled *The Logic of Question and Answer (Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 363)* in his seminal work *Truth and Method,* Gadamer (1960/2004), referring to the Socratic dialogue, underscores the centrality of question, and the "*questionableness of something,"* to any hermeneutic practice. Claiming that the "significance of questioning consists in revealing the questionability of what is questioned," (Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 357). Gadamer goes on to present his idea of the fusion of horizons: the text puts forward a question to the interpreter, thereby establishing a horizon of the question, within which the text is to be interpreted. In order to answer this first question, the interpreter must "reconstruct the question to which the traditionary text is the answer." (Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 367) However, according to Gadamer:

"Reconstructing the question to which the text is presumed to be the answer itself takes place within a process of questioning through which we try to answer the question that the text asks us. A reconstructed question can never stand within its original horizon: for the historical horizon that circumscribed the reconstruction is not a truly comprehensive one. It is, rather, included within the horizon that embraces us as the questioners who have been encountered by the traditionary word Gadamer (1960/2004, p. 367)."

This merging of questions is what Gadamer calls the fusion of horizons. To apply it to the idea of other, in a proper I- Thou encounter, the voice of the other (from/or the text) first raises a question, calling into question the prejudices of the interpreter. In an attempt to answer that question, the interpreter has to reconstruct the question to which the other is the answer. However, since the interpreter has to consider the placement of this questioning other, in his attempt to find an answer, the interpreter has to be considerate of not only the other's context, but also his own.

For Gadamer, the fundamental nature of question is to "make things indeterminate," as questioning always "opens up possibilities of meaning." The creation of these meanings is an endless process, since a different question is posed by different interpreters with each encounter with the other. For this reason, Gadamer's approach is considered dialogic: indeed, he describes the task of hermeneutics as "entering into dialogue with the text Gadamer (1960/2004, p. 361)." Critiquing Hegel's dialectics for being "a monologue of thinking that tries to carry out in advance what matures little by little in every genuine dialogue," Gadamer emphasizes the "primacy of dialogue" Gadamer (1960/2004) constantly through his entire oeuvre. For Gadamer, any understanding between the self and the other can only be achieved once they enter into this authentic dialogue.

3. Kearney's Critique of Gadamer

Nevertheless, Gadamer's hermeneutics is often critiqued for not accounting for the *otherness* of the other. It is believed that his notion of the fusion of horizons is an attempt to eradicate, rather than account for, this otherness. Since understanding in Gadamer is achieved when an agreement is achieved about the subject matter, Gadamer is blamed by Kearney for pursuing "the idea of a reconciliation between our own understanding and that of strangers in terms of a "fusion of horizons (Kearney, 1988, p. 157)." It is surprising for Kearney to claim so, for Gadamer himself identifies his concern for the abolition of the otherness; while discussing his hermeneutic approach, he says, "[Here constantly arises the danger of "appropriating" the other person in one's own understanding and thereby failing to recognize his or her otherness (Gadamer, 1960/2004)."

Indeed, for Gadamer, "To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand—not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion (Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 304)." Consequently, Gadamer warns against "over

hastily assimilating the past to our own expectations of meaning, (Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 304)" or, in the case of the other, suppressing the otherness of the other in favor of one's own prejudices. This explains why Gadamer's dialogic model constantly calls for the interpreter's prejudices to be brought into question, considering it a prerequisite for starting any dialogue.

There are further instances where Kearney has disagreed with Gadamer. However, since, as mentioned above, a detailed analysis of such instances has already been conducted by Geniusas and Madison (2006, p. 238), it would be more interesting to attempt to find out why Kearney's critique, in the words of Genuisas, "violates *Truth and Method* so strongly, that it is hard to see the reasons that motivate Kearney's accusations." In other words, considering that Kearney is himself a brilliant critic, what can be the motivation behind his critique of Gadamer's model?

