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Hermeneutic Virtue and Moral Masquerading: Gadamer and the Question of Solidarity in Melville's *The Confidence-Man*

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Abstract

While Hans-Georg Gadamer does not offer a substantial or systematic account of what he means by solidarity, several Gadamer scholars in recent years have begun to organize and clarify his comments on the topic within his broader project of philosophical hermeneutics. In this paper, I turn to Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man* in order to clarify and challenge some of the conditions for solidarity that Gadamer puts forward. In particular, I focus on certain hermeneutic virtues such as openness, trust, charity, humility, and good will, all of which are necessary for Gadamerian solidarity. In *The Confidence-Man*, Melville depicts a world not only of strangers who lack these virtues, but one in which many of these strangers are conned by sophistical appeals to confidence and faith in one's fellow human being. Melville's text raises a series of important questions for Gadamerian solidarity: Is there any possibility of solidarity with those who are disingenuous actors, who yet hide beneath the guise of faith, trust, and confidence in humanity? How are we to discover new solidarities if we are fundamentally distrustful or suspicious of each other? What if the call for hermeneutic virtue is just another masquerade in a world marked by insincerity, iniquity, and alienation? Ultimately, I claim that Melville's text demands that Gadamer scholars reexamine some of the limitations of the hermeneutic virtues, and by extension, the limitations entailed in affirming and discovering solidarity with others.

Keywords: hermeneutics, Gadamer, solidarity, Melville, virtue, *The Confidence-Man*

Melville's prose works have often been important for major figures in twentieth and twenty-first century continental philosophy, such as Albert Camus, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guittari, Giorgio Agamben, Slavoj Zizek, and Cornel West. Within the last ten years, scholars in Melville studies, literary criticism, and philosophy have made a turn towards considering Melville's works as philosophical texts. This includes Mark Anderson's *Moby-Dick as Philosophy: Plato – Melville – Nietzsche*,[1] K.L. Evans' *One Foot in the Finite: Melville's Realism Reclaimed*,[2] and David Faflik's *Melville and the Question of Meaning*.[3] Furthermore, Corey McCall's and Tom Nurmi's *Melville Among the Philosophers*,[4] and Branka Arsić's and K. L. Evans' *Melville's Philosophies*,[5] are two edited volumes which bring several scholars into the conversation about Melville himself as a philosopher. In the field of philosophical hermeneutics, Gert-Jan van der Heiden's new book, *The Voice of Misery: A Continental Philosophy of Testimony*,[6] contains an entire chapter to Melville's famous short story, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," in which van der Heiden identifies Bartleby as a figure who resists linguistic expression and brings hermeneutic interpretation to its limits.

While van der Heiden's analysis of "Bartleby" does not draw explicitly from the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, the turn to Melville, as an author who so often pulls the reader up short in the event of interpretation and understanding, is a crucial, and perhaps necessary, next step for Gadamerian scholarship. The number of conference papers, journal articles, and book projects which offer a Gadamerian approach or interpretation to a particular text is vast and for good reason. Gadamerian hermeneutics provides incredible resources for interpreting and understanding a text, ourselves, and others in a more profound manner. Yet this kind of scholarship often ends up uncritically affirming hermeneutic principles in the act of interpretation. In Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, he describes conversation and dialogue as the model for articulating the event of understanding. One of his guiding ideas in this regard is the ability to allow one's own prejudices to be put into play, to be challenged, and possibly transformed. Every so often, this should be applied to Gadamer's own work and to Gadamerian scholarship itself, and

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[1] Mark Anderson, *Moby-Dick as Philosophy: Plato – Melville – Nietzsche*, (Nashville: S. Ph. Press, 2015).
[2] K.L. Evans, *One Foot in the Finite: Melville's Realism Reclaimed*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017).
[3] David Faflik. *Melville and the Question of Meaning*, (New York: Routledge, 2018).
[4] Corey McCall and Tom Nurmi, *Melville Among the Philosophers*, (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017).
[5] Branka Arsić and K. L. Evans, *Melville's Philosophies*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017).
[6] Gert-Jan van der Heiden, *The Voice of Misery: A Continental Philosophy of Testimony*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019).

Melville's texts are an excellent vehicle for this task. This is to say, an honest Gadamerian interpretation of Melville means that Gadamerian scholarship must be open to an examination of its own hermeneutic prejudices related to hermeneutic experience, interpretation, and understanding. It is in this spirit that I turn to Melville's novel, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, in order to show how this text opens up a series of challenging questions related to Gadamerian notions of trust, good will, and solidarity.

Aside from this critical aim, there are some important scholarly reasons for reading *The Confidence-Man* alongside Gadamer and his notion of solidarity. First, a Gadamerian approach to the works of Melville contributes to interrupting what Cornel West has called "the philosophic silencing of Melville."[7] As philosophers begin to turn with more frequency to the works of Melville, Gadamer scholars should jump at the chance to engage this new and promising interpretive space. Second, philosophical research on Melville largely avoids *The Confidence-Man* in favor of more popular works from Melville, such as "Bartleby," "Benito Cereno," and *Moby-Dick*.[8] Lastly, there has been a focus in Gadamer scholarship in the past several years on providing a coherent articulation of Gadamer's many fragmented comments on solidarity. A reading of the *Confidence-Man* not only contributes to this project but will shine a light on some important tensions in Gadamer's notion of solidarity as well.

In this essay, I first discuss recent scholarship on Gadamerian solidarity and examine some crucial passages from Gadamer on the importance of solidarity in the modern bureaucratic world of the twentieth century. While Gadamer makes several remarks on solidarity, I will focus primarily on the importance of what Robert J. Dostal refers to as the hermeneutic virtues of trust, good will, and friendship for any kind of solidarity to form in a community. Second, I turn a few scenes from *The Confidence-Man* which highlight some obvious questions about solidarity, such as the possibility of solidarity in a society full of strangers, hypocrisy, and mendacity. Is there any possibility of solidarity with those who are disingenuous and sophistical, yet hide beneath the guise of faith, trust, and confidence in humanity? How are we to discover new solidarities if we are fundamentally distrustful or suspicious of each other? Ultimately, I claim that Melville's text demands that Gadamer scholars reexamine some of the

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[7] Cornel West. "Afterword" in *Melville Among the Philosophers*, edited by Corey McCall and Tom Nurmi, (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017), 213.

