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On Pol Vandavelde's "A Critique of Gadamer's Critical Pluralism": Some Questions*

Dr. Alireza Azadi**

Abstract

Perhaps it is not more than four or five decades that the hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer is recognized by the scholars, but during this short period, we have seen tempestuous critics and objections against their hermeneutical thoughts. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, after publication of *Wahrheit und Methode* in 1960, has met with many criticisms. One of the major areas in which Gadamer has sustained criticism is epistemology. Although the topic of epistemology is not the central point of *TM*, his hermeneutics does call to mind the question, what can we know? And "how is understanding possible, not only in the humanities but in the whole of man's experience of the world?" Does Gadamer's hermeneutics lead to relativism, the very thing he appears quite ardently to fight in his critique of historicism?

Pol Vandavelde¹ is someone who has recently criticized Gadamer's hermeneutics from the perspective of traditional hermeneutics. He published a book entitled: *"The Task of the Interpreter: Text, Meaning, and Negotiation"*. The first two chapters of this book, especially the second chapter, with the title "Interpretation as Event: A Critique of Gadamer's Critical Pluralism," is devoted to attacking some aspects of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. I will state the general schema of his book and his critiques of Gadamer as they have been put forward in the first 62 pages of his book. In my conclusion, I will raise five questions or contradictions in Vandavelde's theory of interpretation.

Key words: Gadamer, Philosophical hermeneutics, Vandavelde, The fusion of horizons, Language, Understanding, Interpretation, Author's Intention, Relativism, Pluralism.

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** Assistant professor of Tabriz university

The General Schema of Vandavelde's Book

Vandavelde describes his position as 'a metacritical or philosophical position', that it is 'phenomenological in nature'. As he writes, he decided to "examine what is involved in interpretation, what kind of decisions have to be made by interpreters, what the goals are when someone interprets a particular text, and how the validity of an interpretation can be assessed." (Pol Vandavelde, 2005, 13) Nevertheless, it is clear that the focus of these pages is concentrating on intentionalist and objectivist ideas of appealing to the author's intention for interpreting a text, and emphasizing on these concepts so far have been at the heart of charges that are directed to Gadamer's hermeneutics, that is: the author's intention, objectivity, validity of interpretation, and relativism.

Vandavelde has called his critiques as 'Ambiguities', and maybe we thought that he wanted to clear and remove these ambiguities, but in contrast, he, in a new body of words and phrases, provides the same charges. Following Betti and Hirsch, Vandavelde strives to guarantee the objectivity of interpretation by reviving the notion of the author's intention. Here, we investigate his thoughts as he brings them out in the first two chapters of his book.

In the first chapter, Vandavelde focuses on the definition of Monism and Pluralism in interpretation introducing their outstanding schools and exemplars. He identifies Gadamer as a great exemplar of a pluralism that "claims that there is something absurd in the idea of one correct interpretation of a text." (Ibid, 1) The important standards of pluralism, he puts, are included in "critical pluralism, multiplism, and constructivism." The hinge of all these approaches is not only a possible multiplicity of equally valid interpretations, but, regarding the nature of the object of interpretation, the many properties of cultural objects, and lack of any stable framework in which the truth or falsity of an interpretation can be decided. We ineluctable and inevitable have a multiplicity of interpretations. Opposed to pluralism in interpretation, Vandavelde points out a critical monism or singularism, that, by emphasizing the author's intention for a given text, believes that there is ideally only one correct interpretation. He speaks of two types: actual intentionalists and hypothetical intentionalists. Although he introduces Friedrich Schleiermacher and E. D. Hirsch as the great representatives of actual intentionalism, he does not refer to hypothetical intentionalism's representatives. The common characteristic of the two is emphasizing the need for a given text to have ideally only one correct interpretation, and of the necessity of keeping attention to the author's intention.