4. The Poetico-Ethical Imagination and Diacritical Hermeneutics

To answer this question, it is important to understand the framework for hermeneutic analysis presented by Kearney. In place of Gadamer's dialogic model, Kearney, referring to Ricoeur, advocates dialectic hermeneutics in his papers *Between Oneself and Another: Paul Ricoeur's Diacritical Hermeneutics* and *What is Diacritical Hermeneutics (Kearney, 2011)?*

Praising Ricoeur's hermeneutics for "building paths between the worlds of autos and heteros," and for "charting a course between the extremes of tautology and heterology," Kearney (2003) explains that diacritical hermeneutics "endeavors to steer a winding path between ontological and ethical categories of Otherness." For Kearney, such a criticism not only conducts an in depth analysis of different kinds of meanings, but also performs the "criteriological function of *discerning* (Kearney, 2003, emphasis added) between competing claims to meaning." By distinguishing between different kinds of selves and others, this "ambidextrous hermeneutic(s)" calls for an exploration of "possibilities of inter-communion between distinct but not incomparable selves (Kearney, 2003, p. 155)." According to Kearney, this can only be achieved if one attempts to recognize the other in self and the self in other.

A similar notion is expressed by Kearney (1988) in the concluding chapter of his book *The Wake of Imagination,* where he offers the adoption of what he terms a "poetico-ethical imagination," as a solution to "restoring some notion of a properly *human* imagination," in an apocalyptic world after post modernism, where the influx of knowledge has deconstructed even the idea of "human." Here, Kearney calls for an "ethical reinterpretation of imagination" which can critique deconstructionism to establish an ethical relationship between self and other.

After analyzing the pessimistic, almost paralytic condition post modernism has left the world in, Kearney suggests that it is now our "ethical responsibility" to "resist such an alarming view of things." He asserts that an ethical-poetical imagination can provide a way out of the circular labyrinth in which postmodern scholars find themselves. One can see the usefulness of his idea in a world where truth is thought to be relative.

Kearney argues that the other, by refusing to remain simply an image in the "midst of the euphoric fissions of apocalyptic mirror play," insistently calls for recognition and an attention to its needs. The answer to this call can only come from a combined ethical and poetic imagination. Poetic expression allows a reimagining of reality through mythical and symbolic representation, thereby opening different ways of being; ethical imagination, on the other hand, grounds these possibilities by reminding one of the responsibilities towards the other. Rather than prioritizing one over the other, Kearney asserts that only their assimilation can create an imagination which can survive in todays' postmodern world.

A closer analysis of Kearney's diacritical approach, along with his notion of poetico-ethical imagination, is enough to reveal the inherent contradictions within these ideas. Both these approaches seem to be advocating a certain kind of openness, while ultimately expecting some kind of a judgment between contesting modes of interpretation of the other. Indeed, the very idea of Kearney's poetico-ethical imagination is based upon this: while for Kearney, poetic imagination with its "openness to the pluri-dimensionality of meaning," can "tolerate the undecidability of play," ethical imagination can help "*decide*

between different modes of response to the other." Similarly, while advocating an openness to the otherness of the other, Kearney (2005) nevertheless claims: "It is not enough to be simply *open* to the other… One must also be careful to *discern* … between different kinds of otherness" (p. 77). For Kearney, this discernment is essential. The idea of discernment ultimately calls for a decision, which, in turn, means limiting the free play of meaning, bringing it to a stop, rather than allowing it to remain open.

The contradictory nature of Kearney's approach is once again apparent in his concluding remarks to his paper on diacritical hermeneutics:

"Every judgment is, Ricoeur rightly reminds us, informed by an unavoidable conflict of interpretations. We need to acknowledge, then, that if ethical critique is an indispensable component in the discernment of others and aliens, it is never above the hermeneutic imperative of a *plurality of interpretations*…This is not a call for relativism. On the contrary, it is an invitation to *judge more judiciously* so that we may, wherever possible, judge more justly" (Kearney, 2011, p. 160).