[8] One notable exception in this regard is Jason M. Wirth, "The Self without Character: Melville's *The Confidence-Man* and Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*," *Humanities* (1), 25, 2018. https://doi.org/10.3390/h7010025. Wirth details the many masks of the figure of the confidence-man and the mirroring quality of his character upon the other characters in the novel.

limitations of the hermeneutic virtues, and by extension, the limitations entailed in affirming and discovering solidarity with others.

Gadamer on Solidarity

Gadamer's comments on solidarity are scattered throughout several of his later essays after *Truth and Method*, including "Friendship and Solidarity,"[9] "What is Practice?: The Conditions of Social Reason,"[10] and "Culture and Media."[11] While Gadamer does not offer a substantial or systematic account of what he means by solidarity, several Gadamer scholars in recent years, such as Darren Walhof,[12] Georgia Warnke,[13] Theodore George,[14] Cynthia Nielsen,[15] and Robert Dostal,[16] have begun to organize and clarify his comments on solidarity within his broader project of philosophical hermeneutics. When reading their work alongside Gadamer's own comments on solidarity, a Gadamerian notion of solidarity seems to affirm a few basic ideas. First, Gadamerian solidarity is not a matter of all parties thinking and acting in the same way, but is fundamentally a matter of recognizing and respecting the diversity, difference, and the otherness of the Other. Second, Gadamerian solidarity is not a specific political theory, position, or judgement, but is something like a condition for the possibility of a responsible and flourishing political context to emerge at all. This is what George calls the "political as not yet politics."[17] Such a notion of solidarity is a matter of disclosing and illuminating ourselves, our traditions, and our differences to each other.

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[9] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Friendship and Solidarity," *Research in Phenomenology* 39 (2009), translated by David Vessey and Chris Blauwkamp, 3-12.
[10] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "What is Practice?: The Conditions of Social Reason," in *Reason in the Age of Science*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1981), 69-87.
[11] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Culture and Media," in *Cultural-Political Interventions in the Unfinished Project of the Enlightenment*, ed. Axel Honneth, Thomas McCarthy, Clause Offe, and Albrecht Wellmer, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 171-188.
[12] Darren R. Walhof, "Friendship, Otherness, and Gadamer's Politics of Solidarity," *Political Theory* 34, no. 5, 2006, 569-593.
[13] Georgia Warnke, "Solidarity and Tradition in Gadamer's Hermeneutics," *History and Theory* 51 (December 2012), 6-22.
[14] Theodore George, *The Responsibility to Understand: Hermeneutical Contours of Ethical Life*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).
[15] Cynthia R. Nielsen, "Gadamer and Scholz on Solidarity: Disclosing, Avowing, and Performing Solidaristic Ties with Human and Natural Others," *Journal of the British Society of for Phenomenology* 48, no. 3, 2017, 240-256.
[16] Robert J. Dostal, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: Between Phenomenology and Dialectic*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2022, 82.
[17] George, *The Responsibility to Understand*, 128.

This is to say, Gadamer lays emphasis on solidarity as something to be discovered instead of something created or manufactured in some way. Third, Gadamer considers friendship to be an important and local model for solidarity at the level of society. Fourth, solidarity requires what Dostal has described as the "hermeneutic virtues" of "openness, trust, charity, humility, and good will."[18]

Many of Gadamer's comments on solidarity stem from his concern for the lack of solidarity in the modern industrialized world, which is marked by anonymity, bureaucracy, mass communication, and the threat of various global crises. In response to ecological crises and atomic weapons, Gadamer considers solidarity to be crucial for responding to these issues:

> We are still a far cry from a common awareness that this is a matter of the destiny of everyone on this earth and that the chances for anyone's survival are as small as if a senseless attack with atomic weapons of destruction were to occur if humanity in the course of one or perhaps many, many crises, and in virtue of a history of experience involving many, many sufferings, does not learn to rediscover out of need a new solidarity.[19]

Likewise, in "Culture and Media," he refers to solidarity as the reason for pointing out the many difficulties of living in a society of masses and mass communication:

> The mass is characterized by a lack of articulation and differentiation, and this includes the anonymity that weighs heavily on humanity. In saying that, I do not mean to join in with the usual tirades of culture critique. I mention it only because I am looking for ways of dealing with our fate of living in this society and of continually using these means and media, in order to learn how to build true solidarity in our culture.[20]

Gadamer also considers the lack of solidarity to be one of the three forms of "alienation" inflicted upon faculty and students in the "modern mass university" system: "What I find to be most dangerous in our situation is that it has become so unbelievably difficult just to discover an existing authentic solidarity."[21]

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[18] Dostal, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 82.
[19] Gadamer, "What is Practice?," 85.
[20] Gadamer, "Culture and Media," 174.
[21] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Idea of the University – Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History*, eds. Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson, trans. Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 59.

Despite these calls for the necessity of discovering new solidarities, Gadamer provides few substantive comments about what solidarity consists of and how new solidarities are supposed to be discovered in the first place. His most extensive response to these questions of solidarity appears in his 1999 essay, "Friendship and Solidarity," in which he focuses on the crucial role of friendship in mass society and the "age of anonymous responsibility."[22] In particular, Gadamer focuses on the Greek notion of self-love (*Philautia*) and being a friend to oneself as crucial for friendship with others. He is careful to note the typically negative connotation that we hear in this phrase as one that is associated with egoism or narcissism. His reference to self-love, however, has much more to do with a sense of unity or harmony with oneself: "One must be united with oneself if one is to be a friend for another, and even if only a lover, even if only a business friend, even if only a co-worker. Everywhere those who cannot be one with themselves will feel living together with others to be a handicap and to be foreign."[23] However, this does not mean that one should or can only be a friend to another person that is like oneself. Friendship (and solidarity) is not a matter of holding the same views or positions as the Other. In fact, for Gadamer, deep friendship is a matter of affirming the otherness of the Other, and being at home with the Other. However, Gadamer nevertheless raises the question about the possibilities for coming to know ourselves and others in an increasingly anonymizing age: "What does it mean for our society as it becomes anonymous, what does the necessity of a rationalized mass existence mean, to which then also belongs the uncanny character of statistics, without which no global economy would work? Are not too many things in which we could really recognize ourselves being withheld from us?"[24] With fewer

