

Schleiermacher: art and interpretation

Linguistic turns

The recent growth of interest in German Idealist and Romantic philosophy has tended to focus on Fichte and Hegel, and, to a lesser extent, on Schelling. However, given the philosophical motivation for the new attention to the thought of this period, it is actually rather strange that its main focus has not been the work of F.D.E. Schleiermacher (1768–1834). The contingent reasons for the neglect of Schleiermacher are, admittedly, quite simple. Schleiermacher's theological work, as the major Protestant theologian of the nineteenth century, has largely determined his reputation, and he did not produce definitive versions of his major philosophical works, which have consequently often been misunderstood or underestimated. Furthermore, only a few works had been translated into English until quite recently, and some of the most significant works still await translation. However, despite his lack of influence on mainstream philosophy, Schleiermacher is of major philosophical importance, being the first to combine the sort of ideas concerning the mind–world relationship we have encountered in the early Romantics, Schelling and Hegel with sustained attention to the role of language in philosophy. Most people are aware that Schleiermacher formulated the first modern account of hermeneutics, but too few people seem aware that this was only part of a wider philosophical project, some of which has now turned out to prefigure central ideas of key thinkers in contemporary philosophy, such as Brandom, Davidson, Gadamer, Habermas, McDowell and Rorty. The appearance of Gadamer in this list might appear surprising, given his critical account of Schleiermacher in *Truth and Method*, but it will become evident in what follows that Gadamer's flawed interpretation is a further source of the failure to appreciate Schleiermacher's real significance.¹ It should perhaps be stated at the outset that I shall not be dealing with Schleiermacher's theology. Most of his philosophy can stand without his theology, and this was something upon which Schleiermacher himself often insisted.²

A brief consideration of influential changes in the analytical philosophy of language since Quine can begin to make it clear both why Schleiermacher deserves more attention than he has yet received in the English-speaking world,

and why the tradition to which he belongs deserves far more credit for its insights than its sometimes rather crude reception has granted it. The guiding theme of the changes in the philosophy of language has been the move away from the idea that philosophy could establish definitive ways of explaining meaning and truth by giving an account of how words connect to pre-existing determinate things in the world. Such accounts, as Rorty has suggested, essentially repeat many of the moves by which earlier philosophy had attempted to explain how concepts represent reality. The history of the analytical philosophy of language, which was not least a consequence of the empiricist rejection of Hegelianism by Russell and others, moves from the attempt to ground meaning in the single word's relation to some kind of 'given' in the world (early Wittgenstein and Russell), to the invocation of grounding 'observation sentences' whose meaning is given by the means by which they could be verified (logical positivism), to a concern with language as a whole as rule-governed human practice (speech act theory), and finally to a – in certain respects Hegelian – holism which no longer sees language and the world as separable (Sellars, Quine and Davidson). This last move is what brings about the new relationship between the analytical or post-analytical tradition, and the hermeneutic tradition of Heidegger and Gadamer. As we shall see, it is also what connects contemporary philosophy to Schleiermacher, who is already very explicit in his rejection of the attempt to understand language in terms of isolated words or sentences, in his rejection of the immediate givenness of things, and in his insistence on the ineliminability of context and background knowledge in all understanding.

The underlying pattern in the history of analytical philosophy is the move from the conviction that the world provides a 'given' which is the immediate foundation of certainty in questions of truth and meaning, to the realisation, as Wilfrid Sellars argued, that such a given is in fact a 'myth', because all awareness that can lead to knowledge must be linguistically structured and thus necessarily involves mediation by the language in which it is articulated. As Samuel Wheeler has suggested, what links Davidson and Derrida, for example, is the rejection of the idea of a grounding 'presence' of thing to thought which enables elements of language to be correlated with determinate elements of the world (see Wheeler 2000). Once it is admitted that direct access to a pre-existing determinate reality cannot be established, because that notion itself is a myth, many of the reasons that had previously led to the rejection of the German Idealist and hermeneutic traditions dissolve, and issues seen as relating mainly to aesthetics again become significant. The focus of philosophy returns, therefore, to the concerns of the Kantian and post-Kantian traditions, which concentrated on the role of thought and language as constitutive of what we take the truth about the world to be, rather than as simply mirroring the truth of what is already supposedly there in an intelligible form. Kant himself saw the 'conditions of possibility' of knowledge as being the necessary categorial operations of our consciousness. Schleiermacher's essential move is to argue, while providing

an account of self-consciousness which is still significant for the philosophy of mind, that these conditions depend on language, and that languages change with history. There is therefore no timeless structure to the way knowledge is organised. Schleiermacher, then, does not assume that language mirrors some kind of given. He consequently opens up, in a more developed way than anyone in the first half of the nineteenth century, some of the most important space in which contemporary philosophy is played out.

Habermas has characterised the move in the direction of what he terms ‘post-metaphysical thinking’ as involving the claim that ‘world-constituting capacities are transferred from transcendental subjectivity to grammatical structures’ (Habermas 1988 p. 15). This is precisely what Schleiermacher also claims, albeit with certain provisos we shall encounter later. Because grammatical structures are historically contingent, there is no extra-historical location from which to establish the relationship between language and what there is, not least because any investigation of this kind has itself to be carried out in a historically developed natural language. In case anyone is in doubt about just how close contemporary philosophy comes to Schleiermacher, consider the following. Schleiermacher pre-empts by well over 100 years the essential move in Quine’s critique of logical positivism. He rejects the analytic/synthetic distinction for the same kind of reasons as Quine himself in his rejection of the ‘dogmas of empiricism’:

The difference between analytical and synthetic judgements is a fluid one, of which we take no account. The same judgement (ice melts) can be an analytical one if the coming into being and disappearance via certain conditions of temperature are already taken up into the concept of ice, and a synthetic one, if they are not yet taken up. . . . This difference therefore just expresses a different state of the formation of concepts. (Schleiermacher 1839 p. 563)

For Schleiermacher, ‘No real concept can be constituted to the point of complete knowledge’ (p. 195), precisely because any changes in a concept’s place in a web of concepts will bring about a re-assigning of the role of that concept, so this process cannot be said to have a conclusion. Given his anticipation of one of the defining arguments in the formation of contemporary philosophy, Schleiermacher’s work is clearly in need of reevaluation. Furthermore, the way in which he prefigures so many contemporary issues suggests something important about the relationship between philosophy and the natural sciences. This relationship is shifting back for many of the most important contemporary philosophers in directions that were already mapped out in Romantic philosophy.

The ‘art of disagreement’

Schleiermacher is not the only philosopher of his time to advert to the vital role of language in philosophy, though he does work out the implications of the linguistic turn more thoroughly than anyone else.³ The argument that transcendental

philosophy relies on the prior existence of natural languages had already been proposed by Hamann as early as 1784, in his critique of Kant, the 'Metacritique on the Purism of Reason'. Like many philosophers today, Hamann – and, in his wake, Schleiermacher – thinks Kant's separation of the sensuous and the conceptual, the receptive and the spontaneous cannot be strictly upheld. Hamann maintains in his own inimitable manner that our need for language means that a notion of philosophy based on a priori forms of cognition lacks a decisive dimension. His argument is worth quoting at length, because its baroque form is also part of its content:

So another main question remains: *how the capacity of thinking is possible?* – The capacity to think *right* and *left*, *before* and *without*, *with* and *beyond* experience? One needs no deduction to prove the genealogical priority of *language* before the *seven* holy functions of logical propositions and conclusions and their heraldry . . . the whole capacity to think depends on language . . . *Sounds* and *letters* are therefore a priori forms in which nothing which belongs to the sensation or to the concept is met and are the true aesthetic [in the sense of having to do with sensation] elements of all human cognition and reason . . . Words therefore have an *aesthetic* and *logical* capacity. As visible and audible objects they belong with their elements to *sensuousness* and *intuition*, but in terms of the spirit of their *employment* and their *meaning* they belong to the *understanding* and to *concepts*. Consequently words are both pure and empirical *intuitions* as well as pure and empirical *concepts*: *empirical* because the sensation of sight or sound is affected by them, *pure* in so far as their significance is not determined by anything which belongs to those sensations . . . Meaning and its determination results . . . from the linking of a sign [*Wortzeichen*], which is a priori arbitrary and indifferent, but a posteriori necessary and indispensable, with the intuition of the object itself, and via this repeated connection the concept itself is communicated to, impressed and embodied into the understanding as much by the sign as by the intuition itself. (Hamann 1967 pp. 224–6)⁴

Language 'deconstructs' the opposition of the empirical and the a priori because it is itself both sensuous and intelligible, and therefore puts in question the division between receptivity and spontaneity which was essential for Kant's foundational aim of mapping the forms which make knowledge possible. (Hamann also, incidentally, deconstructs the opposition between spoken and written language, refusing to give priority to the voice over written communication.) As we saw in the Introduction, Hamann arrives at this position through his desire to celebrate the endless diversity of God's universe.

The crucial consequence of these arguments about language and philosophy for Hamann is that it becomes impossible to sustain the idea that philosophy can wholly escape from its location within a historically specific language. The idea of a 'general philosophical language' is therefore an idealist illusion. Languages are necessarily bound to the contingencies of their particular historical development, in which abstract and sensuous moments cannot be definitively separated. This fact should, however, he maintains, not be regarded as a problem. Instead, the historical specificity of languages should be seen as an opportunity, because

it augments the possibilities for world disclosure. (The contrast between conceptions which see modernity as leading to nihilism and confusion, and those which see it as an opening of horizons is once more in evidence here.) It is in relation to ideas like Hamann's (and, as Charles Taylor (Taylor 1985) has argued, those of Herder) that thinking about language in this period becomes linked to the development of aesthetics. If, as we have seen, language comes to be understood as 'constitutive', rather than merely 'designative', it becomes part of a whole series of means by which we engage in 'world-making', rather than the means of reflecting a ready-made world.

The danger of this position is that it can be used to advocate a thoroughgoing linguistic relativism, of the kind that is present in some contemporary literary theory, in which the boundaries between linguistic communities become uncrossable. One of the most productive aspects of Schleiermacher's work is its rejection of naive versions of relativism and its insistence on truth and objectivity. At the same time, he gives full weight to the fact that the problems involved both in communication within languages and translation between them deeply affect the nature of the philosophical enterprise, rendering it inherently impossible to complete in the manner demanded by traditional metaphysics.

Although he is perhaps best known as the theologian who affirms, in the famous text *On Religion* (1799), written in response to his friend Friedrich Schlegel's 'educated despising' of religion, that religion's 'essence is neither thought nor action, but intuition and feeling' (Schleiermacher n.d. p. 53), Schleiermacher the philosopher is in certain respects an Aristotelian. He begins his *Aesthetics*, for example, by insisting that 'praxis has always been something earlier than theory' (Schleiermacher 1842 p. 1). Somewhat surprisingly, given Schleiermacher's status as a Protestant theologian concerned with 'intuition and feeling', the nearest equivalent to some of his most significant contentions can be found in Marxist thinkers such as Bakhtin, and in Sartre, as well as in post-Wittgensteinian thinkers like Davidson. This is because he regards language as a form of action, being probably the first person to use the term 'speech act' (Schleiermacher 1977 p. 80): 'What we call thought as a whole is an activity . . . such that everyone can act by designating in the same way' (Schleiermacher 1990 p. 256). He also comes close to these thinkers because of his suspicion of philosophical attempts to arrive at an absolute conception of reality. It is here that he most obviously belongs on the Romantic side of the Romanticism/Idealism divide, and differs from Hegel in particular.