After offering a short description of both monism and pluralism in interpretation, Vandavelde attempts to reconcile the possibility of multiple interpretations with the need to consider the author's intention. Monism and pluralism, for him, "are from a theoretical point of view almost mutually exclusive, while in the practice of interpreters they have cohabited somewhat peacefully. Most interpreters in their practice would assent to points made by monists and pluralists alike." (Ibid., 3) He believes that interpretation includes two aspects: act and event. To explain these two aspects, he writes:

By event I mean the fact that we as speakers and interpreters participate in a culture and a language that carry with them concepts, values, and habits of which we might not be aware, so that our interpretation is also something taking place in a tradition. By act, I mean an act of consciousness: someone interpreting a text makes a statement or an utterance and through his or her act is committed regarding the truth of what is said, his or her truthfulness, and the rightness or appropriateness of what is said, so that, if prompted, the interpreter must be ready to defend the interpretation made regarding these three claims (Ibid., 4).

Vandavelde claims that monism and pluralism constitute not a dichotomy, but rather, they are two theoretical positions on these two different aspects of interpretation. The perspective of the pluralist in interpretation, that is, someone who believes that interpretation is an event, takes the third-person perspective, but, on the contrary, the advocates of monism who emphasize the aspect of act in interpretation take the first-person perspective. The intrinsic aspect of an exclusive focus on interpretation as an event tempers the historicism or relativism, which is what happens in Heidegger and Gadamer. He says, "The mistake of many advocates of pluralism is to focus exclusively on the event of interpretation and overlook the pragmatic aspect of interpretation as an act." (Ibid., 5) And he also insists, "Gadamer is the best example of a theoretician who takes interpretation exclusively as event and declares the absurdity of a single right interpretation of a text." (Ibid., 61)

Vandavelde refers to the external and internal difficulties that are faced in any study of interpretation. The external difficulties belong to the disciplines of knowledge and the different traditions, in which by their own methods, they have taken possession of the ways and means to approach a problem while ignoring the reflection on the others. These difficulties can be seen more clearly when we take a look at the different methods used in literary criticism, theology, and philosophy. (Ibid., 5-7) This situation in philosophy, particularly when we compare continental

and analytic-pragmatic philosophy, is worse. "Not only does the phenomenon of interpretation appear quite different when analyzed in either tradition, but it is also very difficult for those who try to bridge the two traditions to be recognized by or even receive a hearing from practitioners of either tradition." (Ibid., 7) In spite of this fact, Vandavelde names some of the philosophers who have bridged these traditions or belong to both, such as: Karl Otto Apel, Jurgen Habermas, Paul Ricoeur, and Richard Rorty. And then he says that "Faced with these external difficulties, I have opted for a method that calls for crossing disciplines and traditions." (Ibid) And then says: "A study of interpretation is only credible if it is about the way actual interpretations are performed by real practitioners. Similarly, what theorists have said about interpretation cannot be ignored simply because they belong to a specific tradition." (Ibid., 8) Therefore, the best remedy for the external difficulties, in Vandavelde's view, is viewing interpretation as both an act and an event.

The internal difficulties, as Vandavelde describes, are concerned with the question of the meaning and the different levels of meaning lying in a text. Once we accept interpretation as an act as well as an event, we are engaged in a narrative of justification about our decisions, choices, and methodology in finding what a given text means. The first step here is to acknowledge several levels of meaning as legitimate candidates for what a text means. Based on contemporary discussions, he distinguishes three levels of meaning: the author's intention, textual meaning, and representative content. Vandavelde maintains, "While most theorists would agree with the distinction of these three levels, none to my knowledge shows the interactions among the three. They usually equate two of the three or disqualify one of them." (Ibid.) For instance, he believes that Schleiermacher distinguishes the grammatical and the psychological interpretations, but he does not consider seriously level three of interpretations, representative content. And then he claims, "It is my contention that much of the disagreement among theorists, especially monists and pluralists, comes from their simplified understanding of what an intention is and what a text's meaning is." (Ibid., 9) In fact, the author's intention, for him, is one of the key elements of the justification process by which we have the means to set a framework within which we avoid relativism.