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[22] Gadamer, "Friendship and Solidarity," 3. Gadamer attributes the phrase "age of anonymous responsibility" to Karl Jaspers and does this in at least two other essays as well. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Anxiety and Anxieties," in *The Enigma of Health* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996), 159; "*Philosophische Begegnungen*," in *Hermeneutik im Rückblick*, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 10 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 395. In the latter essay, he attributes the phrase, "*Zeitalter der anonymen Verantwortlichkeit*" to Jaspers in his 1931 text, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit* (*Man in the Modern Age*). While Jaspers certainly discusses the anonymity of individuals in a mass society and various questions about responsibility and freedom in this society, I cannot find Jaspers ever using the phrase, "*Zeitalter der anonymen Verantwortlichkeit*." Interestingly enough, Jaspers discusses the crucial role of solidarity in the age of the masses. Solidarity, for Jaspers, requires the genuine communication, openness, faithfulness/fidelity between true friends. True friends, however, must also affirm their own self-being (*Selbstsein*) and existential honesty. Gadamer will make a similar comment about friendship in his reference to Plato in "Friendship and Solidarity." Friendship (and solidarity) not only requires a certain responsibility or loyalty to the friend, but perhaps most importantly, it requires a responsibility to oneself. See Karl Jaspers, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, *Sammlung Göschen*, Bd. 1000, (Berlin, Germany: de Gruyter), 177-179.

[23] Gadamer, "Friendship and Solidarity," 8.

[24] Gadamer, "Friendship and Solidarity," 10.

opportunities for properly encountering others and cultivating friendships with ourselves and others, how are individuals supposed to affirm the kind of solidarity that, as Gadamer explains, means a real sacrifice of one's own interests and genuine commitment to others? In some of the final lines of this essay, he points to what is perhaps the most important condition for solidarity, namely, ". . . the complete dedication of our good will."[25]

Solidarity, Trust, Good Will, and the Hermeneutic Virtues

Robert Dostal has done the most work in bringing attention to the crucial role of good will, trust, and other hermeneutic virtues in relationship to Gadamer's notion of solidarity. In his recent book, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: Between Phenomenology and Dialectic*, Dostal refers to some of the core ideas in Gadamerian hermeneutics that Gadamer develops in *Truth and Method*, such as the importance of *Bildung*, the art of listening, the fusion of horizons, and the model of conversation as the event of understanding. All of these practices attempt to find agreement with the Other and disclose a shared, common world. Gadamer and Dostal likewise recognize the finite or limited nature of these practices as well. There is no perfect agreement and conversation often fails. What is primary for any kind of successful conversation or understanding with others is the cultivation of a disposition that allows one to be open to the possibility of being genuinely changed or transformed by the Other. We have to always be open to the possibility that our partner in conversation is right and we are wrong and allow for our prejudices to be put into play such that they may undergo a transformation if they have been shown to be inappropriate to the subject matter at hand. Cultivating this kind of disposition goes hand in hand with what Dostal refers to as the various hermeneutic virtues, which he identifies as "openness, trust, charity, humility, and good will," and most importantly, practical wisdom (*phronesis*).[26]

Openness, as we just saw, has to do with being open to the possibility of transformation and of being wrong about a particular subject matter. As Dostal writes, "Without this [openness and willingness to listen], no conversation can get off the ground."[27] Charity, humility, and good will all refer to a collaborative and generous spirit one should bring to any conversation. Instead of attempting to attack and dismiss another's position, we ought to assume the possibility that any kind of weakness or

[25] Gadamer, "Friendship and Solidarity," 11.
[26] Dostal, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 82.
[27] Dostal, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 81.

contradiction can be reconciled in some way. Dostal rightly identifies the most important virtue for Gadamer as practical wisdom, which emphasizes "good judgment, which knows what is best to do in the circumstances in which one finds oneself."[28] Practical wisdom, or good judgement, requires knowing "the right thing to do in the right way at the right time in regard to the right person(s),"[29] all of which requires knowledge or understanding about the various personal, professional, social, and political contexts we find ourselves in.[30]

This leaves us with one interesting and rarely discussed hermeneutic virtue on this list: trust. In an earlier essay, Dostal describes Gadamerian hermeneutics as a hermeneutics of trust in opposition to a hermeneutics of suspicion.[31] Hermeneutic trust is a trust in language or linguisticality. It is a trust in the very condition for the possibility of interpretation and understanding to occur at all. As I have argued elsewhere, Gadamer offers some of his most explicit comments on trust and language in an essay analyzing a poem from Hilde Domin.[32] What it means to trust in language is to maintain an active disposition towards finding and cultivating a common language with the other in order to understand the subject matter at hand.[33] In tying together trust with the possibility of language and understanding, Gadamer is concerned, among other things, with the distortion, falsification, or confusion of language. If language is the medium of hermeneutic interpretation and understanding, and language itself has become corrupted, then the possibility of trust, understanding, and ultimately, solidarity with others has broken down. Trust, then, becomes as important as any hermeneutic virtue in the promotion of solidarity. Without such a trust in language, which provides the condition for the possibility of any kind of understanding to take place, it is impossible to develop the other hermeneutic virtues of openness, charity, humility, and good will. More than this, without a trust in language the other aspects of Gadamerian solidarity, such as recognizing the otherness of the Other, disclosing our traditions and prejudices for each other, and cultivating friendships, are likewise put into question.

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[28] Dostal, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 82.
[29] Dostal, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 82.
[30] Ultimately, all of these virtues require a fundamental "respect for others" in any kind of exchange (Dostal, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 82).
[31] Robert J. Dostal, "The World Never Lost: The Hermeneutics of Trust," *Philosophy and Phenomenology Research* 47, no. 3 (1987): 413–34.
[32] Alexander Crist, "A Hermeneutics and Poetics of Trust: Gadamer and Domin on Trust and Language," *Analecta Hermeneutica* 14, no. 3 (2022), 139-158.
[33] For more detailed comments on what it means to trust in language, see Crist, "A Hermeneutics and Poetics of Trust," 147-151.

In fact, one could say that solidarity is on the same ontological footing as language. If, for Gadamer, "Being that can be understood is language,"[34] then a trust in language is a trust in the possibility of the event of understanding to occur at all. At bottom, solidarity *is* this trust in language or linguisticality. If solidarity involves the linguistic disclosure of a common world and the coming into an agreement in the event of understanding, then what it means to discover solidarity with each other is to trust and participate in language as the medium of hermeneutic experience. If Gadamer sometimes refers to the discovering of new "solidarities" in the plural, trust in language is the original or primary solidarity we can discover for and with each other. Solidarity is an active trust in the possibility that, despite our differences and competing prejudices, we can understand one another and the subject matter at hand, and that we are open to the possibility that we may be transformed by what the other says to us. Solidarity, as trust in language, affirms and actively cultivates the common bond that we all share in the linguisticality of understanding itself. Any specific political decision, action, or project taken up in a community is then downstream of this solidarity that we discover in our trust in the linguisticality of understanding.