Such a judicious interpretation, according to Kearney (2011), calls for some "critically informed judgments" (p. 156). Since both deconstruction and psychoanalysis have failed to provide a criteria in this regard, Kearney tasks hermeneuts to provide one through a more dialectic approach. However, considering that his dialectic approach is fundamentally based on a critical reading of Gadamer's dialogic one, one is forced to question its validity and significance.

Whereas Kearney critiques Gadamer's approach, it is interesting to note the contributions of Gadamer in the development of Kearney's thought, as well as in the formation of his diacritical hermeneutic model, a fact which Kearney himself acknowledges. For instance, Kearney (2003) claims, "if diacritical hermeneutics extends horizontally across disciplines, it also extends historically across temporal horizons, reinterpreting the myths and memories of our past in the light of future hopes for a more mindful and compassionate understanding of our Others" (p. 156).

The idea of extending across temporal horizons is reminiscent of Gadamer's own discussion of the notion of historicity, when, establishing the significance of temporal distance for any hermeneutic enquiry, Gadamer (1960/2004) asserts that temporal distance should not be considered an obstacle to any hermeneutic enquiry: rather, it should be taken as a "positive and productive condition enabling understanding" (p. 297). Indeed, for Gadamer (1960/2004), "*understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event*" (p. 297). Gadamer has adduced time and again through his notion of historicity that it is impossible for consciousness to separate itself from its context. Consequently, it would be naive to assume that a text can be separated from its context, that critical distance can be maintained between text and its context during the process of interpretation.

Kearney, very much like Gadamer, calls for not only the other to be interpreted within the context of his socio-political setting, but also for the motivations behind specific interpretations to be identified based on the context of the interpreter: as Barash (2007), in his paper *Beyond Postmodernism: Reflections on Richard Kearney's Trilogy*, puts it, "Whereas Kearney focuses on how social action and historical events become meaningful within the context of larger narratives, Gadamer focuses on the situatedness of the interpreter. These are two sides of the same coin" (p. 146).

As established above, Kearney borrows heavily from Gadamer in proposing his dialectic model of hermeneutic inquiry. Indeed, it would be not wrong to say that both Gadamer's dialogic and Kearney's dialectic models share several similarities. The difference between these two approaches, dialogic and dialectic, will be dealt with in greater detail in the final part of this paper. For now, let us return to the original question: what can be the motivation behind Kearney's critique of Gadamer's model?

5. A Critique of Kearney's Critique

To answer this question, it is essential to point out the major difference between dialectic and dialogic approach: while, in the spirit of a true post-modernist, Gadamer refuses to provide a fixed, decisive criterion for distinguishing between self and other, or various forms of other, Kearney can be seen to be desiring the presence of such a 'methodological' framework, while at the same time seemingly realizing that his desire will remain unfulfilled. This accounts for the contradictions inherent in Kearney's arguments. Kearney appears to be antagonistic towards the

notion of *undecidability* of play celebrated by the post-modernist, and desirous of finding a way out of the circular linguistic labyrinth post-modernism has left the world in. At the same time, he is unable to accept the fact that there is no out: even his notion of a poetico-ethical imagination, as well as his diacritical model, can be exposed to be nothing more than an elision of alterity disguised behind an empty rhetoric of openness – the very thing Kearney accuses Gadamer of – once subjected to a deconstructionist critique. For when Kearney calls for judicious judgment between diverse forms of other, he fails to specify who has the *right* to provide this judgment. It is the same utilitarianism versus libertarianism argument over again.

Dooley (2007), in his paper *Truth, Ethics, and Narrative Imagination*, succinctly summarizes this conundrum faced by not only Kearney, but also Ricoeur: "It seems as though both Ricoeur and Kearney want to embrace the linguistic turn and, at the same time, remain faithful to the ontological tradition" (p. 195). Dooley goes on to argue:

> "There is a tension between Kearney's eschewal of "moralizing dogmatism" and a "moralism of abstract rules" and his view that "poetics teaches us essential truths about human experience." Kearney wants to avoid accusations that he is a moral essentialist while concomitantly lending credence to a neo-Aristotelianism that speaks of "essential truths," "universals," and "the good life." Many anti essentialists are quite happy to appropriate the idea of "practical wisdom" for deliberating ethically. But they do not think, as Aristotle did, that such wisdom can bring to light universal truths about the human situation" (Dooley, 2007, p. 199).

