



Gadamerian understanding and Ricoeurian symbol as it contributes to a symbolic worldview

“No word can acquire meaning in the way in which philosophers from Aristotle to Bertrand Russell have hoped it might—by being the unmediated expression of something non-linguistic (e.g., an emotion, a sense-datum, a physical object, an idea, a Platonic Form).”

- (Rorty, *Deconstructionist Theory*, 173)

A symbolic worldview

- This project will argue that one can ascribe to something the status of being genuinely and robustly true. It will do so by positing the central concept of a symbolic worldview.
- There is a reciprocal relation and unity between what is genuinely true and what is provisionally the case, and that this relation is expressed most clearly in a symbolic worldview.

Key Terms

Three key terms that underlie and inform a symbolic worldview are

- Genuinely true
- Robustly true
- Worldview

The overarching argument of this thesis

A worldview is always symbolic, mediating an understanding of what is true about the world that is genuine and robust while also provisional.

Elaborating on the key argument

- ❑ A symbolic worldview does not presume a direct correspondence between propositions about what is true and facticity. This is because language can never encapsulate everything that can be known about something in the world. As Gadamer says, we are historically situated and “always find ourselves within a situation, and throwing light on it is a [hermeneutic] task that is never entirely finished” (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 301).
- ❑ A symbolic worldview posits that the essence of what is genuinely true can only be presented and recognised in context specific forms. These ‘forms,’ what I will refer to as interpretations, reflect historicity or situatedness and are always provisional rather than final.

Distinguishing between genuine/robust and provisional

- ❑ Two words that Gadamer uses for ‘experience’ are *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*.
- ❑ Unlike *Erlebnis*, *Erfahrung* transcends subjectivity and approaches what is more widely held to be true. Within this project, what I call genuinely and robustly true draws on the concept of *Erfahrung* and could be described as a reliable understanding of the way things really are in the world (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 390).
- ❑ To distinguish what is genuinely and robustly true from what is provisionally so, I utilise the concept of ‘essence.’ *Essence* denotes what goes beyond subjectivity and is produced over and above our actions. It is the ‘in-itself’ of things—what makes something what it is—and experienced as an intimation or “insight that strikes us as [self evident and] valid” (Weinsheimer and Marshall, “Preface,” xvii).

A symbolic worldview – establishing the concept

In a symbolic worldview, I will show that what is genuinely and robustly true, and what is provisionally so, are interwoven and constitute a unity of sorts.

This will be shown more explicitly by drawing on Hans-Georg Gadamer's understanding of religious symbol and hermeneutic understanding, and Paul Ricoeur's description of symbol and narrative understanding.

Symbol

Gadamer

I will argue that what is genuinely and robustly true presents itself in interpretations that have a provisional character. They are provisional because they are never final or conclusive. What is genuinely true cannot be separated from what is provisionally so and constitutes a unity that, I will argue, is analogous to the unity of an image and its significance in Gadamer's religious symbol.

Ricoeur

I will argue that a symbolic worldview points beyond its 'primary meaning'—what is genuinely true about the world—to a host of 'secondary' or provisional meanings. While expressing what is genuinely true, these secondary or provisional meanings never deplete all possible ways of expressing the true. I contend that within a symbolic worldview, arriving at an understanding of what is genuinely true continually unfolds within a hermeneutic process. I draw on the resource of 'double intentionality' within the Ricoeurian project to demonstrate this

Why Gadamer and Ricoeur?

- ❑ Gadamer and Ricoeur provide a rich resource for talking about a view of the world that is symbolic.
- ❑ Gadamer identified hermeneutic acts of understanding as the means by which one comes to know what is true about the world. In Chapter 2-3, I turn to Gadamerian art and play to explain how, within a symbolic worldview, we come to an understanding of what is genuinely and robustly true through interpretation and dialogue.

It is in Ricoeur's language of the symbolic and its relation to narrative understanding, which I focus on in Chapter 4, that I find a valuable resource for talking about a worldview that is symbolic. The concept of a dynamic relation between what is genuinely/robustly true and what is provisionally so, within a symbolic worldview, is built upon his idea of "a [symbol's] double meaning structure." (Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics*, 5).

Bibliography

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