Gadamer understands the great difficulty in rediscovering this kind of trust in a world in which this trust has been abused. In his essay on Domin, he does not think the regaining or rehabilitation of trust is an easy or quick thing to accomplish, especially in a community in which language has been propagandized and weaponized to a great extent (Gadamer makes a veiled reference to the Nazification of the German language under the Nazi regime).[35] There is inevitably going to be a long period of disappointment, despair, and confusion on the road to a recovery of trust. Yet despite this, Gadamer is ever hopeful about the return to trust and the possibilities for individuals to affirm trust at any given moment.[36]

Nevertheless, a series of pragmatic questions still remain: how exactly (concretely) is one supposed to take up this trust in language in a world rife with deception, dishonesty, and sophistry? How is one supposed to comport oneself in a world in which so many others are not willing to engage in this trust, or in which many even weaponize notions of trust in order to deceive others? Without others developing this trust, what are the real possibilities for solidarity to be discovered? This is where we should turn to Melville and *The Confidence-Man*.

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[34] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 490.
[35] Crist, "A Hermeneutics and Poetics of Trust," 146-147.
[36] Crist, "A Hermeneutics and Poetics of Trust," 147.

The Confidence-Man as a World of Strangers, Distrust, and Hypocrisy

The events of *The Confidence-Man* take place on April 1st on a steamboat heading down the Mississippi River towards New Orleans, presumably in the mid-1850's. The novel itself consists of several dialogues between a single, mysterious, shapeshifting character presumed to be the confidence-man himself, and several other characters aboard the steamboat. As is common in Melville's texts, the setting of a boat or ship at sea is often a microcosm for America itself. In this instance, the narrator describes all the passengers on the ship as strangers that are constantly boarding and leaving, "so that, although always full of strangers, she continually, in some degree, adds to, or replaces them with strangers still more strange."[37] The name of the steamboat itself is the *Fidèle*, a French word denoting faith or faithful, and a cognate with the English word fidelity. Already in the first few pages of the text, Melville's title and description of the passengers on the ship raise a significant question for the reader: Can a land full of strangers be grounded in a kind of faith or fidelity to one another? What, if anything, binds such strangers together as a community?

Throughout the novel, the masquerading confidence-man engages several passengers on the steamboat in conversation and advocates for a necessary faith, confidence, charity, and/or trust in all humanity. The apparent goal of the confidence-man in these exchanges is to extract money or some favor from the other passengers. To have faith, trust, or confidence in all humanity means that the passengers should likewise trust him and his good nature. If a passenger is unwilling to give him their trust or confidence, the confidence-man will often claim that one must be charitable, for we are all in this together. Our common ground is our common humanity. Distrust and skepticism of others leads to misanthropy and misery, a most terrible condition unbefitting of humankind that ultimately leads to the degradation of society.

This tension contained within the confidence-man's appeal to solidarity and his assumed intention of exploitation appears in several moments throughout the novel. In chapters twenty-one and twenty-two, the confidence-man takes on two different forms in his interaction with a no-nonsense, rugged, and cantankerous frontiersman from Missouri, named Pitch. The first form of the confidence-man is that of the herb-doctor, who tries to sell what the reader presumes to be false cures or medicines to passengers on board. In overhearing the herb-doctor successfully cajole an old, infirmed miser into purchasing a box of his "Omni-Balsamic Reinvigorator,"

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[37] Herman Melville. *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, Volume 10 in *The Writings of Herman Melville*, (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1984), 8.

Pitch calls out the herb-doctor's scheme. The herb-doctor's main line of argument in selling his dubious remedies is that one should have confidence in nature and natural medicines, such as his herbs. In addressing the Missourian, he claims that it is "carrying the spirit of distrust pretty far" to not have confidence in nature.[38] Pitch, of course, responds with how the natural world has caused great damage and harm to him and his property. The herb-doctor responds with all of the ways in which humanity is indebted to nature, and thus should have confidence in nature. In order to persuade Pitch, the herb-doctor offers him a box of his medicines for free, which Pitch denies. No matter what argument the herb-doctor puts forward, he is unable to convince Pitch to have trust or confidence in either nature or his herbal medicines. At the end of this chapter, it appears that Pitch is able to see through the herb-doctor's charade and put him in his place. The herb-doctor politely exits from the scene.

The confidence-man reappears in the next chapter as a representative from the "Philosophical Intelligence Office (P.I.O.)," whose services include providing young boys for work on farms and homesteads. Pitch explains his cynical view on the matter and his own poor experiences with boys for work on his property. The Missourian is now in search for a machine to replace human labor:

> My cider-mill – does that ever steal my cider? My mowing-machine – does that ever lay a-bed mornings? My corn-husker – does that ever give me insolence? No: cider-mill, mowing-machine, corn-husker – all faithfully attend to their business. Disinterested, too; no board, no wages; yet doing good all their lives long; shining examples that virtue is its own reward – the only practical Christians I know.[39]

Pitch is set in his ways and has learned his lessons through hard experience: "Don't try to oil me; the herb-doctor tried that. My experience, carried now through a course – worse than salivation – a course of five and thirty boys, proves to me that boyhood is a natural state of rascality."[40] More than this, Pitch considers not just young boys to be of a vicious mien, but all humanity, in fact, lacks a natural virtuous state. The P.I.O. officer claims that in his many years of experience, he considers all of humanity to be inherently moral. Instead of assuming that all boys are rascals and will grow up to be rascals, one should have confidence, trust, or faith that they will grow out of this disposition.

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[38] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 107.
[39] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 116.
[40] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 117.