Vandavelde argues that there is a basic and inseparable relationship among these three levels of meaning, so that "theorists for the most part do not take into consideration the difference between what a sentence means in terms of what its

components mean and what a sentence means in terms of the intentional state it expresses." (Ibid., 10) Because the speaker uses words that already have some particular meaning in his/her language, and also because he/she has to borrow what are acceptable intentional states in his/her community, it would seem that these two levels of meaning, i.e., semiotic (language spoken) and mental (the author's thought) precede the speaker, he believes. The speaker just chooses of both words and intentional states as existing in his/her language and community, and because of this, he/she is accountable for what he/she said and expressed. "When we apply these considerations to a text, its meaning ... is both semiotic and mental: it is what the sentences mean as made up of the words written and as chosen by the author as conveying those intentional states that a speaker of this language would understand." (Ibid., 10-11)

The third level of meaning, in his viewpoint, is the significance or imputation (what we impute to the text), i.e., the representative content of the text. The third level of meaning is related to an unclear sentence - "His theological position is a round square" - , or to an unclear text: "We understand the sentences of Franz Kafka's *Trial* and still remain puzzled as to what it all means." (Ibid., 11) Here again he argues that, "we do not have ... an opposition or competition between the text's meaning and what readers impute to the text but an interaction." (Ibid.) These levels of meaning, for Vandavelde, do not belong to any ontology of the text, but they are categories of interpretation. Therefore, he concludes, "Since interpretation of necessity has to deal with these three fluctuating levels, what gives stability to an interpretation is not one level of meaning that would anchor interpretation, but something in the process of interpretation itself, what I call the claims made by interpreters, which force interpreters into a narrative of justification." (Ibid., 12) Then he declares, what is a necessary device in the process of justification, by which the validity of an interpretation is established, is the author's intention.

Vandavelde distinguishes two kind of author's intention: "an intention that is a psychological moment - what is going on in the author's mind - and an intention that is a publicly available moment once this intention has been formed and articulated, in our case through words." (Ibid., 10) He claims that very few theorists seem aware of this distinction, and when Gadamer dismisses the author's intention, he only considers the psychological and private intentional moment. Vandavelde, from chapter three to six of his book, refers to three practices of interpretation ... translation, biblical interpretation, and interpretation of novels ... as the best

illustrating of these three levels of meaning. And then he states that each of these three practices of interpretation has its own method for determining what validity means and how to assess it (Ibid., 13).

Vandavelde and Gadamer

Given this brief acquaintance with the general schema of Vandavelde's book, let us concentrate on his "A Critique of Gadamer's Critical Pluralism" in Chapter Two.

Without offering any discussion about the structure, basis, content, and key concepts of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, Vandavelde starts to criticize Gadamer's critical pluralism. His critique relies on linguistics, Husserlian phenomenological concepts, and the prevailing philosophy of language. At the starting point of his chapter, he clears up the reason behind some of the ambiguities in *TM*. As he states, because of the important reason returns to Gadamer's phenomenological project, he avoids offering "rational reconstructions." (Ibid., 17) Vandavelde argues: "he does not always provide detailed arguments for his views but instead just asserts them, which makes it difficult to delineate exactly his position. He asserts, for example, that his views do not lead to relativism, but he does not supply the criteria that would prevent the derivation of relativism from his views." (Ibid)

To prove his claim, Vandavelde focuses on three ambiguities: the fusion of horizons, the active role of the interpreter, and the status of language.

The fusion of horizons

The fusion of horizons is one of the key elements in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Vandavelde introduces this concept as an example of Gadamer's ambiguities. He says that this concept shows that Gadamer emphasizes interpretation as an event and not as an act. "To the extent that Gadamer recognizes that interpretation is an act performed by an interpreter, he remains within the phenomenological line of thought: interpreting is an act of consciousness. The fact that there is a fusion, however, makes interpretation an event." (Pol Vandavelde, 2005, 18) By the concept of fusion of horizons, Vandavelde believes, Gadamer stretches the phenomenological principle that leads him to make assertions of general scope that are not self-evident. He refers to the concept of Gadamer's historical distance as an example. He writes: "one does not readily see why there is necessarily an insuperable distance between an interpreter and an author of the past, or why it is necessary for an era to understand a text in its own way, and even less self-evident is the claim that an interpretation is always productive." (Ibid., 19) Also

referring to Gadamer's famous formula that "we understand in a different way, if we understand at all," (Gadamer, 1990, 297) he criticizes that "one does not immediately see why it is necessary to understand a text differently nor does one see the ground of the general scope of the proposition." (Pol Vandavelde, 2005, 19).