For Hegel, once the transience of systems of thought is philosophically understood it is possible to overcome the differences of the various systems in the absolute Idea. His *Logic* is therefore a self-contained 'science of knowledge', which can articulate itself through the immanent contradictions in thought that give it its dynamic quality. The idea that such a conception can both be wholly immanent and yet provide a complete description of itself was also the source of Schelling's and others' doubts about how such a system could become transitive. In contrast to what we encounter in Schleiermacher's *Dialectic*, disagreement in

Hegel's system is ultimately revealed to be part of a higher agreement which emerges when the final contradiction turns into the absolute Idea. Everything particular is therefore only particular because it is mediated by the universal. Nothing can stand on its own as irreducibly particular: it must become itself via the concept, which articulates its truth. For this reason art, which is tied to particularity, is a lower form of *Geist* than philosophy, and is transcended when it is philosophically understood. However, Spinoza's idea of determination by negation need not be employed in the way Hegel employs it. It is possible to accept that there are no non-relational properties, and that everything we know is therefore mediated by its relations to other things, without thinking that this insight can be cashed out into a wholly articulated system which abolishes the contingency of being. The dialectic can be infinite, because we can always end up changing our thought in the light of new tasks by rejecting previous ways of thinking. What distinguishes Hegel's Idealist from the Romantic philosophy of Schlegel, Novalis and Schleiermacher is his desire exhaustively to systematise the way in which this improvement occurs and to give it a teleological significance.

Schleiermacher, then, has no time for the idea that there can be total or final agreement, even the agreement generated out of the universality and necessity of disagreement. In the *Aesthetics* he argues, for example, that the connection of aesthetics to the rest of philosophy means one would require a generally agreed system of philosophy to be able to establish aesthetics on a firm foundation: 'But this would mean deferring the matter to infinity' (Schleiermacher 1842 p. 48). Philosophical systems can dominate an era, but they pass away and are replaced by competing systems. There is for Schleiermacher, though, no system which could fully encompass this insight and transcend it. Like the early Romantics, with whom he had close, but sometimes critical contact, Schleiermacher denies philosophy's ability to provide an absolute conception of reality: 'Absolute, Highest Unity, Identity of the Ideal and the Real are schemata' (Schleiermacher 1988 p. 67), and therefore not 'real concepts', so 'The idea of absolute being as the identity of concept and object is . . . not knowledge' (Schleiermacher 1839 p. 87). He also invokes the 'Opposition of the universal and the particular. The latter that which cannot be purely represented in thought, the former that which cannot be purely given in being' (Schleiermacher 1986 p. 68). Consequently, the scheme/content distinction, the distinction 'between what language contributes to the object and what the world contributes' (Rorty 1999 p. 108) plays no real role in his thought.⁵ In the 1833 Introduction to the *Dialectic* he therefore maintains that 'we must be satisfied with arbitrary beginnings in all areas of knowledge' (Schleiermacher 1988 p. 149), and, echoing Friedrich Schlegel, that 'beginning in the middle is unavoidable' (p. 104). His orientation towards praxis means that, instead of seeking foundations of knowledge in the manner of Kant and Fichte, the *Dialectic* sets itself the following task: 'instead of setting up a science of knowledge in the hope that one can thereby put an end to disagreement it is now a question of setting up a doctrine

of the art [*Kunstlehre*] of disagreement in the hope that one can thereby arrive at common bases for knowledge' (Schleiermacher 1942 p. 43). The difficulty of translating the word *Kunstlehre* underlines why Schleiermacher's position, despite its acknowledgement of the dialectical nature of thought, stays outside a Hegelian model.

The word *Kunst* in Schleiermacher varies in meaning, as it does in many of his contemporaries, between the older sense of technique or craft, and the newer sense that refers specifically to 'art' as the product of human freedom, which is the object of aesthetics. The ambiguity in the meaning of *Kunst* is the key to some of Schleiermacher's most far-reaching claims. He argues in the hermeneutics that interpretation is itself also an 'art'. What he means is that interpretation relies upon the ability to use rules, as one does in a craft, but that the application of rules cannot be made completely rule-bound, on pain of a regress of rules for rules. Kant had already suggested this point when he described judgement's role in the use of cognitive rules as follows:

If judgement wanted to show universally how one is to subsume under these rules, i.e. distinguish whether something belongs under the rule or not, this could only happen via a further rule. But because this is a rule it requires once more an instruction by judgement, and thus it is shown to be the case that the understanding is admittedly capable of being instructed and equipped by rules, but that judgement is a particular talent which cannot be given by instruction but can only be practised. (*CPR* B p. 172, A p. 133)

This argument, which is usually associated with Wittgenstein, has proved vital in the work of Brandom and others, who insist on the practical dimension of communication, which cannot be reduced to the following of linguistic rules. Brandom characterises 'Wittgenstein's Regress Argument' as follows: 'The rule [of language] says how to do one thing correctly only on the assumption that one can do something else correctly, namely apply the rule' (Brandom 1994 pp. 21). If a regress of rules for rules is to be avoided, one has to assume that the subject possesses an active capacity for judgement, the application of rules, on the basis both of background knowledge which can never be fully reduced to rules, and of individual initiative. These enable the use of an existing rule and, significantly for Schleiermacher's conception of aesthetics, make possible the creation of new usage not based on existing rules. Schleiermacher: 'We call art . . . every compound product in which we are aware of general rules, whose application cannot in the particular case be again brought under rules' (Schleiermacher, cited Rössler 1990 pp. 232–3, from *Short Account of Theological Study*). The result of this crucial methodological point is, then, a link between what is involved in the everyday understanding and use of language, and aesthetic judgement. Aesthetic judgement also relies on rules but cannot be determined by rules, or 'mechanised', as Schleiermacher puts it.

Even though his hermeneutics 'rests on the fact of the non-understanding of discourse', Schleiermacher, like Habermas and Davidson, insists upon the need

for a counterfactual notion of *possible* agreement in communication with others. Davidson says of his method of interpretation that it 'is not designed to eliminate disagreement, nor can it; its purpose is to make meaningful disagreement possible, and this depends entirely on a foundation – *some* foundation – in agreement' (Davidson 1984 pp. 196–7). For Davidson it is not even clear that we would be employing language at all if there were no foundation of our communication in agreement; hence his advocacy of the 'principle of charity', which insists that one should presume that most of what people say is true, if circumstances can be envisaged in which it would be right to say what they do. How far, though, does undecidability of interpretation go, once the assumption is made that there are no grounding rules for interpretation based on the relation between language and the given? It might seem that there is only an endless potential for disagreement. Schleiermacher maintains, however, that: 'Disagreement per se presupposes the acknowledgement of the sameness of an object, as well as there being the relationship of thinking to being at all' (Schleiermacher 1988 p. 132). The real difference, then, is between using a language to try to communicate at all, and not using anything that can be recognised as a language; it is not a difference between utterly irreconcilable uses of language.

This issue has played an often exaggerated role in some aspects of recent French post-structuralist thinking. The argument suggested by Schleiermacher is that misunderstanding is in principle potentially omnipresent because experience cannot be an unmediated guide to truth and meaning, and has to be shared via language. The perennial possibility of misunderstanding does not, however, obviate the possibility of agreement on what is held to be true, even though what is held as true is always fallible. A notorious example of the difficulty here can make the significance of Schleiermacher's position evident. Jean-François Lyotard claims the argument of the French fascist, Robert Faurisson, that, because all the direct witnesses of the gas chambers of Auschwitz are dead, one cannot prove that there really were any gas chambers used for mass murder, is irrefutable, even though he, Lyotard, patently does not believe it himself. Lyotard's position seems to me rather like being unsure if the light is on when the fridge door is shut. If one gets in the fridge, closes the door, and suffocates, there is no proof, because there is no testimony; but, of course, even if one survives and gets out there is no guarantee that anyone will *believe* one's testimony to the presence or absence of the light. In this case the only possible refutation of Faurisson's view seems for Lyotard to be dependent upon precisely what the critiques of empiricist theories of meaning show to be impossible, namely the 'presence' of the truth on the basis of some unmediated contact with it. The truth is clearly absent in so far as the victims die, but if it is inherently absent anyway, because this notion of presence is useless for an account of truth and meaning, one is simply looking at the matter in the wrong way.

The result of this situation for Lyotard is a '*différend*', what Kant terms a '*Widerstreit*', an argument which is irreconcilable because the opponents are

arguing from incommensurable premises. Lyotard's argument, however, as I try to show in more detail elsewhere (Bowie 1997 Chapter 5; see also Frank 1988), relies upon the notion that languages can be incommensurable because they consist of 'rules' of a 'regime of discourse', regimes being constitutionally irreducible to each other. If it were true that understanding relied primarily on rules, Lyotard might have a point, but the whole impetus of the arguments of Schleiermacher, and Davidson, is precisely that a conception of language as essentially rule-bound is not defensible, for the reasons already seen by Kant in his claims about judgement. Rules alone lead to a regress and thus to the impossibility of a language ever functioning as a means of communication at all. As Frank has shown (Frank 1988), it is impossible even to claim there is a disagreement if there is complete incommensurability. In order to realise that the assumptions of one participant in a dialogue are incommensurable with those of another, an intuitive understanding of truth based on an awareness of what it is to take something as true has to be presupposed.

The dispute between Faurisson and those who accept that people were gassed in unimaginable numbers at Auschwitz is about how people died, not about irreconcilable regimes of discourse.⁶ It may be unlikely that Faurisson would change his mind about Auschwitz, but it is mistaken to maintain that, because he lives in a different discourse regime, he could in principle never come to see he was wrong. After all, history is full of examples of such radical changes of mind, which would be impossible if there were no conceivable transition from one set of ways of talking to another. It is, furthermore, possible to have held radically opposed views to one's present views and yet understand why one could have held them. Given that Schleiermacher thinks we are always in contact with reality, even though we may radically differ as to how we interpret it, he sees this as an issue of praxis: 'if we take [the] relation of thought to being away: then there is no conflict, but as long as thought only remains purely in itself, there is only difference' (Schleiermacher 1988 p. 134). Once one enjoins communication one is already necessarily involved in issues of truth and justification. An argument is not an argument if *a priori* it cannot be settled, and even knowing that there is a *différend* requires more than can be thought of in terms of two wholly incommensurable regimes of discourse. In which regime could the ability to *claim* there was a *différend* be located?⁷ Schleiermacher accepts that any conceptual agreement cannot lay claim to absolute certainty (cf. his claims about the 'complete concept'), because being transcends what we can say about it, but meaningful disagreement must involve a relationship based on some – perhaps minimal – identity concerning what is at issue. Brandom suggests a more plausible conception of incommensurability when he argues that vocabularies which are 'not intertranslatable, and not evaluable as alternative means to a common end, tools adapted to some one purpose from outside them both' are in one sense incommensurable. However it 'does not follow . . . that they are incommensurable in the sense that "there is no way to bring them together at the level of theory"' (Brandom 2000 p. 179). The point is that the

same person could use two such vocabularies, for example as a neurologist working on the brain chemistry of trauma, and as a parent concerned about the mental health of their child resulting from the child's traumatic experiences which could be helped by the right kind of therapy.

One of the more puzzling aspects of contemporary debates about language and truth is that positions which acknowledge that the myth of the given is indeed a myth seem to end up with wholly divergent ideas about what consequences this has for the future direction of philosophy. Wheeler argues that the divergences relate to how far a philosopher thinks 'philosophical notions . . . infect the rest of culture' (Wheeler 2000 p. 71). Lyotard's concentration on the supposedly aporetic consequences of the lack of a given contrasts very sharply indeed with Davidson's and Rorty's claims that the end of this particular philosophical search can liberate one from fruitless attempts to make meaning and truth into something based on 'presence', and instead can enable one to see vocabularies, as Rorty does, as tools for achieving what we want. Lyotard (and, as we saw, Derrida) seem to make demands for what is basically Cartesian certainty about meaning and truth. The result is that if presence cannot be achieved one is left with a situation in which someone like Faurisson has to be taken seriously, even though the same justification as Faurisson offers for his contentions could be used to deny the truth of absolutely anything that happened in the past.⁸ This then leads Lyotard to a general judgement on the nature of postmodernity as the age which is characterised by irresolvable differences which it is repressive to try to overcome.

