

HERMENEUTICS IN ANTHROPOLOGY

Malcolm Crick, in his book Explorations in Language and Meaning (1976) stresses the importance of semantic powers, which make human beings members of a self-defining species. He also stresses that a recognition of the effects of the observer's presence within the field observed makes social anthropology, the interpretation of alien systems of thought and action, more a process of translation, between the observed system and that of the interpreter, than a natural science in which such effects can be taken to be minimal or non-existent. Crick thus accepts the following description of the social anthropologist, from Evans-Pritchard's Marett lecture of 1950:

He goes to live for some months or years among a primitive people. He lives among them as intimately as he can, and he learns to speak their language, to think in their concepts and to feel their values. He then lives the experiences over again critically and interpretatively in the conceptual categories and values of his own culture and in terms of the general body of knowledge of his discipline. In other words, he translates from one culture into another. (Evans-Pritchard, 1962 : 21):

Crick reaffirms Evans-Pritchard's contention that social anthropology is a kind of historiography, not a form of natural science. This however poses the question of what it is which distinguishes such non-natural sciences, collectively known as humanities, or human sciences. One answer, given by Wilhelm Dilthey, is to identify the characteristic method of the human sciences as the method called Verstehen, through which the process of creating meanings is relived by the interpreter. This however leads to a false opposition between a faculty of understanding (Verstehen) suitable for theorising the human sciences, and the mode of explanation, for theorising the natural sciences. Dilthey himself recognised that explanation is not wholly excluded from the human sciences. Even by making a distinction, however, between method and object, the observer or interpreter is again excluded from the field observed, leading to a misleading objectification, and a loss of the insight that investigation in the human sciences, and in social anthropology, is like a process of translation.

What follows is a part of the history of an unintegrated domain, loosely specifiable as 'hermeneutics'. It will show some of the implications of placing social anthropology among the human sciences, and of likening it to a process of translation. This partial history will take the form of an account of some of the differences between the theorisings of hermeneutics in three authors, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer, through a commentary on three texts: Dilthey's The Development of Hermeneutics (1900); Heidegger's introduction to Being and Time (1973); and Gadamer's second introduction to Truth and Method (1975). This account cannot show the full inner dynamics of each theorising, and of its production, but it will give a rough characterisation of each. This, however, will be sufficient to show the looseness of the term 'hermeneutics', by showing deep divergencies between three of its principle twentieth century theorisations.

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) was concerned to show the possibility of generally valid knowledge in the human sciences. He grounds this possibility in the nature of the understanding, of Verstehen. He defines 'hermeneutics' in The Development of Hermeneutics as the theory of interpretation, the methodology of Verstehen, as opposed to the exegesis of texts, which is the practice of interpretation. For Dilthey, it is the possibility of understanding expressions of life, fixed in writing, which is specified by the term 'hermeneutics'; for it is by

successive engagements with fixed reidentifiable objects that general rules of exegesis can be developed. Thus there is no contrast with the reidentifiability of objects in the natural sciences. Plainly however there are problems with the suggestion that 'expressions of life' can be durably fixed. There is not just the problem of establishing definitive versions, but also of establishing the relation between expression, its author, and the context in which it was produced. These are presumably the problems which generate Dilthey's supposition of the infinite nature of processes of interpretation, a supposition which is shared by Crick. Dilthey writes in the cited essay:

Theoretically we are here at the limits of all interpretation; it can only fulfil its task to a degree (1976 : 259).

This appears in the essay as a regrettable limitation, but becomes transposed into a necessary consequence of a precondition of any understanding through Gadamer's appropriation of Heidegger's writings.

It is the requirement for fixed reidentifiable objects of interpretation which grounds the privileged status of texts in this essay. Dilthey's emphasis on texts is of course not identical to any such emphasis current in social anthropology. There is in social anthropology the distinction between the alien system of thought and action as text, and the notebooks of the observer, which form the basis of his ethnography. Dilthey's discussion of texts as written works holds only by strained analogy for texts as alien systems, the major difference being the lack of an author in the text of the alien system. The significance of the discussion lies however in the attempt to validate the results of studies in the historiographical mode. Dilthey writes:

Here lies the immeasurable significance of literature for our understanding of intellectual life and history; in language alone the inner life of man finds its complete, exhaustive and objectively comprehensible expression. The art of understanding therefore centres on exegesis or interpretation of those remnants of human existence which are contained in written works (1976 : 249).
(Translation altered.)