In addition to historical distance, the historically effected character of understanding, and being productive of interpretation, some other key elements in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics are criticized by Vandavelde, such as the tradition, and the logic of question and answer. About the concept of tradition and its relevance to the interpreter's horizon, he writes:

On the one hand, Gadamer denies our capacity to retrieve the meaning of a text in its original state. Given that we are necessarily anchored in a tradition, we color the meaning of the text to be interpreted and thus intervene in the genesis of this meaning. But on the other hand, we must believe Gadamer that this does not amount to simply imposing our own views and expectations on the text of the past, but rather leads to the creation of a space where the alterity of the text can speak to us (Ibid., 20).

In other words, he criticizes Gadamer for not offering mechanisms to prevent the fusion of horizons from devastating the text, or understanding from becoming mere projection or speculation.

Another concept that Vandavelde introduces as an ambiguity in Gadamer's hermeneutics is the logic of question and answer. After a brief discussion about this logic, Vandavelde claims that:

He does not show exactly how this dialectic gains its momentum between the two questions, the one the text asks the interpreter as a claim made by the tradition and the one the interpreter asks the text as the response to that claim. What are the mechanisms that would prevent an interpreter from using the text for her own purposes, or at least that would allow a second interpreter to say that the first one missed the text? In short, Gadamer does not indicate how this dialectic permits one to say, "This is what the text means," instead of, "This is what I find in it." The former statement includes a claim to validity, whereas the latter does not (Ibid., 21).

Finally, he maintains that Gadamer did not offer sufficient justification to prevent the danger of arbitrariness.

The active role of the interpreter

The second ambiguity in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, according to Vandavelde's point of view, is in the active role of the interpreter. He believes that,

“In his legitimate effort to show the active role of interpreters, Gadamer excludes the author from the equation of meaning without any serious justification.” (Ibid., 26) Understanding, for Gadamer, is “always a productive activity,” (Gadamer, 1990, 296) and Interpretation “is a new creation [*neue Schopfung*] of understanding.” (Ibid., 473) Gadamer even believes that, “If emphasis has been-rightly-placed on the fact that all meaning is related to the I, this means, as far as the hermeneutical experience is concerned, that all the meaning of what is handed down to us finds its concretion (i.e., is understood) in its relation to the understanding I - and not in reconstructing [*Rekonstruktion*] the originally intending I.” (Ibid) Referring to these and others sentences from Gadamer, Vandavelde claims that Gadamer’s arguments lack sufficient justification. In spite of the fact that he verifies that “it would thus be pointless to accuse him of arbitrariness,” (Vandavelde, 2005, 23) with regard to the specific position of the author’s intention in Gadamer’s thought, Vandavelde asks: “On what basis could Gadamer say to that interpreter who misuses the text that she is wrong, that what she does is not interpreting? What are the criteria of the validity of an interpretation?” (Ibid., 24)

According to Gadamer, every interpretation is concerned with the text itself; the goal of understanding as a process of psychological reconstruction, which was the ideal for romantic hermeneutics, is neither favourite nor possible. The result of such a view will be the fact that “there is something absurd about the whole idea of a unique, correct interpretation.” (Gadamer, 1990, 120) Here, Vandavelde, as a loyal scholar of his predecessors, criticizes Gadamer and claims: “Gadamer thereby concocts an opposite view that he refutes without realizing that this opposite view is so caricatural that refuting it neither clarifies nor supports his own views. He thinks that the only alternative to his views is a return to the reliving (*Nacherlebnis*) or reproducing (*Nachvollziehen*) as advocated by Dilthey and Schleiermacher. Since this alternative is not acceptable, Gadamer seems to argue, the only viable option is to discard the author’s experience as telos and norm.” (Vandavelde, 2005, 25) Referring to a piece of music or a drama, Gadamer asserts that discarding the author’s experience and placing emphasis on the text itself is not a basis for arbitrariness. He continues “yet we would regard the canonization of a particular interpretation - e.g., in a recorded performance conducted by the composer, or the detailed notes on performance which come from the canonized first performance - as a failure to appreciate the real task of interpretation” (Gadamer, 1990, 119) Vandavelde here criticizes Gadamer from two sides:

First, the relation between intending and writing is not analogous to the relation between composing a piece of music and playing it. ... While a composer can be a poor performer, a writer cannot easily have good meaning-intentions and be bad at writing, since it is the writing that makes him a writer, not his intentions. A second difference between composer and writer lies in the type of articulation they provide. Words before being used are already endowed with a meaning within the sociolinguistic sphere, and sentences in order to be meaningful must express intentional states that are possible within a linguistic community. The writer selects not just words and sequences of words but also the meanings that go with those words and sequences of words. His intention is thus more articulated than the intention of a composer and, because of that, more easily identifiable. ... Dismissing the original performance of a piece of music as canonic does not entail the dismissal of the intention of a text's author (Vandavelde, 2005, 25-6).

The Status of Language

The third ambiguity that Vandavelde distinguishes in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics pertains to the role of language and his notion of application. Referring to some quotations from Gadamer about the position of language in his hermeneutics, Vandavelde again repeats his previous charge against Gadamer and says: "As with the fusion of horizons and the active role of the interpreter, Gadamer asserts his rejection of relativism but does not offer a model that would allow invalidation of an arbitrary interpretation. So, what is missing in his model? What could avoid the risks of arbitrariness and relativism?" (Ibid., 28) In response to his question, Vandavelde believes that Gadamer considers interpretation merely as event and "[he] misses a fundamental component of interpretation: it is an act performed by someone who believes he knows what he does and intends to take responsibility for what he says." (Ibid) Then he doubts "that the majority of interpreters would accept Gadamer's conclusion that they only offer a fusion of horizons and do not render the original text in what this text actually says." (Ibid) Again Vandavelde in an absurd sentence says that what makes Gadamer's account unsatisfactory is the fact that interpreters, at the moment they offer an interpretation, usually do not themselves say that what they offer is a reference to Gadamerian formulas or in accordance with it (Ibid., 29).

Most historical writings and interpretations of the past, according to Gadamer's fusion of horizons, have become outmoded; this is because of different reason such

as: different questions, prejudices, and interests. Vandavelde strongly denies this account and writes:

There is no basis for asserting that in principle that will be the case. It would be paradoxical for a historian, for example, to claim at the same time that she contributes to the knowledge of the past and that her present interpretation will be false fifty years from now, unless she demonstrates why this will be the case. Without further justification other than such was the fate of most interpretations, most readers of this historical account would at best not understand why this author herself belittles the relevance of her work and at worst not even bother to read these investigations the very author of which already considers to bear the potential to be outmoded and false. (Ibid., 30)

Once again he criticizes Gadamer's fusion of horizons and claims:

...A fusion of horizons holds as an empirical statement about what happens to most interpretations.

The fusion of horizons does not account, however, for the pragmatic aspect of an interpreter presenting his interpretation. An interpreter cannot himself judge his own present work from a future point of view he cannot presently occupy. When interpreters interpret, they do not have the future perspective of a better interpretation available, from which it could be seen that the present interpretation is just a fusion of horizons (Ibid.).

Although Vandavelde claims that "I do not defend intentionalism, whether actual or hypothetical, but am not anti-intentionalist either," (Ibid., 62) In the latter pages of his book, with remarkable subtlety, he not only defends intentionalism but also recognizes the author's intention as an inseparable and necessary parameter of interpretation. He tries here to prove that interpretation is not merely an event but is also an act. Thus, he starts to describe the pragmatic aspect of interpretation. The pragmatic aspect of interpretation, from his viewpoint, can be described through four parameters of interpretation. "The act performed by an interpreter (1) involves claims, (2) is linguistic in nature (writing or uttering statements), (3) is situated in particular discourses with their rules and goals, and (4) is part of a conversation within a community of interpreters and readers." (Ibid., 31)