Scepticism may be irrefutable by argument, but the approach to scepticism shared by Schleiermacher and some contemporary pragmatists regards this as immaterial, because we cannot avoid the activities of taking as true and justifying to others, being communicating agents, rather than isolated Cartesian spectators. Schleiermacher claims that in real situations, where there never is absolute certainty, and where we must constantly make practical decisions, 'a real willing is always the ground of conditioned thought which relates to an action; and here the real value of thinking is its agreement with what is thought. I do not wish to think the whole object, but only that aspect of the object which relates to my action' (Schleiermacher 1942 p. 330). There may be an indeterminate number of possible aspects of the object which are not countenanced by my thinking at a particular time, but the fact that actions can be successful means that this need play no role in most of my encounters with the world. The positive side of a sceptical attitude for Schleiermacher is instead that it can remind one of the constant possibility of improving knowledge: the 'presupposition of the possibility of error in all knowledge, this knowledge that knowledge is neither complete, nor will ever be complete, does not damage the belief in the idea of knowledge, but just provokes criticism' (Schleiermacher 1839 p. 32). This leads him to a fallibilism of the kind familiar in Habermas and others.

Schleiermacher insists that 'behind the difference of separate knowledge we

must necessarily presuppose a universal identity, and by this we hold firm to the idea of the purity of knowledge, even if we cannot show an object in which it manifests itself' (p. 69). His claim is, then, that this is a normative issue: the presupposition that there is something to be right about is something we share by the very fact that we exchange speech acts. Even if much communication is actually strategic, it still relies upon a shared assumption at some level that what is said could be justified: without this assumption, even strategic deception, which relies on making someone take something as true which is not, makes no sense.

What is not clear in Schleiermacher is the extent to which this 'universal identity' relies on the realist presupposition of a 'world which is objective and independent of our descriptions' (Habermas 1999 p. 249). Habermas, who has recently argued for the necessity of a realist presupposition of this kind, also claims, though, that it is a merely *formal* assumption of argumentative praxis, for much the same reasons as Schleiermacher. Rorty, in contrast, cites Davidson, who contends that the notion of the 'objective world' that is independent of what we think about it 'derives from the idea of correspondence, and this is an idea without content' (Rorty 1998 p. 161). The goal of an objective world 'is neither something we might realise we had reached, nor something to which we might get closer' (p. 39). Schleiermacher does hold on to the notion of some kind of absolute, but, as we have seen, he thinks we can never maintain that our claims to knowledge correspond to it. The absolute is, then, a regulative idea. It cannot be based on the certain existence of what it invokes – the 'view from nowhere' – because this would entail the claim to know what the search for knowledge alone could find out, and this search cannot be completed. As such, the apparent realist assumptions play a normative, not an ontological role in his thinking (see Bowie 2001). What we can hope to achieve is Rortian 'more justification', though we seek this because of an inescapable need to get it right that is generated by the awareness of the fallibility of our conceptions.

The conflicting responses to the farewell to an epistemological ground exemplified by Lyotard and Davidson suggest another division in conceptions of modernity. Those, like Lyotard, who see modernity as the pursuit of a totalitarian absolute conception, regard modernity as a 'narrative of legitimation' which represses the plurality of differing conceptions characteristic of the 'post-modern'. In contrast, those, like Habermas, who concentrate on the advances made possible by modernity's demands for strong forms of universalising justification in science and law, deny the very validity of the term post-modern. Schleiermacher evidently belongs in many respects on Habermas's side, as a representative of the 'philosophical discourse of modernity', but there is a dimension of his thought, developed in opposition to Hegel, which both separates him from Habermas's position and makes him immune to Lyotard's strictures on the repression of difference that supposedly defines modernity.

Schleiermacher talks of a

further element whereby the area of knowledge is limited, by virtue of which in thought everyone is different from everyone else. This is the individual [*das Individuelle*]. To the extent that there is some of this everywhere no act will completely correspond to the Idea of knowledge [in the sense of the 'complete concept'] until after this element has been eliminated. And this can be only indirectly solved if the totality of the Individual as such, i.e. with its foundations, is known, and with this we have a completely endless task. (Schleiermacher 1942 p. 131)

Schleiermacher's notion of individuality might be seen as entailing the kind of scepticism involved in Lyotard's arguments, or some kind of wild subjectivism. However, his argument has in fact to do with the inescapability of communicative action in the genesis of objectivity. One side of this issue has to do with the world of objects which Schleiermacher talks of in terms of the 'organic function', the receptive side of our relationship to the world. Given the fallible nature of all knowledge of the world and the fact that all communicating agents learn their language both via a completely different set of causal encounters with the world and via the different situations in which they learn the use of words, the need to interpret what the other is saying is inevitable. One can never be sure that others are using a word in exactly the same way as oneself, because the background knowledge that gives the word its meaning for a speaker is never fully accessible. Davidson, who also sees the issue in similar terms, stressing the idea that we have to assume individuals have an idiolect because of their differing causal histories, tends, though, to give the causal effects of 'objects and events' too exclusive a role in bringing about what people think words mean. While accepting the fact of differing causal stories, Schleiermacher's point is that the individual subject can also actively bring about a re-assignment of terms, which is then taken up by others by understanding a term in a new way. Our very ability actively to arrive at an understanding of another's non-standard usage suggests that we are not just caused to assign meanings in terms of perceived truth-conditions, and can actively engage in the genesis of new usage.

For Schleiermacher the aim of publicly accountable knowledge is to diminish destructive social conflicts generated by our irreducible otherness to each other. He does not, however, adopt anything resembling Lyotard's Social-Darwinist image of the 'agonistic' essence of social life, where consensus is always likely to be suspected of involving some kind of coercion. At the same time, though, he is concerned with the contingency of the individual, which it can (but need not) make sense to eliminate when seeking to achieve technical purposes, but which it does not make sense to eliminate when responding ethically to other people. Schleiermacher's concern with aesthetic issues, even in his *Dialectic*, makes it clear that he does not think the overcoming of difference in scientific knowledge for the sake of the community is the necessarily prior activity in terms of which everything else is to be judged.

In the *Aesthetics* Schleiermacher distinguishes between ‘identical activities’ and ‘individual activities’, which is his version of what Rorty sees in terms of ‘public’ and ‘private’ (cf. the end of Chapter 5). In philosophy thinking is ‘identical’, it aims to articulate universals: ‘But if we now look at thinking in reality, then everyone thinks here in a specific language, and there is already a difference in this; so that in general we posit thought as identical, but at the same time we posit that it is different in reality’ (Schleiermacher 1842 p. 51). No two people think exactly alike, even if they use the same words. This judgement itself requires identical thinking, because it involves a universal claim. Its content, though, is the reality of individual difference, which no statement can articulate, precisely because it must employ general terms. Other communicative resources, of the kind encountered in aesthetic forms, are therefore necessary for access to individuality. The relationship between the universal and the particular, which was crucial to Hegel and which is at the heart of major divergences in modern thought, once again leads towards the aesthetic.

In Leibniz’s classically metaphysical conception the particular was revealed as being deducible from the general: ‘in the least substance eyes as piercing as those of God could read the whole sequence of the things of the universe’ (quoted in Frank 1986 p. 110). For Hegel ‘being’ only comes to itself via its determination into particularity, but the particularity is precisely a moment of the coming to itself of the universal, which is its truth. Schleiermacher, on the other hand, argues that the individual, which is not just another term for the particular that can be determined by a general term, is not reducible to a concept that exhausts its truth (see Frank 1977). The certainty that Hegel wishes to establish derives from his presupposing that, however contradictory the movement of *Geist* in particularity appears to be, it is in fact the self-manifestation of the absolute. For Schleiermacher such a position would only be tenable if one already had ‘the general construction of all knowledge in which all individual thinking is included/negated [*aufgeht*]’. Without such a system there is no way of saying whether there is any thought which ‘is excluded from all influence of the individual’ (Schleiermacher 1942 p. 134). In the same way as the ‘absolute unity of being’ (p. 224) is ‘not a concept any more’ (1988 p. 31), and therefore becomes a regulative idea that motivates the search for better descriptions, ‘the individual’ becomes a normative limit on our certainty that we have understood the other, a reminder that there may always be something that escapes our ability to articulate it in general terms. In relation to the contemporary versions of Hegel, Schleiermacher offers a reminder that a community which ‘sets for itself what is to count for it as its absolute principles’ (Pinkard 1994 p. 254) always brings with it the danger that it will exclude and repress members of that community who cannot subordinate themselves to this kind of universality. This danger is what motivates Schleiermacher to insist that his dialectic requires the complement of a hermeneutics that will be able to give a proper role to the individual. In order to see more exactly why this is the case we need to consider Schleiermacher’s account of self-consciousness.

Immediate self-consciousness

Schleiermacher develops his account from the difficulties we encountered in Kant. As we saw in Chapter 1, Kant's problem was the relationship between the reflecting and the reflected self, the I as subject and the I as its own object. The identity of the subject could not be grounded in empirical consciousness: 'the empirical consciousness which accompanies my representations is in itself dispersed and has no relation to the identity of the subject'. Given that experience does not consist of a chaos of empirical representations there must therefore be a subject which creates a unity between those representations, otherwise 'I would have a self which is as multicoloured and multiple as the representations that I am conscious of having' (*CPR B* p. 133), or, no self at all. Kant admits the need to posit the *existence* of the grounding I, whose knowable identity must, like all knowledge, then be synthesised from its different intuitions. However, he insists we have no cognitive access to the I that is the condition of synthesis: it is 'nothing more than the feeling of an existence without the least concept'. What makes knowledge possible is the categorial apparatus of our thinking; this, though, is based on 'the synthetic unity of apperception', which is 'the highest point to which one must attach all use of the understanding, even the whole of logic' (*CPR B* p. 134). Identity therefore depends upon the unifying of different intuitions in judgement. The problem is that this unity seems to rely on the multiplicity given in receptivity, even though he also argues that there must be a prior ground which makes the unification possible. This was a crucial part of what led to the questioning of Kant's version of the 'unity of apperception' by Fichte.

For Schleiermacher consciousness is grounded in the fact that our very *being* consists in the 'linking of different moments' (Schleiermacher 1942 p. 272). The reason this linking cannot depend on consciousness as cognition, thus on acts of spontaneity, is precisely that cognition itself depends upon the *differentiation* of moments that are then synthesised.⁹ There must therefore be an immediate ground which is prior to the differentiation upon which mediated cognition depends. Cognition is necessarily temporal, because it is made up of a succession of intuitions, the *linking* of the intuitions must transcend this temporality, so that which makes the linking possible cannot be known, yet must exist as its necessary connecting ground.¹⁰

Schleiermacher distinguishes between Kant's synthetic 'I', and what he terms 'immediate self-consciousness': 'If we look at the single I as something which persists in the developments, thus as something constant and the same in a sequence of time, then the self-consciousness of this identity is only something derived' (Schleiermacher 1842 p. 68). Whereas conscious, reflexive identity relies upon inferences linking different experiences, the individual, immediate I is the *basis* of any act of inference: its awareness therefore does not rely on inference to know that *it* is thinking what is thought. It is the 'activity of the individual [*Einzelne*] as such in its difference' (p. 69). The difference here is

between *my* individual, existential self-consciousness and all other self-consciousnesses. Schleiermacher's question concerns how one can provide an account of the linking of the different moments of consciousness while avoiding the problems we saw in Kant and the thinkers who follow the reflection model. That model gives no way of explaining how I can apprehend my experiences as my own.