However, human 'inner life' is not equally expressed in all texts; and it becomes evident that there is an implicit ordering of texts on the basis of degrees of such expressiveness. Texts such as Goethe's Poetry and Truth and Schiller's On Aesthetic Education are preferred to texts such as property inventories and legal contracts, which express or describe human 'outer life'. The contrast corresponds to that between expressive and instrumental texts. The emphasis on inner life, on intentions and consciousness, becomes clearer by considering the assertion with which Dilthey concludes the essay:

The final goal of the hermeneutic procedure is to understand the author better than he understood himself: a statement which is the necessary conclusion of the doctrine of unconscious creation (1976 : 260).

This might seem to be no more than the correct suggestion that by reconstructing the context of the author's writings, it is possible to reconstruct conditions and constraints on them, of which the author was not or could not be aware. However, the implications of 'the doctrine of unconscious creation' are not exhausted by this, as becomes clear in the shift from privileging texts to privileging their authors as the objects of hermeneutics. Dilthey writes:

But the work of a great poet or explorer, of a religious genius or genuine philosopher can only be the true expression of his mental life; in human society, which is full of lies, such work is always true and can therefore in contrast to other fixed expressions be interpreted with complete objectivity. Indeed it throws light on the other artistic records of an age, and on the historical actions of contemporaries (1900 : 249) .

Thus it is not the historical context which allows the interpreter to interpret the text, but the text which helps the interpreter to interpret the historical context. However, the assertion of the possibility of first establishing the truth of the 'great poet' or 'real philosopher', and then using this truth to develop understanding of the context is entirely implausible on several counts. It is only less implausible than the suggestion that it is possible to identify authors to represent particular eras, to make choices between, for example, Dilthey and Marx.

Dilthey describes the two parts of the process of exegesis as follows:

In the process of interpretation we can distinguish only two aspects to grasping an intellectual creation in linguistic signs. Grammatical interpretation proceeds link by link to the highest combinations in the whole of the work. The psychological interpretation starts with penetrating the inner creative process and proceeds to the outer and inner form of the work, and from there to a further grasp of the unity of all his works in the mentality and development of their author (1976 : 259) .

This equal emphasis on 'psychological interpretation' is however wholly misconceived, the mistake lying in the supposition that it is possible to extend the reconstruction of the author's mental processes beyond the evidence of surviving texts; thus the use of such reconstructions to explain the texts can only be a process of reading back into the texts what has already been read out of them. This unilluminating circularity is reproduced in the following description of Verstehen:

Understanding (Verstehen) is the process of recognising a mental state from a sense-given sign by which it is expressed (1976 : 248) .

Although the reidentifiable sense-given sign is the evidence for the recognition of the mental state, Dilthey suggests that the ground for the possibility of this recognition is the interpreter's own experience of mental states. He writes:

The possibility of valid interpretation can be deduced from the nature of the understanding. There the personalities of the interpreter and his author do not confront each other as two facts which cannot be compared: both have been formed by a common human nature and this makes common speech and understanding among men possible (1976 : 258) .

Dilthey does not question the influence on the process of interpretation of the specific form of 'common human nature' which is present in the particular interpreter. Nor does he systematically discuss the possibility and actuality of differences in the languages and categories of interpreter and author. The danger of this neglect is well put by Crick, following Evans-Pritchard:

An insufficient comprehension of the conceptual structures of one's own society and an inadequate familiarity with the complex resources of one's own language can easily be a source of mistranslation and so cause misunderstanding of another culture. (Crick 1976 : 153)

By emphasising the importance of the author, Dilthey submerges the rôle of the interpreter and the effects of his understanding on his interpretation of the other culture. For Dilthey the aim of hermeneutics is to reconstruct the self-expression which is given in the text through a process of identification with its author. As a result of this orientation the problem of relativism emerges, because of the emphasis on the specificity of the system to be understood, and of the attempt to construct an understanding of that system from the standpoint of that system. The impossibility of such identification can however lead to a recognition that the process of understanding the alien system is not one of absorption into the system, but of translation of that system into that of the interpreter. There is in the process of understanding a necessary relation between the interpreter's self-understanding and the interpretation of the system to be understood. As Hanson concludes in his paper, 'Understanding in Philosophical Anthropology':

Furthermore a comparative perspective has characterised my entire analysis. I found it easiest to think about why Africans do not evaluate their assumptions on the basis of empirical evidence by thinking first about why Western scientists do (1970:66).