Referring to Grice, Searle, Buhler, Apel, and Habermas, Vandavelde wants to show that the claims to truth and truthfulness are the core of the interpreter's interpretation. Vandavelde argues that "since interpretation takes the form of making statements outlining the content of the interpretation, and since making statements is

an act, the act, like any speech act, commits interpreters to follow up on their claims if they claim any validity for their interpretation." (Ibid., 34) Then he discerns four claims that are involved in interpretation: intelligibility, to tell the truth, to be truthful, and the claim to rightness (Ibid., 34-5). These claims have some profound effects on interpretation. They, as Vandavelde points out, involve identifying the object of interpretation and also force the interpreter to justify how the object of interpretation is to be treated. "By their claims, interpreters situate themselves in a process in which different interpretations can be evaluated." (Ibid., 35) What involves the interpreter's claims and is very important in the process of interpretation, as Vandavelde says, is justification. "The narrative of justification that is in principle initiated by the claims interpreters make engages them in a conversation not only with other interpreters but also with the original writer, to the extent that the goal of interpretation is to understand what was meant." (Ibid., 46)

Saying that some objects of interpretation are intentional and others non-intentional, he claims that "the intention is part of the definition of the object: it is because of an intention that we have a text, and it is because of an intention that we treat it as a text." (Ibid., 36) In the necessity of taking note of the author's intention, Vandavelde again asserts: "every interpretation of an intentional object has to posit an intention behind the object of interpretation, even if it is a minimal intention." (Ibid., 37) He emphasizes that "without the presupposition of an original intention, there would be no basis for even disagreement." (Ibid) In the second chapter, he stresses again and again on a necessary correlation between the author's intention and the text, and on the impossibility of neglecting intention from the process of interpreting a text, thus, it can be asked of him: 'what is this if not intentionalism'? Repeating his assertion in the first chapter that we have to differentiate the private psychological intention from the publicly available intention, Vandavelde makes another claim: "Anti-intentionalists only oppose a psychological version of intention and do not seem aware of a distinction established long ago between what happens in the author's head - the private psychological intention - and the publicly available content of intention." (Ibid., 37-8) He states that Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Husserl and Hirsch are philosophers who recognized this distinction. But with explicit reference to Gadamer and the post-Heideggerean tradition in the United States, he writes:

The notions of reliving or reproducing (*Nacherzeugen*;234), thus, against all of Gadamer's misunderstandings, and almost the whole post-Heideggerean tradition in

the United States, do not mean a recovery of what was going on in the head of a single person. It rather means the possibility, for example, to put oneself in the circumstances of Luther, through his letters, through a study of the controversies of the time and the import of the scriptures in daily life, and try to understand what he thought. (Ibid., 39)

But the important question from Gadamer's viewpoint would be: 'Is it possible to experience the very circumstances of Luther as they were?' If it is possible (although we know that it is impossible), the second question would then be: 'What is its meaning for the present?' That is, the question about its applicability.

After discussing the inseparable interrelations among the three levels of meaning, and four claims that are involved in interpretation (intelligibility, to tell the truth, to be truthful, and the claim to rightness), and also after distinguishing between two kinds of author's intention, Vandavelde attempts to define the role of language as a "medium in which the two claims of the interpreter to recover an intention and of the writer to articulate an intention can be made compatible." (Ibid., 47) Language, for Vandavelde, is a medium or a sophisticated means for manifesting author's intention. He writes: "If language can articulate the intentional states of historical writers and allow an interpreter to decipher what the writer meant, then it fulfills a complicated function of articulating an intentional state, providing such an intentional state with its public expression, and referring to an outside world." (Ibid., 48)

Using contemporary discussions in linguistics, especially Saussure's theories, Vandavelde tries to prove that there is a direct link between a language and a set of intentional states. "Since language as a system captures the values of terms used by speakers, and since the value of a term is where the world inscribes itself in language, language is directly linked to a set of intentional states, in the sense that it encompasses terms with how they are supposed to be used by real speakers in the real world." (Ibid., 52) Vandavelde concludes that our communication happens because of the direct link between a set of intentional states and language. And what makes human communication possible at all, however, "is a situation in synchrony." (Ibid) "In synchrony language as a system guarantees in principle an isomorphism between what the text says and what the interpreter reads. In synchrony the terms used by a speaker have the same value for the other members of the linguistic community." (Ibid., 52) However, in the cases that the value of terms is different and is not shared naturally in a synchrony (for example, in the case of a translation

or an interpretation of a text in the same language, but from the distant past), it will have to be reconstructed.