Schleiermacher tries to explain the structure of self-consciousness in terms of 'thought', which is our being receptively affected by the world in, for example, scientific observation, and 'will', our ability to affect the world. When there is a transition from one to the other, from our observing an object to our acting on the object, there must be something which remains the same, otherwise the continuity of self-consciousness necessary for the world to be intelligible becomes inexplicable. Furthermore, receptivity is never wholly passive and activity always involves some degree of passivity:

If at one moment the whole of life is not posited then this is a defect to which a supplement must be added. In the activity of thinking the consciousness of the object is also posited, in the act of will the consciousness of resistance is also posited; one moment completes the other. The transition of both moments into each other must include the positing of the other, that is, it must be posited as *pure immediate self-consciousness*. (Schleiermacher 1942 pp. 286–7)

Schleiermacher's account of the subject also relies on what he terms the 'transcendent basis', which is beyond all particular acts of cognition:

as thinkers we are only in the single act [of thought]; but as beings we are the unity of all single acts and moments. Progression is only the transition from one moment to the next. This therefore takes place through our being, the living unity of the succession of the acts of thought. The transcendent basis of thought, in which the principles of linkage are contained, is nothing but our own transcendent basis as thinking being. (Schleiermacher 1942 p. 274)

In consequence, '*The transcendent basis must now indeed be the same basis of the being which affects us as of the being which is our own activity*' (p. 275). What must be the case with regard to being, if different things are to be predicated of the same object and for revised judgements about an object to be possible is, therefore, the case for self-consciousness as well: the two are structurally linked by their transcendence of what can be known about them.

Schleiermacher sometimes terms immediate – in the sense of non-reflexive – self-consciousness, as Novalis does, *Gefühl*, 'feeling'. 'Feeling', as Novalis also argued, cannot feel itself, it is 'different from reflected self-consciousness – I, which only states the identity of the subject in the difference of the moments and thus depends upon a synthesis of the moments which is necessarily mediated' (Schleiermacher 1942 p. 288). The I that we can retrospectively synthesise as having 'accompanied all our representations', which can remember my childhood experiences as *my* childhood experiences depends upon an *existential* continuity of the self which cannot be present to consciousness: 'Feeling and

the principle of combination [by which he means judgement] are One. For self-consciousness comes between each moment, because otherwise the acts would be indistinguishable' (Schleiermacher 1990 p. 71). In a note added to this part of the *Ethics* he suggests, echoing Kant in the *CJ*, 'If one goes a step further then all action as combination [i.e. all judgement] is grounded in feeling' (p. 73).

In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre echoes what Schleiermacher intends by the notion of feeling: 'Consciousness is not a particular mode of cognition, called intimate sense or self-cognition, it is the transphenomenal dimension of the being of the subject. . . . Self-consciousness is not double. If one wants to avoid infinite regress it has to be an immediate and non-cognitive relation of self to self' (Sartre 1943 pp. 17–19). For Schleiermacher we are dependent on the mode of being of our self-consciousness in ways which we could not definitively explain, and this gives rise to the need constantly to interpret oneself and others. Self-consciousness' reflection upon itself is always *subsequent* both to the fact of its own existence and to the existential fact that there is anything at all rather than nothing.

Schleiermacher explains the nature of the self further in relation to our pre-reflexive experience: 'We have no idea of the I [in the sense of reflected, synthesised self-consciousness] without reflection. This only gradually develops in human beings after their physical life has already begun' (Schleiermacher 1942 p. 291). The means via which this self-reflection comes about are in part linguistic. Becoming a reflexive 'I' does entail, as Lacan puts it, the 'defiling' of the subject by the signifier. A moment of disruptive non-identity, using an external term that others use, is required for the emergence of my identity. For Schleiermacher, though (and likewise, Novalis), this does not mean that the I is simply a function of the general signifier that comes to denote it. If the I were merely such a function, the individual, existential fact of consciousness would be reduced to the general means of articulation, the signifier. Because Schleiermacher's I does not have cognitive access to its own ground, it is reducible neither to what it is at any particular moment, nor to its reflection in the signifier as the other of itself.

We have repeatedly seen that the *mirror* or the signifier, i.e. the object side of the relation, cannot provide a criterion of self-identification: this requires something which is not objectifiable. Linguistic articulation is a necessary condition of self-consciousness, but it is not a sufficient one. Understanding words as meaningful requires more than the possibility of a linguistic response that *seems* to indicate understanding: how do we ever come to understand the words of others as *meaningful* noises at all? Schleiermacher shows that what is required in an adequate theory of self-consciousness and communication is a way of distinguishing what one must be familiar with to understand what it *means* for a self-conscious individual to say 'I', from what is required for the noise 'I' to be produced via a rule-governed mechanism. There is, then, an inherent non-identity between immediate self-consciousness, and any general means of signification, and this will be the basis of Schleiermacher's philosophical evaluation of both aesthetics and hermeneutics.

This conception of the I is where Schleiermacher most obviously diverges from contemporary thinkers who resemble him in other respects. Is immediate self-consciousness, though, not precisely a kind of ‘presence’, of the kind Schleiermacher excludes with regard to knowledge of the world via his linguistic turn? The answer to this is clearly no. Schleiermacher insists that: ‘There are no thoughts without discourse [*Rede*] . . . one cannot think without words’ (Schleiermacher 1977 p. 77), so no mental items can be invoked which would ground meaning without the necessity of language. However, if immediate self-consciousness does not entail a version of presence, and yet is not to be equated with determinate thought, how are we to say anything about it?

This is, of course, the crux of the matter. Descartes says that I can know nothing more fully than my own mind, which therefore involves the grounding form of presence: ‘I think, I am’. As we have already, immediate self-consciousness does not rely on a propositional form of knowledge. ‘Feeling’ need not be verbally determinate. Frank summed up this issue as follows, as we saw in the last chapter: ‘Knowledge of myself *as* of myself does not depend on classification. But it also does not depend on identification [on ascribing a mental predicate to a singular term which stands for myself, so that ‘I know that I ϕ ’] – for how should I identify an object which *could* not be anything but myself?’ (Frank 1991 p. 407). ‘Feeling’ may begin in one sense to look suspiciously like an ‘I know not what’, and this is certainly the case if one assumes that all that is accessible to us must be propositional. However, feeling also seems to play an ineliminable epistemological role even in fallible determinate knowledge – in so far as I must be infallibly aware, at the moment I think I know something via my perception of the world, that I think it is the case, otherwise the possibility of self-correction becomes incomprehensible. Furthermore, feeling is for Schleiermacher the basis of forms of awareness and articulation which cannot be reduced to the terms in which we can verbally articulate them. The link to music is vital here.

Although the notion of feeling is perhaps the most problematic aspect of Schleiermacher’s thought, it does point to a dimension which is sometimes neglected or glossed over in much philosophical discussion of language. We evidently must rely, for example, on verbal language to extend our understanding of music; at the same time, though, music itself can change our understanding of verbal utterances. The interplay of metaphorical and literal usage in articulating an understanding of music points to what is at issue here. Samuel Wheeler has argued that when Davidson claims the only meaning a metaphor has is its ‘literal’ meaning, what is meant is that most of what language does need not be thought of in terms of bi-conditional statements which define literal meaning, such that “‘Snow is white” is true if snow is white.’ Instead metaphors, like music, matter because of what they make us notice, because of the world-disclosing capacity that they share with music. The employment of metaphor in trying better to understand music suggests why what music says is never reducible even to our best ways of verbally articulating it. We are rarely, if ever,

wholly happy with a metaphor, even though it may disclose aspects of a piece of music that other descriptions cannot.¹¹ The fact that even in a verbal utterance the musical can be more significant than the semantic is too often forgotten in discussions of music and language. However problematic the notion of immediate self-consciousness may seem, then, it at least keeps open ways of thinking about meaning and intelligibility which are not reducible to what can be said in words, and this is, of course, vital to aesthetic theory.

Art as free production: 'individual' and 'identical' activity

So far I have tried to show how Schleiermacher initiates a 'linguistic turn', but not in the manner that dominated so much analytical philosophy until the advent of the holism of Quine and Davidson. Communication depends for him, as it does for Habermas and Davidson, primarily on the preparedness and ability of individual language users to overcome differences by reaching agreement or understanding, despite the lack of determining rules. Perhaps the most vital part of his conception, however, which differentiates Schleiermacher even from these contemporary theories of communicative action, is his focus both on linguistic change, and on those aspects of our self-conscious being which are not adequately articulated by what can be said about them. With regard to the former, Schleiermacher characterises the shifts in linguistic usage that redefine our relationships to the world and each other in a way which relies on human subjects as potential initiators, rather than just passive objects, of the worlds articulated in language. At the same time his position does not underestimate the extent to which people *can* be objects of language: 'A simple appropriation of thoughts which have already been laid down in language is not an activity of reason, and if we assume someone whose whole thinking is nothing more than those thoughts, then that person is hardly a person at all (Schleiermacher 1990 p. 264). 'Poetic' usage, creative initiatives in language are, then, not a special case, or deviations from a norm, but are instead inseparable from the very nature of language. It is for this reason that Schleiermacher's hermeneutics is so closely linked to aesthetics.

Probably the first explicit formulation of the 'hermeneutic circle', the attempt to understand the part of a text or utterance via the whole, and the whole via the parts, derives from the application of Schelling's philosophy to the question of interpretation. In 1808 Friedrich Ast, a pupil of Schelling, suggested a method for understanding texts from the past based on a questionable appropriation of Schelling's identity philosophy. For Ast, we are able to reproduce the thought of the past through its essential identity with our own thinking. He uses the idea of the organism to ground understanding in the idea that each thought can be understood as part of an intelligible whole:

The basis of all understanding and cognition is finding the spirit of the whole from the single part and grasping the single part via the whole . . . each is only posited with and by the other, just as the whole cannot be thought without the single part as a

member of it and the single part cannot be thought without the whole, the sphere in which it lives. (in Gadamer and Boehm 1976 p. 116)

Schleiermacher was clearly influenced by Schelling, and he already begins work on hermeneutics in 1805. The conclusions he reaches are, though, very different from the Idealist ones reached by Ast. The irreducibility of individuality that derives from immediate self-consciousness means that the part could only relate to the 'spirit of the whole' via an unprovable postulate that the whole is the other and complement of itself. Grasping the relationship of part and whole, which Schleiermacher sees as essential to understanding, is therefore a task that cannot be completed because of the contingencies of our access to what is relevant for a particular case. Context is constitutively boundless, even though we can make pragmatic decisions about what needs to be taken into account in particular interpretations. Schleiermacher also questions Ast's position by insisting upon the inextricable involvement of thought with particular languages, there being, as there was not for Hamann, no 'general philosophical language' which would reconcile the differences of the particular languages. Importantly, he associates this argument with aesthetics.