The P.I.O. officer offers a physical analogy. Just as a young boy's first set of teeth are fragile and ultimately deficient, a new set of teeth emerge which are firm and stable. So, while a young boy may display early signs of vicious behavior, one should only have just a little bit of patience, as they will ultimately bloom into a virtuous disposition. Pitch rightly calls the P.I.O. officer a "punster," a "talking man," and a "wordy man," who engages in wordplay, analogy, and sophistry at the expense of any clear, rational argument.[41] However, the P.I.O. officer manages to convince the Missourian through more analogies that he was too quick to judge his previous boy servants: "Had you but kept that thirtieth boy – been patient with his sickly virtues, cultivated them, hoed round them, why what a glorious guerdon could have been yours, when at last you should have had a St. Augustine for an ostler."[42] With some reserve, Pitch ultimately applies for a new boy servant with the P.I.O. officer "for the sake purely of a scientific experiment," to which the officer responds: "Respected sir, never willingly do I handle money not with perfect willingness, nay, with a certain alacrity, paid. Either tell me that you have a perfect and unquestioning confidence in me (never mind the boy now) or permit me respectfully to return these bills."[43] As the Missourian affirms his confidence, the officer leaves the steamship with the following remarks:

> Thank you. Confidence is the indispensable basis of all sorts of business transactions. Without it, commerce between man and man, as between country and country, would, like a watch, run down and stop. And now, supposing that against the present expectation the lad should, after all, evince some little undesirable trait, do not, respected sir, rashly dismiss him. Have but patience, have but confidence. Those transient vices will, ere long, fall out, and be replaced by the sound, firm, even and permanent virtues.[44]

Pitch, along with the reader, is led to believe that he was conned out of a few dollars by this sham philosopher and his fallacious "doctrine of analogies."[45] But more than this, Pitch is confounded as to how he was persuaded to relinquish his "general law of distrust" in humanity, when such a principle would have served him well in dealing with such an "operator."[46] Yet even if the confidence-man's methods and aims were

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[41] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 124, 125.
[42] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 126.
[43] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 128.
[44] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 128.
[45] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 130.
[46] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 130.

self-serving or even diabolical, is he so wrong about the importance or significance of having faith, trust, or confidence in humanity?

One of the significant reasons for why the confidence-man is successful in his charade is due to the lack of genuine solidarity aboard the ship. Aside from various naïve or gullible passengers, most of the characters in the story are distrustful, insincere, or lack a virtuous character in some way. Pitch, for instance, may not be a liar or schemer, but he is certainly cynical and perhaps a genuine misanthrope. Other characters display shades of disingenuity or hypocrisy (as we will see in the next section on the Black Guinea). Many are cautious and suspicious, many are simply desperate, and many find themselves alienated from each other on this ship of strangers still more strange. In the novel, the confidence-man knows just how to exploit these weaknesses of character and fragmented social conditions. Even if he is unsuccessful in a first encounter with someone as distrustful as Pitch, the confidence-man merely returns in a new disguise and a new form of casuistry tailored to the passenger and circumstances. If the *Fidèle* lived up to its name, and all or most of the passengers on the ship promoted the kind of honesty, good will, and trust necessary for solidarity, then arguably the confidence-man would be quickly exposed and denounced as such. Dishonesty and duplicity would likely be conspicuous to a community exercising practical wisdom and the other hermeneutic virtues.

The very existence of the confidence-man is something of a product or symptom of a society rooted in hypocrisy, suspicion, alienation, anonymity, deception, and desperation. It is difficult to read the novel without thinking that these are precisely the conditions of nineteenth century America that Melville is criticizing. In fact, one could argue that Melville is more concerned about the "impact of anonymity" and the emerging "world of strangers" in antebellum America than he is about individual confidence-men or women.[47] Karen Halttunen describes this new world of strangers in early to mid-nineteenth century America as marked by deep concerns about hypocrisy and insincerity. She documents a series of advice manuals for young men in the early nineteenth century entering into the city from the countryside as warning against the downfalls of hypocrisy. Yet, as she shows, their concern was not particular to these young men but about Melville's generation as a whole: "The advisers' broadest fear was not simply that a small corps of confidence-men roamed American society, but that an entire generation of Americans was being tainted with

[47] See Lyn H. Lofland, *A World of Strangers: Order and Action in Urban Public Space*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America*, 1830-1870, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 35.

hypocrisy."[48] Such a world of hypocrisy leads to a bewildering kind of irony, in which "deceit masquerades as faith, misanthropy as universal brotherhood, and cynicism as philanthropy, and the misanthropic Pitch is the true lover of his fellow men."[49]

Elizabeth S. Foster, in her introduction to the 1954 Hendricks House edition of *The Confidence-Man*, identifies some of these societal conditions and character flaws that Melville draws our attention to in this new world of strangers:

> The dearth of charity amongst Christians, greed, gullibility – the light of satire glances constantly over these human failures and foibles. It is focused sharply and wittily from time to time on certain characteristics of Western, and particularly American and nineteenth century civilization – the invasion of all areas of life, even religion and philanthropy, by the "Wall Street spirit," the hope of millennial enlightenment from a free press, *laissez-faire*.[50]

Furthermore, Foster refers to *The Confidence-Man* as a nineteenth century American version of Voltaire's *Candide*, yet one that avoids an overt irony and instead favors a "subtle, pervasive, elusive irony, of suggestion and understatement rather than exaggeration, or talk rather than action."[51] These are the subtle and sophistical conditions of an alienated world that raise a challenge to Gadamerian solidarity. The confidence-man in the novel is not a bully or mob boss enforcer who extorts a local shop owner under the obvious and transparent lie of 'protection.' As we saw in the above example, the confidence-man requires more than money. Pitch needs to believe, to some extent, in the truth of what is being said, or rather, the lie must be believed in order for the transaction to take place. He requires Pitch to give him his confidence, his trust, his faith in the officer, in the virtuous nature of young boys, and ultimately in humanity itself. For Foster, and for Melville, it is this particular kind of masquerade and this more up-to-date version of living in the "best of all possible worlds" that indicates a real "danger to humanity."[52]

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[48] Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 33.
[49] Elizabeth S. Foster, "Introduction," in *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* by Herman Melville, (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1954), xciv.
[50] Foster, "Introduction," xvi – xvii. Hershel Parker, in his own historical note to the 1984 Northwestern University Press/Newberry Library edition of the *Confidence-Man*, refers to Foster's 1954 introduction as the "single most important study to date" of Melville's text. See Hershel Parker, "Historical Note," in *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, Volume 10 in *The Writings of Herman Melville*, (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1984), 335.
[51] Foster, "Introduction," xiv.
[52] Foster, "Introduction," xiv – xv.