As established from this passage, Kearney is reluctant to openly advocate a moralist approach. Why then, is he adamant to find a decisive ethical framework to judge others? The answer, to use Dooley's words, is because Kearney remains a "metaphysician at heart," a metaphysician, it can be added here, who, fearing that postmodernism has left the world in chaos with no way out, does not want to see it as anything but a threat that should be dealt with. Postmodernism is the other to Kearney's metaphysics, and yet, Kearney appears to not want to listen to its claims. This explains why, in his book *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters*, Kearney acknowledges his fear that if the free play advocated by postmodernism is allowed to continue, it would make it impossible to distinguish gods from monsters, good from evil, and justice from injustice. While, according to Dooley, Kearney has not outright called Derrida a "bad postmodernist," his assertion that "the ethics of responsibility that deconstruction advocates is so committed to the notion of "undecidability" that its practitioners risk ending up in a state of paralysis, alas, still stands" (Dooley, 2007, p. 199).

Kearney's fears might seem relevant, considering that by deliberately denying to define a fixed criteria for any kind of judgment between different forms of other, whether this other is a text, society, or an actual person, the other is left open to interpretations and reinterpretations by the interpreter. Gadamer's dialogic approach, by advocating openness, seems to be demanding the same thing. However, contra Kearney, in the final section of this paper, I will argue that in its very openness lies the real strength of Gadamer's model.

6. Dialectic or Dialogic?

Like Gadamer, Kearney too advocates a certain kind of openness through his narrative imagination, since this imagination constantly re-create a narrative of 'self,' a self that recognizes that it can never be completed and hence, is always "ceaselessly reinterpreted" by imagination. The narrative imagination thus opens up the "notion of personal identity… to include… a communal identity," because the self keeps revising its narrative when – and whenever – confronted with the other. While this appears to be a possible resolution to the contemporary conflict about both the relation between self and other, and about foregrounding ethical criticism into an acceptable framework, it raises one imperative question; where will this reinterpretation – advocated by both Kearney and Gadamer – end? And if these reinterpretations of reinterpretations are allowed to continue, would not the world remain in the same parodic play, symbolized by Mallarme's metaphor of a lustre, where these reinterpretations would prove to be nothing beyond other reinterpretations, where each reinterpretation would simply be a reflection of previous reinterpretations, appearing to add something new, when in fact, reaching nowhere? Also, who will be the 'custodians' of these reinterpretations? Who will have the

right to reinterpret when faced with an ethical conundrum in a literary work, or during an encounter with the other? Would such an ethical framework reinterpret itself to allow for *Heart of Darkness* to remain in the cannon for its aesthetic merit, or would such a reinterpretation shun the novella for its inherent racism exposed by Achebe?

Is Kearney then justified in advocating a dialectic approach that at least calls for decision at a certain point? And consequently, should Gadamer then be blamed for proposing a more dialogic approach, one that relies on questions and answers, with the essence of the question being to "open up possibilities and keep them open"(Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 209)?

7. Conclusion

A comparative analysis between dialectic and dialogic approaches is needed to fully understand the significance of adopting Gadamer's model in contemporary society. This analysis is provided by Rupert Wegerif, a contemporary philosopher who has written extensively on the dialogic method in education, and is known for proposing a dialogic theory of education for the Internet Age. Wegerif (2020), in his web article, *Dialogic and Dialectic: Clarifying an Important Distinction*, linking the dialectic model to Hegel's notion of "difference within identity," asserts,

"Identity comes first … non-identity or difference is then brought in in the form of an internal contradiction – being can only make sense as a contrast to its negative or non-being...So it seems that a thing is both what it is and not what it is. The tension between incompatibles, being and non-being, is then resolved in a synthesis. For Hegel the 'synthesis' that emerged from the clash of being ('thesis') and non-being (antithesis) was becoming".