Schleiermacher, as we saw, regards all the operations of our thinking as involving 'art'. He characterises art, in the narrower sense of the object of aesthetics, as 'free production . . . of the same functions which also occur in the bound [*gebunden*] activity of humankind' (Schleiermacher 1842 p. 375). Everyday understanding and aesthetic judgement are linked by the fact that they both rely on rules, but these rules rely on application, which cannot itself be bounded by rules. He now establishes a link between everyday understanding, aesthetic judgement, *and* the production of art, all of which involve differing degrees of the rule-bound and the spontaneous. Instead of setting up definitive boundaries between art and non-art, Schleiermacher sees the possibility of transitions from one to the other in any sphere of activity. This allows the too often unreflectively reiterated question of 'What makes something a work of art?' to be circumvented by the idea that art is a perennial possibility in any form of meaningful articulation. Whether something is art will then depend upon the relation between bound and free production in a community, a relationship which is not historically stable. If I write the handbook for a nuclear power station, for example, I am bound by the purpose of not having the station function like Three Mile Island or Chernobyl. No one will be terribly concerned whether the free productive act of writing the handbook has a value in itself for me because of my pride in my ability to construct beautiful sentences. To this extent my handbook would, in Schleiermacher's terms, be unlikely to be a work of art, even though some sentences in it may achieve aesthetic status by offering possibilities beyond the function of the handbook. In other circumstances, however, it is conceivable that parts of such a text could be transported into a novel in a manner which was essential to the novel's aesthetic achievement.

In a further example of the role of a 'private'/'public' divide, Schleiermacher maintains that art is an 'individual activity', whereas a technical handbook would involve 'identical activity', and 'artistic activity belongs . . . to those human activities which . . . presuppose the individual in its difference from the other' (p. 61). Art and individuality are inextricably connected: the wider question here is how the divide between the public and the private manifests itself in the culture of modernity. Hegel's *Aesthetics* failed to give a convincing account of how the very individuality of art, of the kind encountered, say, in Kafka, could give rise to an enduring universal significance. Because aesthetic productivity is linked to 'immediate self-consciousness', a notion for which Hegel had no time at all, the results of aesthetic production cannot, for Schleiermacher, be subsumed into an identical meaning for everyone: 'not a trace of knowledge arises yet out of all thinking in poetry [*Poesie* with the sense of *poiesis*, productivity], it only expresses the truth of the single consciousness' (p. 66). What, though, makes this the 'truth' of that consciousness, without this meaning that there are simply as many individual 'truths' as there are poems by individuals? Knowledge, as belief that can be justified to others, makes claims to universality and so negates the individual in favour of general propositions which can be accepted in a linguistic community. The creative text allows for the unfolding of something which need not be reduced to what can be affirmed or denied by a community: think, for example, of the way in which some of the most effective metaphors may elude any kind of truth determinacy or general agreement as to their import. However, the point about individuality characteristic of art is that it can still take on collective significance. This apparent contradiction leads to the core of Schleiermacher's thinking.

The never to be realised, counter-factual goal of Schleiermacher's philosophy is the 'individual-universal'. What Schleiermacher intends is in certain ways close to what was implied by the connection of freedom and beauty in the *System Programme*. Unlike the Idealists, however, Schleiermacher does not assume there could be an ultimate reconciliation of individual and universal. In that case, what status does this goal have? As will be clear from the present context, this is not just an issue concerning truth conceived of as the regulative idea of the overcoming of particularity by universality, of the kind we considered in relation to the question of knowledge and the absolute in Schleiermacher. It is rather a question about the wider goals of a culture which would allow for difference and individuality, while demanding that such difference and individuality be open to discussion as to its legitimacy. Art is significant, therefore, because of its constant testing of the relationship between the 'identical' and the 'individual'. In this perspective the history of art comes to be seen as the manifestation of the attempt to combine individuality and universality in free human production. Art is, then, not simply the individual, 'private' counterpart to identical 'public' science and philosophy. It is both a reminder of what can be excluded by science and philosophy, and can disclose new ways of looking at things which affect science and philosophy.

Because his aesthetics relies upon the idea of a productivity which plays a role in all forms of human activity Schleiermacher bypasses the dichotomy between an aesthetics of reception and an aesthetics of production: 'Because beauty is produced via human activity more than by anything else the production and reception of it are the same. Productivity and receptivity are only different in degree' (Schleiermacher 1984 pp. 3–4). This leads him to the following piece of apparent Romantic hyperbole: 'all people who make a work of art their own in some way are to be regarded as artists' (p. 178). If something is to be music at all the listener must hear it *as* music. There is no rule for deciding the status of a sequence of noises, so the listener must be involved in the same kind of 'production' as the composer, because they must transcend anything that can be learned mechanically, albeit to a much lesser degree than the composer. This ability is, of course, and this is the crucial point, also exercised all the time in the everyday understanding of and production of novel utterances. Robert Brandom has suggested, admittedly associating his view with Hegel, what is at stake in a view like that of Schleiermacher:

What matters about us *morally*, and so ultimately, *politically* is . . . the capacity of each of us as discursive creatures to say things that no-one else has ever said, things furthermore that would never have been said if we did not say them. It is our capacity to transform the vocabularies in which we live and move and have our being (Brandom 2000 p. 178).

In such a perspective the role of the aesthetic is not, though, as it was for Hegel, merely to be the prelude to a higher form of truth. The aesthetic becomes instead the locus of debates over what matters to people which should not be dominated by the manipulations either of a levelling, commodity-determined culture, or by scientism. At one end of the notional scale of human production for Schleiermacher is 'science', in the sense of agreed objective knowledge; at the other end is art, free productivity for its own sake. This difference is, though, only ever relative and is only possible because of 'what matters most about us', namely our ability to do things in new ways even within the most 'identical' practices.

Hermeneutics as art

For Schleiermacher the necessity for interpretation of the utterances of others is *always* present, and not just necessary in special cases. The 'stricter practice' of the 'art' of hermeneutics therefore presumes that 'misunderstanding results as a matter of course and that understanding has to be desired and sought at every point' (Schleiermacher 1977 p. 92). In the same way as knowledge could only ever aim to eliminate the individual element, without there being a position from which the elimination could definitively be verified, the hermeneutic circle results from the fact that 'each person is . . . a location in which a given language forms itself in an individual [*eigentümlich*] way', but it also results from

the fact that 'their discourse is only to be understood via the totality of language'. These two quantities, the individual and the totality are, as we have seen, not reducible to each other. Because language results from 'speech acts' (p. 80) the speech *act* is inherently individual: it is your or my act at a particular time in a specific situation. Uttering the same words is not the same speech act. As such, speech acts 'cannot be subordinated to calculation', they cannot be 'mechanised' in terms of grammar because interpretation relies on never fully available contexts. The idea of the totality of a language, the *langue* in Saussure's terms, is itself just a regulative idea: 'No language is totally available to us, not even one's own mother-tongue' (p. 84). There are, furthermore, no linguistic 'rules . . . that would carry the certainty of their application within them' (p. 81).

It is clear, of course, that there are plenty of linguistic rules and constraints, without which we could not communicate, but this idea only captures one dimension of language, the public norms without which intelligibility would never be possible at all. The point is that these norms also can be transcended by individual usage. The individual can come into play in any situation in life where new usage makes something new possible, offers a solution to a problem, or just rebels against the established way of saying something, and this is why Schleiermacher does not confine the notion of art to the more narrowly aesthetic sphere. He introduces the notion of art in order to suggest how the individual, disclosive dimension of language is always an issue in interpretation: 'The full business of hermeneutics is to be regarded as a work of art, but not as if carrying it out finished in a work of art, rather in such a way that the activity only has the *character* of art because with the rules the application is not given as well i.e. cannot be mechanised' (p. 81). The level of language which might seem 'mechanisable', reducible to a set of rules that explains its functioning, Schleiermacher terms the 'grammatical'. The grammatical corresponds to the *notional* totality of the linguistic system, the sum of the norms which govern intelligible linguistic practice. However, such a totality is infinite 'because every element is . . . determinable by the other elements' (p. 80). We can only understand one speech act via a whole series of others that form its background of intelligibility, and this applies to these acts in turn.

We encountered the structure of this argument in a different context in Schelling's 'Würzburg System', and in Hegel. In the light of Jacobi's arguments about Spinoza, Schelling saw scientific investigation as infinite because '*Every single being is determined by another single being, which in the same way is determined by another single being etc. into infinity.*' That was why he argued that, because it does not primarily depend upon concepts, which lead to chains of determination, the work of art can attain a kind of immediate meaning that is inaccessible to science. As we saw, Derrida's demonstration that a single signifier could never generate the presence of a meaning echoes Schelling's ideas on the deferral of presence in his identity philosophy. On one level Schleiermacher himself prefigures Derrida: because each linguistic element is affected by its context it would only be fully determinable if one were able to specify all con-

ceivable contexts in advance. However, Schleiermacher is interested in the successful praxis of communication, rather than, as Derrida sometimes seems to be, in the consequences of the ultimately aporetic claim that there can be no Cartesian certainty about meaning.

The fact that language is manifest in the form of speech acts leads Schleiermacher in important new directions. Language users are individuals, and the existence of language is therefore dependent upon their contingent acts: 'language must individualise itself. Otherwise it can only be thought of as a capacity but not really exist' (pp. 363–4). Humboldt makes the same point: '[language] has nowhere, not even in writing, a permanent home, its so to speak dead part must always be reproduced anew in thought' (Humboldt 1973 p. 57). The individuality that Kant reserved for the genius in art, who established new rules via aesthetic production, is carried over into all areas of linguistic usage and thus into all areas of human activity. Without the ability to move from the grammatical level to the level of context and application which is not bounded by rules, we could neither understand nor communicate in an effective manner.¹² Now this may really sound like Romantic hyperbole, but much the same point has been made by Brandom:

Every use of a vocabulary, every application of a concept in making a claim, both is answerable to norms implicit in communal practice – its public dimension, apart from which it cannot mean anything (though it can cause something) – and transforms those norms by its novelty – its private dimension, apart from which it does not formulate a belief, plan, or purpose worth expressing. (Brandom 2000 p. 178)

Once one moves away from theories of language which seek to explain it solely in terms of how it represents bits of the world, towards a conception of it as a public activity through which individuals can realise themselves and their wishes, this whole dimension of Schleiermacher's thought turns out to offer significant resources for contemporary revisions of the idea of the philosophy of language, let alone, of course, for revision of the history of the philosophy of language.

Presenting Schleiermacher in these terms may seem rather odd, given his reputation for subjectivism, apparently demonstrated in remarks like this: 'We cannot know whether the other person hears and sees just as we do' (Schleiermacher 1942 p. 371). The insistence of Rorty and others on the fact that there can be nothing sub-propositional, so that the 'space of reasons' is inherently linguistic and intersubjective, relegates the dimension of immediate self-consciousness to meaninglessness, because it cannot result in the cashing in of a public validity claim. The aesthetic dimension of what Schleiermacher intends is, though, not touched by this kind of claim. His contention is that knowledge of 'whether the other person hears and sees just as we do' requires the assumption that there is an identity in the way we schematise our perceptions. We must make this assumption, which can never be definitively confirmed, precisely because there is no shared given, only the contingencies of

what each individual receives in 'organic affection' and schematises with a shared language which is acquired in conjunction with those contingencies. As such, thoughts, as propositionally articulated publicly shareable objects of agreement or disagreement, must be distinguished from what does not reach the level of propositionality.