As a result of the submergence of the interpreter, Dilthey cannot begin to give an account of the constraints on understanding imposed by the conceptual structures implicit in languages, nor of the possibilities of altering those constraints. The constitution and development of the interpreter's understanding is an issue explicitly taken up by Gadamer, as a weakness in Dilthey's theorising of hermeneutics; while Heidegger is particularly concerned with the influence of the availability of categories on understanding. The very opacity of his language is a result of his attempt to break through preconceptions embedded in language as given, to what he took to be the truth of philosophy.

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) published Being and Time in 1926 in the journal set up by Husserl to develop his phenomenological programme. It gradually became clear however that Heidegger's contribution was not so much a realisation of a part of the programme, as a new programme. In Being and Time itself it is not clear that Heidegger recognised this, and there is thus throughout the work a persistent but ambiguous appeal to 'phenomenology' which is not systematically related to the developing use of the term in Husserl's writings. The following is a brief summary of the introduction to Being and Time, which must necessarily be selective. The significance of this selection can only be made plain by a further reading of the text in question. There will be no direct quotations because they would probably be more confusing than illuminating, but the numbers in brackets are the page numbers of the German edition, indicating the passages on which sections of the summary are based.

Heidegger's concern is to restate the question of Being, which denotes the general category, and not a class of specific entities, because he takes this to be the precondition of philosophical investigation. In this restatement the privileged entity is Dasein, the entity which people are, because it has as a defining characteristic the possibility of understanding not just itself, but other kinds of entity too (12). Heidegger stresses that Dasein is self-interpreting, thus establishing the importance of self-definition and of semantic powers. What Heidegger shows is that Dasein is always already engaged in a linguistic

community, and has structures of understanding prior to the attempt to understand. Thus the forestructures of understanding are prior to the setting up of the subject/object dichotomy, which is the basis of the dichotomy between human and natural sciences. Thus interpretation and understanding are not to be taken as on the same level as causal explanation in the natural sciences, but are presupposed in the very setting up of the dichotomy. Heidegger thus shifts the emphasis from the individual author of particular texts, to the linguistic community, which, in the terms of transcendental philosophy, is identified as the transcendental subject.

What Heidegger wishes to question are Dasein's forestructures of understanding through the attempt to reconstruct them. This reconstruction is designed to establish the actual horizon for an interpretation of the meaning of Being in general. Heidegger indicates temporality as the meaning of the entity which is called Dasein (17), but in so doing questions the concept of time. He writes that 'time' has long functioned as a criterion for naively discriminating between various realms of entities, with a questionable distinction between temporal entities, natural processes and historical happenings, and non-temporal entities, spatial and numerical relations (18). There is a customary contrast between 'timeless' meanings of propositions, and the temporality of propositional assertions. This however obscures the crucial role of temporal determinateness in structuring human understanding (19). This temporality is historical in the sense that having a history is a determining characteristic of Dasein (20). Dasein's being in the present is always dependent on its having been in the past, as a result of which it is embedded in traditions carrying over from past to present. The failure to recognise the influence of tradition in the present obscures the historical origins of categories, and the suppressions implicit in them. By stating the full nature of categories preserved through the mediation of traditions, it is possible to recognise the influence in the present of the past, and to understand what is of value in it (22). Heidegger represents the process of investigation as phenomenological description which, he suggests, means 'interpretation'. The phenomenology of Dasein is hermeneutic in a dual sense of making the basic structures of Being known to Dasein (37) and of working out the conditions for the possibility of philosophical investigation. Further as a result of working out, through this hermeneutic, the conditions for the possibility of reconstructing historical processes, the methodology of the human sciences is indicated. This can be called 'hermeneutic', according to Heidegger, only in a derivative sense. There is then a clear contrast here between this and Dilthey's specification of hermeneutics as the theory of interpretation, which is to be the methodology of the human sciences.

Heidegger's questioning of the constitution of the interpreter's self-understanding, and of the categories in which that understanding is to be articulated, is taken up and made more accessible by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-). This greater accessibility is achieved at the cost of confusing the distinction between ordinary language and the language in which ordinary language is theorised. Gadamer emphasises the temporal dimension of understanding, the temporal distance between interpreter and interpreted, and the importance of the historical determinations of the interpreter's understanding, the importance of effective history. Gadamer's purpose in talking about effective history is to show how the history of a community is present in the constitution of a community at a particular point in time, not simply in its practices, but in the structures of its members' understandings. This is a stronger version of Evans-Pritchard's claim:

The claim that one can understand the functioning of institutions at a certain point in time without knowing how they came to be, what they are, or what they were later to become, as well as the person who in addition to having studied their constitution at that point of time, has also studied their past and future, is to me an absurdity (Evans-Pritchard : 21).