Therefore, while there is an exchange involved in dialectics, reaching a resolution remains the aim. This is where dialectic differs from dialogic: to quote (Wegerif, 2020):

"At the end of the dialogue there is no synthesis in which the difference between us is submerged within a greater identity. I am still me and you are still you but there might be a greater awareness of the possibilities of human life ...".

Hence, unlike dialectics, a dialogue never ends, because a resolution is never reached. What is achieved however, is an expanded consciousness about the otherness of the other, a consciousness that can be used to make sense of the world. Gadamer (1960/2004) underscores this when he explains:

"The maieutic productivity of the Socratic dialogue…is concerned merely with the…immanent logic of the subject matter that is unfolded in the dialogue. What emerges in its truth is the logos, which is neither mine nor yours and hence so far transcends the interlocutors' subjective opinions that even the person leading the conversation knows that he does not know".

Therefore, not-knowing, and the realization that one can never really *know*, is a prerequisite for an authentic dialogue because it allows for personal prejudices to be called into question. Dialogue permits self and other to meet in a creative, intellectual play where each poses a question to the other. Fusion of horizon is achieved when new insights about each other are achieved. These insights, however, remain open to further questions that can be posed at the next encounter.

In his attempt to distinguish between diverging discourses to form value judgments, between narratives that "congeal and incarcerate," and narratives that "loosen and emancipate," as he puts it in his *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters,* Kearney (2005) makes the very mistake he accuses the postmodernists of making – of going into abstractions (p. 175). Furthermore, his diacritic hermeneutics, in its call for judgments, relies on a notion of authority and power he himself seems reluctant to take up. As Wegerif (2020) points out, "ultimately dialectic thinking, like identity thinking, is about closing down and controlling meaning. Kearney himself does not want this. What he does want, nevertheless, is a criterion for judgment so that one could distinguish between different types of representations of other. Kearney's concern is valid; however, through his dialogic model that aims to reach a greater understanding of, rather than a decision about the other, Gadamer has provided a solution to the conundrum of distinguishing between contesting representations.

In short, in today's post-truth world, buzzing with diverging discourses, each demanding to be understood, it becomes even more imperative to keep reminding oneself that there can never be one absolute rule to guide all. Since the very notion of identity has been put into question, Kearney needs to accept that Gadamer has already offered a solution to the demands

of the other: that text, or the other, will always remain open to interpretations, and so, there is no way out of the hermeneutic circle. To use the words of Wegerif (2020), there can be "no universal formula for the implementation of universal values."

Hence, an encounter with the other does not demand an implementation of some already-established rules; rather, a creative adaptation of previously constructed rules can suffice to provide a judgment where one is needed, and that too after the fusion of horizons has been achieved. Self-enlargement, rather than self-assertion, should be the goal of any ethical criticism. Thus, to decide whether Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* should be praised for its aesthetic merit despite its blatant racism, Cohen needs to reconstruct the question to which the novel is an answer, after calling into question his own prejudices about what constitutes racism. Only then will he be able to realize the element of self-criticism evident in Conrad's representation of the other, and achieve a greater understanding of the writer and the motivation underlying his work.

Because of the limited scope of the paper, we are not able to provide a detailed comparative analysis of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Achebe's response to it. Taken further, such an analysis, conducted through Gadamerian hermeneutics, would perhaps help us come closer to answering Cohen's question. Also, since the article relies solely on interpretive analysis rather than empirical data, its scope is limited. Future studies could benefit by contextualizing the analysis to see its practical implementation in our society.

While there is no final solution to the inherent loneliness characterizing contemporary existence, perhaps such an existence can be made more bearable by attempting to achieve a better understanding of distinct others by delving in their diverse voices presented through literature. If understanding the other is an impossibility, the least we can do is attempt to understand where this other is coming from.

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