At the level of propositions Schleiermacher claims that even if what another person sees as the *Bild*, the 'image' of the colour, may be different from what I see: 'This can never be established, but this does not matter if the object is only the same one that I have and the other person describes the same actions in relation to the object as I describe' (p. 373). He does, however, insist on the contingency vital for his claims about art by claiming that 'all communication about external objects is a constant continuation of the test as to whether all people construct identically' (p. 373). There is, then, no guarantee that any series of classified observations can be generally grounded in certain knowledge that is common to all people. This leads him to a vital hermeneutic point:

The identity in the construction of thought as the element of knowledge is only manifest in language [i.e. the system of iterable signifiers with which we communicate]. But there is no general language, therefore there is also no general identity of construction. Thus this characteristic is not realised and will not be realised. All attempts to reach a general language are failures; for the agreement about a general language is itself subordinated to particular languages. (p. 374)

He also prefigures Habermas's Heidegger-derived insistence that theory is grounded in the background consensuses of the language of the life-world:

Language never begins to form itself through science, but via general communication/exchange (*Verkehr*); science [*Wissenschaft*, which includes the sense of 'philosophy'] comes to this only later, and only brings an expansion, not a new creation, in language. As science often takes the direction of beginning from the beginning, it must choose new expressions for new thoughts. Forming new root words would be of no help because these would in turn have to be explained by already existing ones. (p. 511)

In a typical example of his misapprehension of what Schleiermacher argues, Gadamer attributes this point to Wittgenstein (Gadamer and Boehm 1976 p. 323). Just as Wittgenstein moved away from the idea in logical empiricism of a logically purified language, Schleiermacher argues in the wake of Hamann that if one wished to be able to articulate the correspondence of subject and object, language and reality, one would have to presuppose an 'absolutely general language. But there is no means of producing such a language . . . For language is not always susceptible to construction and remains connected to the area of nature' (Schleiermacher 1942 p. 379). Natural languages both arise in and are transmitted through the contingencies of the sensuous world and they are the basis of our primary understanding of the world. Any subsequent attempt to arrive at a general language therefore cannot be shown to have wholly obviated the forms of understanding which first make the world intelligible to us at all.

How, then, is it that differing organisms can come successfully to employ the same communicative forms? Part of Schleiermacher's explanation involves his most controversial and misunderstood term: 'divination'. Since Dilthey in particular, 'divination' in Schleiermacher has been assumed to mean '*Einfühlung*', 'feeling one's way into' another person's thoughts via their utterances. This notion has rightly been attacked as psychologistic, and has helped produce some truly awful literary criticism. Even from the arguments seen so far it is evident that Schleiermacher could not have meant anything of the kind. Furthermore, he did not use the term *Einfühlung*. His own explanation of 'divination' uses the telling example of children's initial language acquisition. Language cannot be language without universals: in communication 'Everyone seeks to fix the universal image for themselves and others' (p. 373). The problem here, which we already encountered with regard to reflective judgement in Kant, is how a general schema is to be applied to a potentially infinite series of different objects which are supposed in some way to be the same, for example, a tree.

The obvious answer would seem to be comparison of different cases, but this does not solve the problem because one would need a first tree, an idea that is the basis for the subsequent series of comparisons. A tree can only be said to be a tree via the discriminations made possible by language, and language relies on the structure of one thing being determined by another. Unless one has already presupposed that the first object really is a tree no series of comparisons will definitively establish its identity, because they will lead to an infinite regress.¹³ Schleiermacher argues that everyone finds himself in the situation of requiring this presupposition when they acquire their first language, but that the presupposition cannot be firmly grounded. There is no 'given' upon which one can build, the given itself is constituted from the interaction of private experience and the public use of language, and the two sides can never be clearly divided from one another, private experience always being in some measure organised in public forms, and public language in real usage always being in some measure affected by 'private' interpretation. Any attempt at understanding another's utterance therefore involves a hiatus between the use of general signifiers and the particular individual's understanding. For children this is particularly the case:

They do not yet have language, rather they are looking for it, but they also do not yet know the activity of thinking because there is no thinking without words: on what side do they begin [i.e. by comparison or 'divination']? They have not yet got *any* points of comparison but they only gradually acquire them as the basis of an unexpectedly quickly developing comparative procedure; but how do they fix the first thing? (Schleiermacher 1977 p. 326).

The answer is 'divination'. But what does the term mean?

Divination involves 'production', 'creation' (*Erzeugung*). Children have what Schleiermacher calls an 'inner mobility towards creation on their own part' (p. 327), which goes along with a 'directedness towards the reception of others'. He

uses the same terms in relation to art. There is no absolute point from which the process of language acquisition can be said to begin, but given that we do successfully acquire language, we must infer that individuals can make revisable, ungrounded guesses at their 'first thing'. Davidson suggests, in the same vein, that our understanding of the use of words in context relies on forming of what he terms 'passing theories'. These have the same function as reflective judgement, moving from the particular to the general without a guiding rule, and 'there are no rules for arriving at passing theories, no rules in any strict sense, as opposed to rough maxims and methodological generalities' (Lepore 1986 p. 446). Acquisition of language therefore can be neither the accommodation of consciousness to a system of pre-existing signifiers in which it mirrors to itself what it is, nor the means for the direct apprehension of given ready-made objects, nor a merely solipsistic individual giving of meanings to signs. *All* use of language must be *potentially* creative because it can bring about a revision of how a term is used. Divination is, then, a necessary component of our everyday, and always incomplete, rule-governed praxis of understanding each other and the world. When I say something which is understood by another, or understand something they have said, this does not mean that I simply reproduce the words used with an identical sense. It means instead that, as Frank has put it, I 'carry out another articulation of the same linguistic chain' (Frank 1986 p. 123). Because it is the articulation of a different individual in a different set of circumstances there is always an aspect which is different, even when the 'same' sentence is used.¹⁴

Schleiermacher's expression of admiration for children's powers of language acquisition shows how his conception also involves an ethical dimension: 'it seems to me that we only smile at the wrong uses that children make of the elements of language they have acquired – which they not infrequently make only via too much logical consistency – in order to console ourselves for or revenge ourselves on this preponderance of an energy which we ourselves no longer possess' (Schleiermacher 1977 p. 327). Children create new forms of language in their attempt to produce communication with others. At the same time, every time we ourselves fail to understand or make ourselves understood, some aspect of this 'energy' must come into play if we are to overcome our misunderstanding. I have elsewhere termed the result of this situation the 'hermeneutic imperative' (Bowie 1997). Individual lives are a never completed series of attempts to grasp, via divination and comparison, the meanings of others (and, of course, by reflecting on one's own past utterances, one's own meanings). The acquisition of 'grammar' is vital in this, but 'the more the soul already possesses, its receptivity becomes more sluggish in its movements, so that even in the most lively soul, precisely because each in its individual being is the non-being of the others, it is the case that non-understanding will never completely dissolve' (Schleiermacher 1977 p. 328). One has therefore to live with the contingency of understanding, even as one cannot escape trying to achieve understanding. Schleiermacher's conception of understanding and interpretation is, then, in

many respects a precursor of contemporary moves towards normative accounts of meaning in terms of discursive practices which are not susceptible to the kind of rule-bound explanation sought by the founders of analytical philosophy. A further dimension of Schleiermacher's exploration of language, which played virtually no role in the dominant accounts in the analytical tradition and which is still often underplayed in contemporary philosophy, must now be examined.

Literature and the 'musical'

One of the deciding factors that makes Davidson's account of interpretation more plausible than that of Lyotard is that it is hard to see how one could assert that two people are communicating in a language at all if they did not share some kind of presupposed intuitive understanding of truth. Faurisson is making a claim about how something can be legitimated, not denying the possibility of truth in relation to Auschwitz. Sequences of noises only become meaningful signifiers via some kind of shared world that we understand in terms of claims that something is or is not the case, even if we disagree totally about some fundamental aspects of that world. Something analogous would seem to be the case for music: what makes organised sound into music is a consensus on the part of a community of listeners that the sound conveys something intelligible and organised, even though it may have no directly assignable semantic content. In this sense music plays the role of a kind of 'vocabulary' for that community by disclosing aspects of, for example, its affective world to it. The bridge between language and music can, in a rather loose but useful way, be understood via the idea of metaphor. A metaphorical utterance of the kind present in a radical modernist poem may in many cases not be comprehensible in terms of its truth conditions, but may yet be world-disclosive in some significant respect. Music can be seen in this perspective as part of a historically shifting continuum of means of articulation which goes from 'identical' scientific language, via differing degrees of metaphor, to 'individual' musical forms. It is along such a notional continuum – whose divisions are neither stable nor in any way definitive – that the issue of 'literary' language in modernity is located.

The 'poetic', in the sense of the creative and the 'literary', has remained a contentious issue throughout modernity, with some theories granting literary usage a radically special aesthetic status, and others denying that there is any such thing as literature at all because literary texts are just texts like any others. The genesis of the disciplines of 'literary criticism' in the English-speaking world and of 'literary hermeneutics' in the German-speaking world – whose roots can be traced to this period – highlights the degree of contention surrounding the question of literature.¹⁵ From what we have seen so far, Schleiermacher's basic intuition about the nature of interpretation suggests something important about the battles carried out in these disciplines over the understanding of literary texts. If the task of interpretation is to find agreed rules of meaning, or certainty about what a particular text means, why do so

many people in the modern period spend so much time in never finally resolved institutionalised conflict over utterances of others, 'literary' or not? Why are there no 'definitive' interpretations of major literary, or, for that matter, any other significant texts?

As we have seen, this situation can be thought of either, as those like Lyotard and others influenced by Heidegger do, as pointing to some major crisis in modernity to which philosophy has privileged access, or, as it is for Davidson and Rorty, as the source of a new awareness of the different uses of differing kinds of discourse that leads to the need for a constant renegotiation of how our communicative practices are to be justified. Adhering to the idea that this constant need for renegotiation should be regarded as the sign of a universal crisis requires one to take philosophy too seriously, making an often rather restricted version of the history of philosophy, as it largely is for Heidegger, the key to history as such. It is only by a much more wide-ranging and specific analysis of the justificatory and expressive practices of modern societies that the effects of the putative end of universal forms of understanding can be adequately assessed. The best way to achieve this is by what Brandom described as the constant interplay of the public and private aspects of our communicative practices. Schleiermacher offers interesting possibilities here. By centring his attention on the presence of an individual, private aspect even in the most apparently rule-bound activity, Schleiermacher is able to claim that 'everywhere, including the realm of science [meaning natural science], there is a free play of thoughts which is a preparation for artistic production' (Schleiermacher 1977 p. 180) – 'artistic' relating once more to the fact that rules do not apply themselves and therefore demand divinatory application. Post-empiricist theories of science now stress that any new theory can be considered to be a metaphor, which may be false in terms of the present web of explanations, but which can become literalised and true if the theory is accepted. Once the assumption, generated by the myth of the given, that there are bits of the world that make our sentences true comes to be regarded as unintelligible, a strict line between the literal and the metaphorical gives way to a conception in which the purposes of particular uses of language are the central issue.

The rejection of definitive divisions between the metaphorical and the literal is what leads Schleiermacher to claim there is no absolute difference between 'aesthetic' and other aspects of linguistic usage. Although *Poesie* is *bildlich*, concerned with intuition and particular images, it is present in some degree even in the most rule- and observation-bound activities: 'The more distinct the laws of a form are, the more empty is the production of individuality. In this way the individual life is opposed to what is mechanised. But the relation of the two varies in different texts. The individual never completely recedes' (p. 191). To this extent science and art 'cannot possibly be totally opposed to each other' (p. 194). There will always be a tension between the notional general status of any signifying system and its particular use in practice, which can never be 'mechanised'. Schleiermacher opposes 'poetry', creative, literary production to

'prose', which includes any discursive practice, including in the natural sciences: the 'general hermeneutic difference between poetry and prose is that in the former the singular wishes to have its particular value as such, in the latter it only wishes it in the whole, in relation to the main thought' (p. 140). The *Dichter* (in the sense of any 'creative writer') most directly confronts this issue, but its implications are inherent in all linguistic usage. This conception is, then, in line with contemporary pragmatist ideas about the need to see scientific practice in terms of its differing 'discursive commitments' to those involved in 'poetry', not in terms of its inherent superiority to or radically different nature from other forms of human practice.