Stressing that both the material studied, and the understanding of the interpreter, have historical determinations is a different point from suggesting that a discipline, such as anthropology, is historiographical. Gadamer's criticism of Dilthey's failure to give an account of the formation of the interpreter's understanding hinges on a rejection of Dilthey's distinction between hermeneutics as the theory, and exegesis as the practice of interpretation. It is the use, or application, of understanding acquired through interpretation which constitutes that understanding. There is no distinction between the process of producing understanding in the practice of interpretation, and the validation of it by measuring the practice against the theoretical norms articulated in the theory of interpretation, hermeneutics. Gadamer thus relocates hermeneutics in the practical activity of developing systems of conventions and codes, which constitute legal systems, religious beliefs, and, more broadly, natural languages. An example of such practical activity is the modification of an existing language in order to express in it the thought and action of an alien community.

The precondition for such practices is the possibility of communication between interpreter and interpreted, but it is precisely the gap between strangeness and familiarity in the text to be interpreted which is the site of hermeneutics. The familiarity consists in the presuppositions and prejudices shared by text and interpreter; the strangeness by the remaining pre-suppositions, which are not shared. The familiarity is constituted, so far as Gadamer is concerned, by the presence of some effect produced by the thing interpreted in the community of the interpreter. It is plausible that this provides access to things to be interpreted in the instance where that thing is a part of a history linking interpreter and interpreted. This however is plainly not the case for the anthropologist who is not a member of the community studied. There is then a problem of how in this instance the familiarity required to provide access to the thing to be interpreted can be obtained. If the community studied is contemporary, then plainly this happens as described by Evans-Pritchard, quoted at the beginning of this paper. If the community is not contemporary, access can still be established through the reading and studying of the written and plastic remains. The process of interpretation is thus generated by the challenge to pre-supposition made by the texts. Without this challenge to presupposition, and therefore without presupposition, there would not be processes of understanding. The encounter between text and interpreter brings pre-suppositions and prejudices to recognition, and it leads to the dissolution of all but those which bring about genuine understanding. By putting prejudice at risk in the encounter with the text, that text can reveal its claim to truth. Thus the process of understanding begins when a text addresses the interpreter and poses a question to prejudice. Instead of reconstructing the self-expression which is given in a text, by identifying with its author, Gadamer is suggesting that understanding must affirm its own historical context. In the foreword to the second edition of Truth and Method Gadamer characterises his investigation in the following manner:

At any rate the purpose of my investigation is not to offer a general theory of interpretation, and a differential account of its methods, but to discover what is in common to all modes

of understanding and to show that understanding is never subjective behaviour toward a given object, but towards its effective history - the history of its influence; in other words understanding belongs to the being of that which is understood (1975 : xix).

Gadamer is therefore not developing a methodology of the human sciences. He writes: 'I did not intend to produce an art or technique of understanding in the manner of the earlier hermeneutics. I did not wish to elaborate a system of rules to describe, let alone direct, the methodical procedure of the human sciences' (*ibid* : xvi). For Gadamer truth is not the result of applying validating methods to processes of investigation, and he endorses Heidegger's notion of truth as revelation. He states his main direction of questioning as follows: 'My real concern was and is philosophical: what stands in question is not what we do, nor what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing' (*ibid* : xviii). The implication of transcendentalism becomes more clear in the following: 'The investigation asks, to express it in a Kantian way, how is understanding possible' (*ibid* : xviii). The procedure of German transcendental philosophy of going behind what is present in consciousness, and inquiring for the conditions of its presence, is transformed however by the systematic recognition of language, rather than isolated categories, as the medium for the expression of 'what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing'. This shift alters the nature of the transcendental claim, since although 'consciousness' may with some plausibility be supposed to be unchanging, and atemporal, allowing the derivation of one set of conditions of possibility, language may not. Gadamer identifies the consequences of this shift as follows: 'Hence the demand for a reflexive self-grounding as made from the viewpoint of the speculatively conducted transcendental philosophy of Fichte, Hegel and Husserl is unfulfilled' (*ibid* : xxiv). This failure Gadamer takes to indicate the impossibility of all reflexive self-grounding. What is common to all understanding is the role of effective history, and the mediation of tradition through the mediation of language, but the necessary diversity of languages, traditions and effectivities of history provides no basis for the postulation of a subject of a total process, required for a grounding of transcendental philosophy. Thus Gadamer cannot use this means for deciding which prejudices are genuine, reflecting the historical determinateness of the prejudiced, and therefore making understanding possible, and which are not.