Melville's concern with the hypocrisy, insincerity, and lack of character comes through in the third chapter of *The Confidence-Man*. Unlike many other chapters, this scene involves the confidence-man (as the "Black Guinea") involved with a multitude of passengers instead of a focused, one-on-one discussion. The scene begins with the narrator describing a "grotesque negro cripple," who though homeless and otherwise in a poor condition, manages to be cheerful and endearing for many of the passengers on the ship.[53] Due to his cheerful nature, many passengers offer small donations to help with his poor condition. However, several of the passengers begin to treat the Black Guinea like a dog and attempt to throw their pennies into his open mouth. The narrator describes this as a "*diversion* and charity," which places the Black Guinea "on a canine footing."[54] His appearance becomes that of a dog and he begins to be treated like a dog. Already in the beginning of this scene, Melville highlights for the reader the significance of appearances insofar as they betray the superficialities and hypocrisies of those engaged in the charade. In taking appearance for reality, the human being appears as a dog, what appears to be charity is really a humiliation or indignity, and what pretends to be virtue is really a capricious pastime or distraction at the expense of another human being.[55] At this point, however, each character is perfectly fine playing out this masquerade. The confidence-man, as the Black Guinea, has acquired the confidence and money of the other passengers, and the passengers can pretend to be charitable and beneficent while passing the time on their journey.

The illusion is put in jeopardy, however, by the entrance of a figure presumed to be "some discharged custom-house officer" who, in his misanthropic and scornful manner, calls out the Black Guinea as a cheat and a fraud.[56] The narrator remarks how this individual, who himself walks on a wooden leg, is initially quite successful in motivating the crowd to suspect the Black Guinea. However, after the wooden legged man asserts himself too forcefully, the crowd then begins to take the side of the Black Guinea. Though it is a subtle point, Melville indicates here yet again the disparity between appearance and reality. While the passengers appear to be esteemed individuals with character and integrity (two of the figures in the scene are clergymen), they are easily swayed by passion, rhetoric, and crowd sentiment, changing positions back and forth like a game of pinball. Ultimately, the wooden legged man removes

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[53] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 10.
[54] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 11.
[55] The narrator refers to the pitch-penny game of the passengers as a "game of charity," indicating the disingenuous nature of such 'charitable' activity (Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 12).
[56] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 12. Melville himself would end up acquiring a position as a New York customs inspector in 1866 after many financial setbacks as an author.

himself from the scene and the rest of the passengers decide to further question the Black Guinea. They ask him if he has any identification on him, any "documentary proof," or any "plain paper about him."[57] When the Black Guinea says he does not have any, an Episcopal clergyman steps in, who the narrator describes as "manly; with a clear face and blue eye; innocence, tenderness, and good sense triumvirate in his air," and who asks the Black Guinea if there is anyone on the ship who will testify to his good nature.[58] In response, the Black Guinea describes several individuals on the ship, which the reader will eventually come to realize are just the different forms and outfits of the confidence-man himself. The Episcopal clergyman then leaves the scene to find one of these individuals.

The wooden legged man returns to the scene and considers the search for the Black Guinea's witnesses to be a "wild goose chase" and refers to the Black Guinea as "some white operator, betwisted and painted up for a decoy."[59] A Methodist minister then enters the scene and asks the wooden legged man: "Have you no charity, friend?" To which the wooden legged man responds: "Charity is one thing, and truth is another."[60] After the Methodist minister continues to press the matter, the wooden legged man articulates what he considers to be the hypocrisy of charity: "Here on earth, true charity dotes, and false charity plots. Who betrays a fool with a kiss, the charitable fool has the charity to believe is in love with him, and the charitable knave on the stand gives charitable testimony for his comrade in the box."[61] This begins to chip away at the cool and patient demeanor of the minister, who ultimately descends into his own kind of hypocrisy by calling for charity and simultaneously denouncing the character of the wooden legged man: "'Reprobate!' cried the other, his indignation now at last almost boiling over; 'godless reprobate! if charity did not restrain me, I could call you by names you deserve.' 'Could you, indeed?' with an insolent sneer."[62] At this point, the Methodist minister accosts the wooden legged man and further betrays his own hypocrisy: "You took me for a non-combatant did you? – thought, seedy coward that you are, that you could abuse a Christian with impunity. You find your mistake."[63] Melville indicates here how patience, charity, and turning the other cheek all seem to go by the wayside when they are challenged. For Melville's America, the Christian virtues appear to have their limits. Once the wooden legged man leaves the scene yet

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[57] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 13.
[58] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 13.
[59] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 14.
[60] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 14.
[61] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 14.
[62] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 15.
[63] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 15.

again, the Methodist minister preaches to the crowd the perils of mistrusting one's fellow human being and the crowd affirms the message.

At this moment, the Black Guinea asks the crowd if they will then have confidence in him, to which several passengers return to their suspicions about him and deny him this trust. Even the Methodist minister after his speech is unmoved by the Black Guinea:

> Once more the negro wailed, and turning in despair from the last speaker, imploringly caught the Methodist by the skirt of his coat. But a change had come over that before impassioned intercessor. With an irresolute and troubled air, he mutely eyed the suppliant; against whom, somehow, by what seemed instinctive influences, the distrusts first set on foot were now generally reviving, and, if anything, with added severity.[64]

Yet, at the last minute, one of the characters affirms his confidence by handing the Black Guinea a half dollar, which the crowd perceives as a kind of admonishment for not likewise affirming trust, charity, and confidence in the poor and downtrodden. Yet there is a deeper and more profound irony in this entire scene. Despite all of the unappealing flaws, hypocrisies, and prevarications of the passengers, the narrator strongly suggests (without explicitly telling us) that the Black Guinea is in fact the confidence-man himself, that this is actually an imposter (perhaps in some form of blackface) faking an infirmity, that this is a dishonest and deceptive individual playing on appeals to trust, charity, and confidence in order to swindle some advantage from those around him. Even though the suspicious and misanthropic mien of the wooden legged man precludes the possibility of friendship and communal flourishing, even though the Methodist minister does not live up to his own appeals to charity and trust in others, this inherent distrust in the Black Guinea by both characters seems to be precisely the disposition that could potentially keep one from being taken advantage of on board the *Fidèle*.