What rarely plays a central role in contemporary conceptions, however, is the following vital aspect of language, to which Hamann, Schlegel and Novalis also adverted.¹⁶ Schleiermacher sees language as having both a 'logical' and a 'musical' aspect. It is the latter which is essential for *Poesie*. The 'productivity' that leads to articulation in language is internal: 'but it only becomes external via the note [*Ton*]. This is analogous to the musical element and in the use of language we always get an impression of this musical element' (Schleiermacher 1842 p. 633). The musical element in language is evidently not directly semantic, but the fact that the illocutionary force of any utterance can be changed by its tone, emphasis and rhythm means that in actual communication what an utterance *does* is not adequately understood in terms of its supposed semantic content. Schleiermacher connects the significance of the 'musical' to his arguments about immediate self-consciousness, suggesting one way of countering objections to this notion. Habermas has reportedly claimed in conversation that immediate self-consciousness is really just a residue of our animal past, which can only become significant when its intersubjective consequences are articulated in language. However, this view underestimates the way in which human culture is unthinkable without forms of articulation which cannot be reduced to the ways in which we try to understand them in language, but which have their own kind of 'meaning', the meaning which Novalis and Schelling found, for example, in rhythm.¹⁷ In a further move, which makes this difficult concept more plausible, Schleiermacher connects the kind of meaning which is implied by the 'musical' to immediate self-consciousness.

I suggested in Chapter 5 that 'any form of articulation that can disclose the world in ways which affect the conduct and understanding of life' can be regarded as possessing meaning, and that 'if meaning is what can be understood, then music is meaningful by the very fact of its being music rather than noise'. For Schleiermacher the meaningfulness of music depends on the fact that the human mind has a strong tendency 'to be able to represent itself purely in its mobility, apart from everything logical' (p. 400) – by 'logical' he means 'propositional' and truth-determinate. Musical production makes us 'conscious of the mobility of human self-consciousness' (p. 395), a mobility which affects the nature of our being in the world, and which can in turn be affected by music. To the extent to which this mobility has little or no semantically determinate

content and must be experienced in interaction with a work of art, it can become a criterion of aesthetic autonomy. What Schleiermacher intends here therefore also prefigures the emergence of forms of modern art which rely precisely upon their freedom from representation. This move away from representationalism leads to a further vital idea. As we shall see in more detail in Chapter 7, the establishment of music as an increasingly central aspect of modern culture is linked to the emergence of the modern notion of literature.¹⁸ Why this might be the case becomes evident from Schleiermacher's arguments concerning language and style.

The identification of a 'literary style' depends, in a broad sense, upon the 'rhythm' of an author's sentences, which depends upon characteristic recurrences of linguistic elements and the manner of their combination. The 'logical' is that which is open to examination as to its truth status. This status must have to do with general criteria of judgement which, though articulated in particular utterances, should transcend the particularity of the individual utterance. Even in the realm of the 'logical', 'a sentence can as an expression in language be completely adequately formed in terms of its logical constitution, but it offends us because it does not satisfy the musical' (p. 635). This piece of apparent aestheticism is in fact better understood in terms of the pragmatist claim that language can be a tool in more than one way. The ability persuasively and effectively to communicate a claim can be as important to its success as is its 'logical' soundness. The questioning of the borderline between rhetoric and truth that we will see in an extreme form in Nietzsche is dealt with here in a much less melodramatic and in some respects more enlightening manner.

Oliver Sacks cites the case of the aphasiacs who, while being incapable of understanding distinct words as such, were able to unmask a lying speech by President Reagan by understanding the way in which language was being used on the musical level. Sacks says of aphasiacs that one has the feeling 'that one cannot lie to an aphasiac' because they 'have an infallible ear for every vocal nuance, the tone, the rhythm, the cadences, the music, the subtlest modulations, inflections, intonations, which can give – or remove – verisimilitude to or from a man's voice' (Sacks 1986 p. 78). Most of the audience of aphasiacs laughed at Reagan's speech. The real sense of the 'musical' was lacking in what Reagan said: 'it was . . . above all, the false tones and cadences of the voice, which rang false for these wordless but immensely sensitive patients' (p. 78). What is at stake in Schleiermacher's connection of aesthetics and language therefore reveals a political dimension in the need to attend to the musical. The fact that it requires a shared mental pathology to make it collectively obvious that Reagan made mendacious speeches reveals the extent to which the particular sensibility to the use of language highlighted by Schleiermacher and Sacks is easily lost, or may never even develop. The concrete political implications of this are anything but easy to pin down, but the role of the aesthetic here does involve a clear warning that the kind of philosophy which concerns itself solely with the propositional dimension of language will fail to address other dimensions of lan-

guage which are inseparable from the culture of truth in a community. Because he takes individuality so seriously Schleiermacher sees non-violent communication between individuals as an imperative. In this way a theory of language inseparable from aesthetics adumbrates a political theory whose aim is to establish a situation in which individuality can articulate itself without overriding the individuality of others.

Art in this perspective is concerned with articulating what 'identical' thinking can repress because of its orientation towards fixing a world of stable objects for technical and scientific purposes. If philosophy is conceived of as the discipline which is to arrive at general truths, the difficulty of writing philosophy which does justice to the aesthetic dimension is obvious, and is part of what gives rise to controversies over the relationship between the literal, and the aesthetic and rhetorical dimensions of texts. The *Dichter* for Schleiermacher has to 'provide something that cannot really be given by language, for language only ever provides the general' (Schleiermacher 1842 p. 639). A flower in a botanical handbook (Schleiermacher's example) must be described via a schema that applies to others of the species. This is generally no problem in pragmatic terms: one recognises the flower if the schema fits, though the explanation of how this is possible faces all the difficulties we encountered in the questions of judgement and language acquisition. A flower in a literary or other aesthetic context – this applies also to painting: think of Van Gogh's sunflowers – is not to be seen as a token of a type. If the depiction of a flower in a botanical handbook is judged to have aesthetic value this will not depend upon the image being able to be used as a means of identifying the flower in a field. Neither will a 'poetic' evocation of a flower be judged by whether it enables you to recognise and pick the flower on a summer's day. For Schleiermacher 'the poet . . . is concerned with the truth and complete determinacy of the singular' (p. 639). The 'truth' of the singular cannot be the truth of thinking whose aim is identification and classification, but this raises the crucial question of what sort of truth it can be.

The answer to this question leads to another dimension of the relationship between the public and the private. The very possibility of language depends upon iteration: the public aspect of language relies on repeatability of signifiers as a necessary condition of intelligibility. However, one of the concerns about language that emerges with Romanticism is that the iterability of words can become a too exclusive means of fixing a world which is in fact dynamic. The 'private' dimension of the subject that resists being reduced to sameness therefore requires language to function in a different manner. Schleiermacher argues that one of the things that can occur in literature is that 'the changing, floating, purely transient aspect of the state of mind [*Gemütsstimmung*] should be presented [*zur Anschauung gebracht*]' (p. 640) against the fixity of the signifier. Music has an obvious advantage here: it can convey dynamic states of mind because, even though the Western chromatic scale consists only of twelve notes, music's significance is the result of the relations between these notes, the representational function of music being subordinate in a manner which it is not in

everyday language.¹⁹ The same chord or musical phrase can function in an indefinite number of ways and thus can articulate something singular – think of Adorno’s example of the disruptive use of the C major chord in the atonal context of Berg’s *Wozzeck*. Language, Schleiermacher claims, is ‘simply irrational in relation to the singular’ (p. 643) because one of the primary pragmatic functions of language is to reduce difference to identity.²⁰

Iterability and singularity are, then, opposed, yet meaning requires both if language is to work in real contexts. Thought requires language if it is to be determinate, and even the realisation of our particular desires requires the articulation in general terms of *what* we desire. Such articulation, though, obviously involves more than the simple schematisation required for identifying entities in the world. What I want may very often not exist in the world, so I am hardly able to identify it by representing it in an already constituted language. The key factor in Schleiermacher’s response to this issue is again the ‘musical’. The musical ‘consists of nothing but transitions . . . by virtue of this, language is capable of directly representing the changeable in spiritual being’ (p. 642). This is, incidentally, another case where music can be regarded in a manner analogous to Hegel’s *Logic*, which, as we saw, tried to characterise the pure movement of thought. The *movement* between signifiers or statements is what gives rise for Schleiermacher to *Poesie*. The effect generated by such movement is not, though, merely indeterminate, as the very specific nature of poetry makes clear. The semantic potential of a poem or piece of literary prose is connected to the level of its specific formal organisation, which is constituted by the movement between the signifiers as it is read.

For Schleiermacher the possibility of creativity ‘is already originally in language, but admittedly it is only the poetic where it appears’ (p. 643). At the point at which language realises potential for new significance it is necessarily individual. Originality cannot, though, consist in the endless production of new words, because of language’s reliance on iterability. What counts is the combination of the words in new configurations, which is, of course, where language again comes close to music, by relying on rhythmic and other aspects of articulation that are not directly semantic and come about through the different combinations of the same elements. Schleiermacher maintains that ‘there can be no concept of a style’ (Schleiermacher 1977 p. 172), that is, a rule for identifying a style, because what is at issue does not emerge in terms of a semantic analysis of a text, relying rather on individual combination of the same elements as are used by others. We can derive semantic consequences from the organisation of words and their rhythmic and phonic interaction, but the effect of such organisation is not primarily semantic, and constitutes a vital aspect of the aesthetic effect of a text. Such organisation has evident analogies to the way in which the harmonic and melodic organisation of the notes, the rhythms and the tone colours in music generate its disclosive effects. The important fact about ‘style’ in this sense is that its irreducibility to concepts does not derive from the words of the text themselves, which are the same as those used by others, but results instead

from the gaps between the words that make the new relationships between them possible, thus via what cannot be said in the text (on this see Frank 1989). This is how individual style relates to what Schleiermacher maintains about immediate self-consciousness, which is not accessible via specific acts of thought, but only via what grounds their connection. He also connects these ideas to the way music is an expression of immediate self-consciousness: 'just as the infinity of combination of articulated sounds belongs to human thought being able to appear in language, so the manifold of measured (*gemessen*) sounds represents the whole manifold of movements of self-consciousness, to the extent that they are not ideas, but real states of life' (Schleiermacher 1842 p. 394).

The analogies at issue here between language and music, like the analogies we saw in Hegel between music and the concept, depend on the idea that all determinacy is relational. The following remark can thus apply both to a word and to a musical note: 'in its single appearance the word is isolated; its determinacy does not result from itself but from its surroundings . . . The complete unity of the word would be its explanation and this is as little present as the complete explanation of objects' (Schleiermacher 1977 p. 106). A word is understood 'via its being together with the words that surround it' (p. 116), thus involving, as it does for Derrida, a constitutive lack that must be completed by the words in the rest of the signifying chain, in the same way as the notes in a piece of music require the other notes to become music. Hegel ultimately wishes to resolve these differences into the fully articulated identity of the absolute idea. Derrida, in contrast, can in this respect be understood as adverting to the musical aspect of language, which inherently defers 'presence' in the sense employed above. Adorno's remark in 'On the Present Relationship between Philosophy and Music' that 'As a sphinx [music] makes a fool of the spectator by continually promising meanings – and even intermittently granting meanings – which are for it in fact only, in the truest sense of the word, means towards the death of meaning, and in which [meanings] it for that reason never exhausts itself' (pp. 154–5) points to a way in which Derrida's ideas might be profitably explored in relation to music. Derrida's conception (and at times Adorno's) becomes problematic because he offers too few plausible ways of considering how language can be a successful means of communication. Schleiermacher accepts that there is an essential asymmetry between the semantic desire to regulate linguistic practice in the name of transparency of meaning, and the potential inherent in any utterance for an individual user of the language to mean something different by it which may only become apparent in terms of the revelation of more and more contexts of that language user's world. He does not, though, fetishise deferral of meaning in the way Derrida sometimes seems to, because, as we have seen, he does not conceive of meaning in Cartesian terms.

