
Wallulis develops his "hermeneutics of life history" against the background of the Gadamer/Habermas "debate," in which Gadamer emphasizes the historical constitutive forces that shape a person and Habermas emphasizes a person's capability as an agent of "self-determination." Primary constitutive forces for Gadamer, who follows Heidegger in this focus, are language and history. Subjectivity in this view is limited, barely extant. Although subjectivity has its limitations in Habermas, the subject indeed has a "capacity for self-determination" that Wallulis points out in his examination of Habermas's early works (p. 51). This capacity can be strengthened in the interest of social function. The basis for this strength in Habermas's argument in *Knowledge and Human Interest*, according to Wallulis, is self-reflection. The result of a self-reflective process is self-formation (or self-reformation in the case of neurotic subjects). Gadamer's insistence on the effects of history and the limitations of the subject follows Heidegger's concept of Being-in-the-world. Gadamer emphasizes how a person is thrown into language and history. Habermas follows Freud. In so doing, Habermas characterizes psychoanalysis, sans its metapsychology, as a depth hermeneutics that provides for self-reflection in a continuing process of interactive socialization that underlies self-formation.

Wallulis is interested in the factors that enable "personal achievement" and explicitly does not seek a solution to the problems of subjectivity or individuality, noting that he wishes to "avoid the immediate associations that are made with the highly theorized and particularized context of a philosophy of the subject" (p. 1). Yet, the problem of the subject nips at the heels of his argument.

In regard to Gadamer's "privileging of history and prejudice over subjectivity and self-awareness," Wallulis suggests that
the rhetorical battle against philosophies of the will, of the sub-
ject, and of consciousness has been successfully waged and the
continued denigration of the phenomena on which these philoso-
phies were based is not really needed. (p. 4)

Wallulis is not ready to reject the entirety of Gadamer’s hermeneutic
conception of the effects of history. Rather, Wallulis scrutinizes the
thesis of historical situatedness “for what it quite justifiably entails
and where it is actually overstated” (p. 53).

Wallulis also examines Habermas’s hermeneutic version of Freud’s
dictum: Where id was, ego shall be. His primary interest is suggest-
ing that Habermas’s claims

about the power of self-reflection can be employed as valuable
and needed correctives against the claims of a subjectivity-deter-
mining effective history, but they are more likely to be an obsta-
cle in regard to the belief that subjectivity must be criticized and
limited for the sake of the event-character of history. (p. 58)

The purpose of studying the debate seems to be to set in relief
the attributes of Gadamer’s and Habermas’s arguments that can sub-
stantiate an understanding of Wallulis’s topic: the enablement of
personal achievement. He notes that the “most essential part of
Gadamer’s argument that the event of understanding is a limit to
subjectivity is how we ‘always already’ belong to what we understand:
to language, to tradition, to history—in short, to the event of un-
derstanding” (p. 59). Wallulis explains that, with regard to enablement,
consciousness of our historicity is “consciousness of being ‘always
already’ enabled in the sense that we have already been furthered
in our self-development” (p. 60). He suggests that “the positive ex-
perience of enablement is an important aspect of the process of
self-formation described by Habermas” in so far as growth and change
within a psychoanalytic “alliance between therapist and patient” is
enabled (p. 61).

Wallulis (following Bruner) interprets Erikson’s psychoanalysis as
a phenomenological analysis. He compares Habermas’s notion of
identity with Erikson’s and concludes that “Erikson also advocates a
balance between personal and social identity... in much the same
way that Habermas expressed in an early stage of his writing”
(p. 90). Wallulis continually attempts to balance the description of
the person—the human subject—as constituted by history with a
description of the subject as agent of self-formation. In his studies
of Gadamer, Habermas, and Erikson, Wallulis’s goal is to formulate