While these more distrustful characters are to some degree protected from the schemes of the confidence-man at an individual level (although even this is not guaranteed, as in the case of Pitch), this comes at a high price for the community. In order to avoid being exploited by the various operators in Melville's America, one must be distrustful of others, always on guard, or perhaps even assume the worst in people. With this disposition, however, one sacrifices a genuine faith or trust in humanity. What is lost in defending oneself from the world and others is solidarity with the world

[64] Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 16-17.

and others. Furthermore, one ultimately contributes to a world in which the confidence-man is able to exist and thrive in the first place. A world in which we are all strangers to each other and inherently suspicious of each other leads to a quasi-Hobbesian state of nature, in which one might actually have to develop the skills of a confidence-man in order survive or gain some kind of critical advantage.[65] While a cynical worldview might provide some safeguard against being hoodwinked by cunning individuals, it does not lead to a flourishing solidarity in the community. Yet, if one attempts to be trustful and honest in a dishonest world, then one is left open to be a mark for the many artful operators of this world. The con is effective either way: one either loses their money or their faith in humanity. In some cases, one might lose both. This is a fundamental tension that Melville raises for the reader, and this is the kind of double bind that the confidence-man knows how to exploit in Melville's America.

Along with decrying a world of hypocrisy and insincerity, Melville is trying to demonstrate the great wager or risk involved in confidence. Cornel West, in a conversation about *The Confidence-Man* with D. Graham Burnet, articulates this sentiment perhaps most clearly when he quips: "In every 'con' there's a little 'con,' if you know what I mean!"[66] This is to say, community is a risk. Confidence, trust, or faith is important for solidarity in any community, but this can easily be abused. Both prefixes con- and com- in confidence and community imply togetherness, 'withness.' But the con in confidence, the idea that the foundation of community is built around trust, faith, or fidelity can just as easily be the con of the confidence-man, the one who abuses that trust and faith in others. At another point in the conversation, West remarks that, as a Christian, he is "radically unhoused" by Melville's text, and that "Melville pushes a Christian like me up against the wall."[67] As West says:

> Yes, for the Christian 'He is risen, hallelujah, He is risen.' But there are still children in the gutter, eating garbage . . . So we Christians, who have the audacity to say that the seemingly weakest force on earth - love - will ultimately transform a world of hatred and bigotry and cruelty and

[65] In the epilogue to *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, Halttunen describes the transition from deploring the deceptive practices of the confidence-man to actually valorizing skills in charm and manipulation in postbellum corporate America: "The major reason for the confidence man's disappearance from advice literature was the growing acceptance of the idea that the young American on the make had to become a kind of confidence man himself in order to succeed" (Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 205).

[66] Cornel West and D. Graham Burnett, "Metaphysics, Money & the Messiah: A Conversation about Melville's '*The Confidence-Man*,'" *Daedalus* 136, no. 4 (2007): 105.

[67] West, "Metaphysics, Money & the Messiah," 111, 114.

> xenophobia and domination and oppression, we also seem to make the best haters! And then, on top of that, here comes Melville, saying, 'But anyway, what difference does the practical part make? Since y'all are just enacting a masquerade anyway, with various kinds of masks that hide the incongruity and the dubitability of this set of illusions that you call the Christian story.[68]

For West, and perhaps for any Christian reading Melville's text, what is the point of faith, hope, and love, when it is all just a masquerade? For Gadamer scholars reading *The Confidence-Man*, what is the point of affirming the hermeneutic virtues in a world of hypocrisy and deceit? What is the point of discovering new solidarities in a world only interested in a dangerous kind of pseudo-solidarity? If Melville in any way pushes Gadamer up against a wall, it is to say that despite the good intentions behind the call for openness, trust, good will, and friendship, it may all just turn into another masquerade in a world marked by insincerity, iniquity, and alienation. Perhaps even more disconcerting, such appeals may turn out to be another confidence game carried on and propagated by those who attempt to gain your trust with appeals to charity and humanity, and who are all the while picking your pocket in a dark corner of a steamboat.

Conclusion—Revising and Adding to the Hermeneutic Virtues

In conversation with Carsten Dutt, Gadamer claims that in affirming a philosophy of "rational self-responsibility," we must "find the paths ourselves: the paths of solidarity and of reaching understandings. Among the tasks of politics today, I think a top priority should be to make us more generally aware of our deep solidarities."[69] In referring to various global crises, such as atomic energy and immigration, Gadamer compares our situation, of all things, to being thrown together on a rowboat: "I am convinced that our thinking today with the framework not only of the nation-state but also of Europe is proving to be outdated. Isolation from the rest of the world is no longer possible. Humanity today is sitting in a rowboat, as it were, and we must steer this boat in such a way that we do not all crash into the rocks."[70] Yet how would an individual on board the *Fidèle* take up this project? As Georgia Warnke notes, many of

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[68] West, "Metaphysics, Money & the Messiah, 111, 113-114.
[69] Hans-Georg Gadamer. *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, ed. and trans. Richard E. Palmer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 80.
[70] Gadamer, *Gadamer in Conversation*, 81.

Gadamer's own examples of a community discovering solidarities occur as a reaction to a traumatic and life-threatening event, such as war or military invasion.[71] Yet the dangerous conditions on Melville's steamboat are not as obvious. The sophistry is subtle and all hypocrisy, insincerity, and mendacity inherent to Melville's community remain largely hidden under a veneer of virtue and appeals to our common humanity. If the rowboat (or steamboat) of humanity we all find ourselves in today is really a ship of fools,[72] will we even be able to catch sight of the rocks we are about to crash into?

This tension that Melville's text raises in Gadamer's notion of solidarity is one that requires a few reflections. At the outset, it would not be controversial to claim that the hermeneutic virtues have certain limitations. For instance, one's openness and good will in a conversation is not warranted if the other is exhibiting violent, aggressive, or otherwise extreme behavior. However, how is something like trust, good will, and openness supposed to work with those who are subtle deceivers or sophists of a high caliber, who play and prey on the very claims for confidence and faith in our fellow human beings? First, I think it necessitates a rethinking of the hermeneutic virtues. For instance, what would *phronesis* look like within a community rife with distrust and suspicion, or without the proper character traits? For Aristotle, to properly develop the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom, one first needs to cultivate the moral virtues at a young age. Moral virtues allow one to have the proper desire to pursue a virtuous end, while practical wisdom allows one to deliberate about the virtuous action (the virtuous mean between two extremes) to achieve this end. Yet this implies a community in which a virtuous education is not only encouraged but is actually successful.

However, suppose that an individual or a series of individuals can acquire practical wisdom in a less than ideal or even morally corrupt community. What kind of 'good' judgment would such an individual prescribe? Here, I think, is the first frustrating insight that *The Confidence-Man* brings to our attention about Gadamerian solidarity: In a corrupt community, the only good judgment practical wisdom can dictate for us is precisely not to act at all. It means recognizing that there may be no

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[71] Warnke, "Solidarity and Tradition in Gadamer's Hermeneutics," 21.