Hamann deconstructed the intelligible/sensuous divide by showing that language must involve both. Again something analogous applies to music, which Hamann suggested was the 'oldest language' (Hamann 1967 p. 224), and this can suggest an interesting further way of understanding Schleiermacher's

insights. In *The Order of Things* Michel Foucault claims that ‘The threshold between Classicism and modernity . . . has been definitively crossed when words cease to intersect with representations and to provide a spontaneous grid for the knowledge of things. At the beginning of the nineteenth century they rediscovered their ancient enigmatic clarity’ (Foucault 1970 p. 304). By ‘Classicism’ Foucault therefore means the era when words and representations intersect; modernity supposedly abolishes firm frameworks for knowledge because the world ceases to be ready-made, once the constitutive role of language becomes apparent. The move away from representational functions gives language an autonomy which Foucault thinks is the source of much of the most significant writing in modernity. The idea of a divorce of language and representations is related to what Schleiermacher, writing at the time when words rediscover their ‘clarity’, discusses in terms of the irreducibility of words to concepts, which is linked to his ideas about *Poesie* and music.

What seems of most interest in the present context is the historical fact that at this time in the early nineteenth century in Germany the judgement becomes more and more current that music without words is the highest form of art, at the same time as conceptions of language move away from ideas like the divine origin and thus put in question straightforwardly representational views. The change in the relative status of language and music often relates, as we have seen, to the new understanding of subjectivity in the thought of the period. The decisive fact about the music that develops at this time is precisely that the notes can be heard independently of any link to representation of the objective world. I should perhaps stress here, in order to avoid any misunderstanding, that the way the notes in the music of a particular society come to be ordered *is* clearly bound up with ideological issues: composers do not compose in a vacuum. However, the ordering of notes is never wholly comprehensible in terms of the way that ordering is socially determined, because it does not just represent some other form of social practice or structure. Music is inherently able to sustain a degree of aesthetic autonomy, however minimally this may be the case in particular examples. The frequently misused idea of music as a universal language is, then, not merely a piece of ideology. In contrast to the incomprehensibility of unfamiliar natural verbal languages, unfamiliar music can make considerable sense, for example of the kind present in gestures or looks used while communicating with someone who does not share your language.

Foucault claims that attention to the consequences of the shift in language away from representation only really emerges later in the nineteenth century with Nietzsche. In the light of the arguments concerning music that we have seen so far, this is evidently not the case. The emergence of the idea of language as existing for its own sake, for example in Novalis’s reflections on poetry, is inseparable in Germany from thinking about music aesthetics. The interesting question is exactly why music takes on this new status, and this has to do with the new ideas about language, and with the changing relationship between the affective and the conceptual in modern life. For Schleiermacher, as we have

seen, the boundary between the musical and the conceptual is never absolute. Wittgenstein echoes this idea when he claims that:

Understanding a sentence in language is much more related to understanding a theme in music than one thinks . . . Why should the strength and tempo move in just *this* line? One wants to say: 'Because I know what that all means'. But what does it mean? I couldn't say. In 'explanation' I could compare it with something else that has the same rhythm (I mean the same line). (One says: 'Can't you see, that is as if an inference were being made' or 'That is, so to speak, a parenthesis' etc. How does one ground such comparisons? – There are different kinds of groundings.). (Wittgenstein 1982 pp. 226–7)

Oliver Sacks's aphasiacs also indicated how the rhythmic and the musical play an essential and never fully determinable role in language use. What all these approaches share is a conviction that the claim to establish an authoritative philosophical language, of the kind promised but not delivered by the sort of system proposed by Hegel, risks repressing vital aspects of our subjective being in the world. These are manifest precisely in aspects of communication that are still often underplayed in modern philosophical approaches to language. If one thinks of language as communicative action, rather than representation, it seems evident that the dimension of subjectivity Schleiermacher thinks of in terms of immediate self-consciousness can play a significant role in thinking about language. What is at issue here with regard to the relationship between subjectivity and non-verbal forms of articulation is not susceptible to criticisms of the kind made against the myth of a pre-linguistic presence as the supposed ground of epistemology. Rorty is rightly wary of the sub-propositional 'given' when it is used as a means of grounding semantics, but this is not what is at issue here, as Wittgenstein's comments suggest.

The crucial point is that while language is undoubtedly a necessary condition of the claim to understand anything about music, the fact that language itself seems to have roots in the musical means that it cannot exhaustively characterise the content of what it has itself to rely on. This leads back to an idea encountered in earlier chapters. Rhythm is, as we saw, constituted in terms of iterable differences – the same beat only becomes the same beat via the occurrence of the next 'same' beat. Saussure argued that the signifier can only become a signifier, rather than an arbitrary noise or mark, via both its iterability and its difference from other signifiers, which means that it essentially relies on 'rhythm'. As I have shown elsewhere (see Bowie 2001), this idea is explored by Friedrich Schlegel in relation to Kant's theory of the schema, which Schleiermacher understands as the basis of the ability to use the same words to refer to an indefinite number of different things. What is clear, then, is that the rhythmic and the musical are not contingent additions to language, and that their relationships to each other can shift in different kinds of articulation – this issue will be explored in more detail in Chapters 7 and 8.

Schleiermacher's awareness of the broader significance of these issues is

highlighted when, discussing music in the *Aesthetics*, he uses 'divination' in relation to the virtuoso's playing of the work of a composer: 'in performance there is always something which cannot be represented either by signs or words and which has to be found by divination. The composite marks which are supposed to represent the idea [of the whole piece] are largely laughable' (Schleiermacher 1984 p. 75). Virtuosity is simply mechanical and could effectively be computerised 'if one were to invent a complete system of marks for all the nuances that a note is capable of . . . finally one would be left, apart from reading correctly, just with the exactitude of touch and of the rests' (pp. 75–6). Recent technology has, of course, made this possible, as it has made possible forms of translation and interpretation in relation to circumscribed kinds of language use. Schleiermacher's point is that the mechanical playing of a piece does not constitute it as aesthetically important music, in the same way as successful interpretation of a text cannot be wholly 'mechanised'. This example points to a much broader issue, with which we can conclude this chapter.

There is no doubt that the development of modern science depends upon the elimination of much of the 'musical' aspect of communication and what it reveals to us. The growing contemporary importance of the levels of communication explored by Schleiermacher is a result of the awareness of the negative consequences of this elimination, even though he is clearly aware of its value in the appropriate 'identical' contexts. Oskar Negt has suggested how, around Schleiermacher's time, 'human possibilities were superior to what was technically available'.²¹ These days, of course, the opposite is increasingly the case: the technical means have massively increased, but what individuals can do with them has not always kept pace. Much contemporary Western culture simply relies on new technical means to dress up what is in fact an impoverished repetition of exhausted cultural forms. How this fact is connected to the relationship between the public and the private is one of the vital questions in contemporary culture. Many of the responses to this question rely on Heidegger's story of modernity as the era of the technological dominance of being by the subject, a story which I have been concerned to question by the alternative story being offered here. Schleiermacher's account of the subject acknowledges the potential for the subject to function in terms of domination if it relies wholly on 'identical' activities, but he also suggests ways in which we can still think about subjectivity that offer alternatives to Heidegger's story. As we have seen, philosophers like Brandom and Rorty use similar arguments to Schleiermacher as a way of questioning scientism. But where they tend to diverge from him, and come closer to Heidegger, is in relation to the issues of subjectivity and non-verbal forms of articulation explored in this chapter. It is here that Schleiermacher still has much to offer, though much work still needs to be done to develop convincing versions of his conception. The gravitation towards music in nineteenth-century Germany by many philosophers concerned with aesthetics will concern us further in the following chapters. Nineteenth-century philosophical aesthetics increasingly focuses on music as

the paradigm for all art, and the resultant arguments have a role to play in a variety of contemporary debates.

Notes

- 1 I have edited and translated Schleiermacher's *'Hermeneutics and Criticism' and Other Texts* (Schleiermacher 1998).
- 2 This is very apparent in the following remark from the *Dialectic*: 'Except for the fact that the divinity is, as transcendent being, the principle of all being, and as transcendent idea is the formal principle of all knowledge, there is nothing to say about it in the realm of knowledge. Everything else is just bombast or the interference of the religious, which, because it does not belong here, must have damaging effects' (Schleiermacher 1839 p. 328).
- 3 Wilhelm von Humboldt also proposes some vital philosophical arguments concerning the centrality of language, but he does so in a philosophical programme which is less significant than Schleiermacher's.
- 4 The last part of this passage makes clear Hamann's debt to Locke, and is not the most convincing part of his account of language, as the objections of Sellars and others against a given based on sense data make clear.
- 5 In a paper on this issue ('Schleiermacher and Post-Metaphysical Thinking', forthcoming) I suggest that, even though Schleiermacher invokes arguments involving such distinctions, they actually do not have a real effect on how he sees knowledge working in the world.
- 6 The trial in 2000 involving the mendacious historian David Irving in Britain showed that there is little trouble in establishing the falsity of such views as those of Faurisson, on the basis of expert testimony and documentary evidence.
- 7 Davidson's 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme' shows in more detail what Lyotard seems not to appreciate. Peter Dews has suggested that Lyotard's position confuses validity claims, which can be part of any language game, and language games themselves.
- 8 Furthermore, as soon as he makes a counterclaim, Faurisson is involved in the contradiction of claiming validity on a basis he denies to others. If there is no testimony that what he claims did not happen did happen, there cannot be any reliable testimony that it did not.
- 9 Cf. Hölderlin's play on the notion of *'Ur-teil'* as 'original separation/differentiation'.
- 10 This is why Kant has to make spontaneity something which is outside of the sensuous world of cause and effect and temporal succession, thus giving rise to the question how spontaneity can be said to have causal effects.
- 11 Think also of the ways conductors try to communicate how they think music 'should go' by metaphors, gestures and all sorts of other kinds of non-verbal signals.
- 12 Schleiermacher refers to this aspect of interpretation as 'technical' or 'psychological'. in which 'language with its determining power disappears and only appears as the organ of the person, in the service of their individuality' (Schleiermacher 1977 p. 171).
- 13 Wheeler's account of Derrida's objections to Husserl's essentialism involves the same point: 'an item's being of a given kind cannot be fully present, since to take it as of a kind is to take it together with past and future repetitions' (Wheeler 2000 p. 82).
- 14 Frank tends to underestimate the degree to which we are in certain respects indeed 'spoken' by the habits involved in the languages we have acquired: the level of creativity

in language use seems to me to be located more in our ability to make sense of utterances in ever new contingent contexts.

- 15 The ever more apparent crisis in traditional literary disciplines and the rise of 'theory' indicate how much these disciplines are a historical product which is now being transformed into something else in the light of new forms of communication and other social changes.
- 16 As we shall see later, Wittgenstein is the exception in the twentieth-century tradition that emerges from analytical philosophy.
- 17 The justifiable objection that *nothing* in the world is reducible to what we say about it, and that the idea of this irreducibility being significant therefore rests on a mistaken conception of language, does not invalidate what I propose here.
- 18 See also Neubauer 1986, Bowie 1997.
- 19 It is, as Rorty has argued, not useful to claim that language has no representational function. The point is that it cannot be shown to represent a ready-made world, so that it is always also at some level constitutive of what it represents, but this does not mean that we do not use it representationally. The fact that music can also perform representational functions suggests how, once again, the boundaries are not fixed here.
- 20 Clearly there is a sense in which language does involve singularity all the time, people regularly saying sentences which have never been said before, but social communication in the name of the coordination and effecting of actions primarily relies on the reduction of singularity.
- 21 The rapid development of musical instruments during the nineteenth century is part of this situation.