The concept of tradition plays a crucial role in Gadamer's construction of understanding, and is the only possible location for distinguishing between prejudices. He writes: 'Tradition, part of whose nature is the handing on of traditional material, must have become questionable for an explicit consciousness of the hermeneutic task of appropriating tradition to have been formed' (*ibid* : xxi). The manner in which this questioning becomes possible however is never clarified, and thus the reason for the emphasis on the appropriation, rather than criticism and rejection of tradition does not emerge. This is the result of there being concealed in the notion of effective history a shift back from emphasising language to emphasising consciousness. Gadamer remarks: 'Hence there is a certain legitimate ambiguity in the concept of the consciousness of effective history, as I have used it. This ambiguity is that it is used to mean at once the consciousness obtained in the course of history and determined by history; and the very consciousness of this obtaining and determining' (*ibid* : xxi). This representation of effective history as primarily effecting consciousness and not as mediated through language obscures the possibility of articulating traditions, and the particular effectiveness of history on particular understandings, through analysing the language in which they are mediated.

Even the emphasis on language is to an extent misplaced. It leads to a suppression of the question of the conditions determining the development of language. Gadamer's claim to the transcendental status of philosophical hermeneutics suggests the possibility of developing an account of those conditions; but he does not develop a distinction between the ordinary language of intersubjective communication, in which effective history is operative, and theoretical language in which an account of the limits on the suspension of prejudice might be constructed. The distinction is between a language in which rules are followed, and the language in which the rules are specified, their social role specified, their mutual compatibility discussed, and the possibilities for development and change in the rules elaborated. The theoretical language must of course preserve the structures of meaning present in the ordinary language, but give in addition an account of their formation, and cohesion. The failure to make this distinction is the basis for Gadamer's emphasis on the appropriation of tradition, rather than its criticism, because only through theorising the ordinary language in which tradition is preserved is it possible to do anything more than accede to it. The problem is to specify conditions for the adequacy of theoretical languages to ordinary languages. The following is a brief indication of the form of such conditions. A theoretical language is adequate to the domain which it articulates, in this case the structure of the ordinary language, insofar as it can internalise its specification of the domain, not grounding it in appeal to external elements, such as 'common human nature'. Thus the process of validation is also internalised, since validity now consists in the theory's capacity to perform that articulation. The terms of the theoretical language are not to be imposed on pre-given data, but developed through an articulation of the domain and the specification of its elements. The validity of the terms is thus established by their capacity to allow this articulation. If, instead of grounding theory, with Dilthey, in the universal category of 'common human nature' the enterprise of interpretation were taken to be the attempt to grasp the mechanisms at work beneath appearances, and to grasp the generation of the complex opaque forms which are present in discourse, through the construction of such theoretical languages, the grounding by appeal to external standard is no longer necessary. The development of the theory is then governed not by the decision of the interpreter, constituted independently of the engagement in theorising, but is governed by the structure of the domain of objects to be interpreted, in which the understanding of the interpreter is a variable and not a constant.

The emphasis in the hermeneutic orientation on intersubjectivity tends to obliterate the distinction between theory and everyday intersubjective understanding. This obliteration is a precondition for the contention that the critique and supersession of a theory can be reduced to a mere process of criticising ideology. A critique of ideology reconstructs and criticises the system of representations of relations, institutions and practices in a society. This can be an isolable activity only if that system of representations can give a coherent and complete account of what is represented. This presupposes that what is represented is itself coherent and complete. However if the relations represented are mutually inconsistent, the critique of ideology cannot stop at the limits of the system of representations, but must go on to give an account of why inconsistencies occur in reality, of what the possible resolutions of the tension arising out of them are, and of the manner in which those inconsistencies can demonstrate themselves, both in reality, and in the system of representation. The contention that all that is needed to eliminate misunderstanding is a systematic critique of the discourse rests on the mistake of representing discourse as unconditioned by the domain which it articulates. If, instead, discourse is taken to reflect and represent inconsistencies and contradictions in the domain itself, then it is not just the discourse, but the domain which must be criticised. Thus if ideology is taken to be inseparable from, and grounded in the system of relations which it represents, then it is not sufficient to discover tensions in the discourse in which

the ideology is articulated, in order not to be misled; but the process of criticising ideology must go on to criticise that which is represented. It is not a question simply of discovering the rules according to which ordinary language is constructed and developed, but of leaving open the option of criticising that ordinary language.