Vandavelde believes that not only language is a system involves a set of intentional states, but so is discourse. We have different kinds of discourse such as: politics, literary criticism, law, advertising, etc. "Discourse is the milieu in which claims come to life." (Ibid., 56) He states that both language as a system and discourses, with their rules and stakes, precede me. "The linguistic articulation provides an intention with its public manifestation, and the discursive articulation provides the speaker with his social manifestation." (Ibid., 55) As to the importance of claims and their relationship with the rules of discourse and the practices of people, Vandavelde writes: "what puts the rules of discourse in motion and what links those rules to the practice of people are the claims implicitly made." (Ibid., 56)

Among these claims, as Vandavelde puts it, the claim to rightness transcends the boundaries of specific discourses and indirectly gives room for a conversation not limited to the rules of any single discourse. "What the claim to rightness adds -and the claim to rightness is also implicit in any act of interpretation-is that the validity of the interpretation has to be justified for any audience." (Ibid., 59) By the claim to rightness, he claims, interpreters make actual a community with past audiences, future audiences, and with the original writer. "The fact that the claim to rightness initiates in principle a narrative that transcends the boundaries of discourses also means that the interpreter has to be ready to respond to questions and objections that have not yet been formulated (coming from future audiences, which have not yet spoken, and from past audiences, which can no longer speak). This kind of narrative is thus not only a narrative of justification but also a narrative that establishes and maintains a conversation that is unlimited toward the past and toward the future." (Ibid) This conversation that Vandavelde mentions, unlike Gadamer's textual bases, is not a conversation with the text in itself but with the author of the text. "Through interpretation, Homer has been made a member of our community. In this new community, Homer (or whoever hides behind his name) can again—even if it is by proxy—make claims, because it is he (under the public persona he took when composing) whom we try to understand. And the interpreter can address Homer (under his public persona) without disclaimers such as, 'The interpreter only touches upon what is intelligible to present audiences, so that the original meaning is lost forever, because we cannot know what it feels like to be a seventh-century Greek author?'" (Ibid., 60).

Conclusion

Vandavelde have attempted to distinguish two duties: the writer's duty to tell the truth, and the interpreter's duty to discuss threefold interests: original intent in the text, literal meaning of the text, and the indeterminacy of its representative content. He, emphasizing the speech act performed by an interpreter, affirms that interpretation is a rational activity that presumes a claim of validity. But it seems some important elements may have been overlooked by him:

A) It seems to me that it would be better for Vandavelde, before criticizing Gadamer for the objectivity of interpretation, if he could respond to the question that "What Is Philosophical about Philosophical Hermeneutics?" Answering to this question, I think, will solve many problems and questions about Gadamer's Philosophical hermeneutics.

B) Against Gadamer's position, Vandavelde considers the author's intended verbal meaning as changeless, reproducible, and determinate. But, he himself did not say that how can interpreters be able to reproduce the author's intended verbal meaning? What is the practical model and method?

C) Has Vandavelde have thought seriously about the question of "*Why Gadamer invited us to pay more attention to the applicability of understanding, and also to the present and future not to the past (although past in the framework of tradition and historicity of understanding have not been missed in Gadamer's thought)?*"

D) There is no doubt that Gadamer hasn't offered any methodology appropriate to the interpretation of texts, but he does not claim to do so. Still, Vandavelde charges Gadamer for the lack of this methodology. But, here, is a big question he must be asking himself: Was Gadamer's basic intention to answer to the question "*Which method and model is the best one to interpret a text?*" or did he try to find an answer for the question: "*What is understanding? And how is understanding possible?*" Maybe Vandavelde has forgotten that the central point for Gadamer was not the methodology of interpretation, but rather, following the lead of Heidegger, it was the ontology of understanding.

E) Another question is why Vandavelde sees Gadamer's interpretation as an act and then begins to criticize it from this aspect, while he himself clearly confesses that "Gadamer emphasizes interpretation as an event and not as an act." (Ibid., 18) All of these considerations and others need to be examined in a separate paper.

Notes

1- He is a Belgian philosopher. He was educated at Catholic University of Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, and holds all three of his degrees - in Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral - from the same university. He has been associate professor of philosophy since 1991 at Marquette University in USA. His book, "*The Task of the Interpreter: Text, Meaning, and Negotiation*," was published in 2005

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