As a result of not making this distinction between ordinary language and theoretical language, Gadamer is misled into grounding his theorisation of hermeneutics in an unanalysed, unanalysable notion of 'tradition'. Gadamer cannot articulate the difference between history as perceived, as a part of the conscious tradition of a people, operative in their everyday life, and a systematic reconstruction of that history, in which divergencies between history as perceived, and history as reconstructed can also be accounted for. The parallel between this relation and that between ordinary language and theoretical language should be plain. As a result of this failure, Gadamer cannot ground his own theorisation in an articulation of the tradition from which it itself stems. He cannot specify how the content of traditions is formed, nor of how it changes. If the context of tradition can no longer be known in the Hegelian style as the production of self-conceptualising reason, neither can the content and development of the content of tradition be so known. In rejecting such forms of totalisation, Gadamer rejects the possibility of establishing the moment of truth and knowledge in understanding, through appeal to an absolute moment in the process of self-conceptualisation. This rejection seems to entail a rejection of all systems of relations which go beyond the context of tradition, through which that tradition might be grasped, understood and criticised. There is however no need to suppose that without a total context of history, in the Hegelian style, there can be no move beyond specific contexts. Indeed Gadamer's rejection of the desirability as well as of the possibility of final interpretations of texts suggests as much. There can be no such total context of history, since the very enterprise of understanding and reconstructing history presupposes the finitude of the understanding undertaking the enterprise. Instead of leaving traditions to be specified by a total history to which the finite interpreter can have no access, Gadamer's own specification of necessary conditions for understanding texts can be applied to the understanding of traditions. By recognising the distinction between the ordinary language in which tradition is preserved, and theoretical language in which that tradition can be articulated, this problem of the wholly unspecifiable nature of traditions can be dissolved.

Thus in Dilthey, hermeneutics is theorised as the methodology of the human sciences. In Heidegger, hermeneutics becomes the specification of the **forestructures** of understanding, and of language, which are prior to the making of distinctions between subject and object of discourse. On this basis Gadamer rejects the objectifying tendency in hermeneutics, demonstrated in Dilthey, whereby the interpreter identifies with the author, in order to reconstruct the objective self-expression given in a text. **He stresses** instead the relation between text and interpreter, mediated by tradition. The question which remains, indicating a possible line of development in hermeneutic theorising, is how traditions, mediated through language, are to be theorised. At this point it is clear that Gadamer's form of transcendentalism, grounding the possibility of all understanding, cannot be an invitation to the construction of substantial eternal structures of the conditions of the possibility of understanding, but to direct engagement in understanding specific domains, by interpreters, whose historically specific possibilities of understanding are the precondition for such engagement. There is no more than a formal answer to Crick's transcendental question of 'what it is to know, interpret, understand, and mean' (1976 : 129) and an understanding of that answer can be gained only through such engagement, which will be the more illuminating

the more the effects of the interpreter's self-understanding are made explicit. As Crick himself concludes: since the human species is self-defining, change is of its essence and the concept cannot be taken as a pregiven of interpreting, but is always in the process of redefinition. It is thus clear that even the definition of the human species as self-defining cannot be taken as a given of theory, but itself requires theorising. In order to understand the mechanisms whereby changes in the self-definition come about, it is necessary to question the production of such definitions. Both the possibility of the formation of that definition, and the possibility of theorising it, must be theorised in the theoretical language. There is certainly no reason to suppose that a recognition of the importance of semantic powers is always present in ordinary languages, and in human self-understanding, and thus theorising of it must produce an account of its presence or absence. The self-definition of the human species as self-defining must itself be put in question. Clearly in the construction of an account of Europeanised cultures the very refusal to recognise the importance of semantic powers would have to be theorised, and the definition of the human species as self-defining would have to be juxtaposed to marxist definitions of it as producing and reproducing its own means of subsistence. A more decisive conclusion depends of course on actually producing an account of such cultures, which has not been the concern of this paper.

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