[72] The wooden legged man in chapter three at one point admonishes the other passengers for their inability to see the confidence-game being played upon them: "'You fools!' cried he with the wooden leg, writhing himself loose and inflamedly turning upon the throng; 'you flock of fools, under this captain of fools, in this ship of fools!'" (Melville, *The Confidence-Man*, 15). Melville is probably referring to the *Ship of Fools* painting by Hieronymus Bosch and the 1492 book of the same name by Sebastian Brant (*Das Narrenschiff*). Yet the image or allegory of a ship of fools goes back to Book VI of Plato's *Republic*, in which Socrates and his interlocuters discuss the many obstacles in the way of a true captain or philosopher king to emerge and be recognized as such by the community.

right thing to do, no right way, no right time, and no right person in the contemporary situation. While it might not sound like a hermeneutic gesture, sometimes the good will and circumstances necessary for a genuine conversation are not available, and maybe it is just a waiting game. Solidarity, according to Gadamer, is not something one can manufacture, fabricate, or force. In fact, this is precisely Gadamer's insight about conversation as the model of hermeneutic experience and the event of understanding. No one can force a conversation or singlehandedly will it into existence. Instead, "it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it . . . the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led."[73] Solidarity is not a solidarity of one. In a community of corruption and hypocrisy, without others willing to match our good will, one's comprehensive knowledge of context might reveal that one is simply hamstrung to act in any productive manner towards solidarity with others.[74]

While part of the frustration in this notion of practical wisdom is its apparent passivity in the face of corruption, this should not imply an inherent laziness or complacency in Gadamerian solidarity. Insofar as one encounters the liar, the cheat, the gaslighter, or the confidence-man in his or her many forms, one should attempt to bring such dishonesty into the light. There is precedence in many of Gadamer's works which call for the strengthening of one's individual judgment and critical capacities.[75] This, I think, calls for the cultivation of vigilance. Not only should one remain vigilant in withstanding and exposing mendacity and falsification, but vigilance to remain ever attentive to the possibility of a new genuine dialogue partner or new friend to emerge. This kind of vigilance means remaining wakeful with open eyes for the Other to come into view. It means to hold vigil, in the sense of holding on to and holding open the flame of solidarity for others to see from a distance, inviting others to discover solidarities together.

However, in Melville's world of confidence-men and moral masquerading, how is one supposed to maintain this kind of vigilance and hope for others to affirm solidarity, while also avoiding the pitfalls of cynicism and suspicion? Solidarity

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[73] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 401.

[74] This point raises a set of obvious epistemological concerns about self-deception and about how one knows they are in fact the 'one' or one of the few who can not only identify the corruption at hand but are also themselves virtuous and capable of affirming solidarity in a corrupt community. Unfortunately, properly addressing this issue is beyond the scope of this essay.

[75] See, for instance, "Culture and Media," "What is Practice?," and Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Limitations of the Expert," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History*, ed. Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson, transl. Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 181-192.

ultimately requires two or more individuals to come together in trust, friendship, and good will, which ultimately requires a certain amount of risk. This risk is at least twofold. First, and most obviously, one risks being taken advantage of by others. The offering of trust, friendship, and good will can easily be exploited by many subtle operators and institutions who have no qualms about treating others as mere means to their self-interested ends. Second, as Foster indicates, there is a real risk in accepting the naïve Panglossian position of living in the best of all possible worlds in modern (or contemporary) America. This is to say, in the spirit of solidarity and affirming the hermeneutic virtues, one might end up deceiving themselves about the world they live in, which is either incapable or has no interest in reciprocating one's hermeneutic gestures. This, in turn, may lead to actively ignoring or making excuses for the dishonesty and hypocrisy of others. Ideally, proper vigilance would keep one from accepting such a deception or distortion of reality, but it remains unclear how one is supposed to maintain this virtuous balance between false hope and dangerous gullibility on the one hand, and undue suspicion and cynicism on the other hand.

Lastly, *The Confidence-Man* places the Melvillian Drummond light on one of the most fundamental tensions within Gadamerian solidarity, namely, that the discovering and affirming of solidarities is not something one can coerce, manipulate, or force others into doing. Dostal's work not only emphasizes the role of good will in Gadamer's notion of solidarity, but in his recent book, he also details the often-overlooked influence of Immanuel Kant's practical philosophy on Gadamer's hermeneutics.[76] We should likewise here refer to Kant and his notion of what it means for a rational being to act with a good will as it relates to Gadamerian solidarity. For Kant, having a good will means that one acts from one's duty to the moral law. As an act of the will, this means that whether one acts from one's *a priori* duty or from *a posteriori* inclinations is a matter of one's free choice of the will. Crucial to having a good will means that one has to take it up for him or herself. Furthermore, attempting to coerce or manipulate another rational being into having a good will, especially through any form of dishonesty, would be a violation of the autonomy of that rational being, and means that such an individual engaging in this deception is likewise not acting with a good will.

While Gadamer is not a strict Kantian by any means, Gadamerian solidarity functions in a similar fashion. To bring about a world in which we are all attempting to discover and affirm already existing, but perhaps hidden, solidarities means that

[76] See Dostal, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 8-54. This chapter is entitled: "Gadamer's Ambivalence toward the Enlightenment Project."

each individual ultimately has to choose to do this on their own. One might provide arguments and at best attempt to persuade others to take solidarity seriously, but it is not something one can force, manipulate, strongarm, or coerce others into. Furthermore, persuasion cannot be achieved through dishonest means, as this would not be in the spirit of good will, trust, openness, and friendship. Especially if solidarity fundamentally means a trust in language, then forms of dishonesty and duplicity are a basic violation of this trust. This would be the exact opposite of caring for and cultivating the linguistic possibilities for understanding. To put it simply, one cannot run a confidence game on others in order to bring about solidarity in the world. One masquerade cannot be replaced by another masquerade, as West notes in his interview, "Once you let loose a lie in the world, it can easily take on a life and logic of its own. So that it may initially have been sustaining or whatnot, but the canker works gradually. The danger is that lies can become habit-forming. That's part of what Melville is saying here too you see?"[77] Despite all the tensions and difficulties in his notion of solidarity, Gadamer would wholeheartedly agree with this. Whether it is the duplicitous world of Melville's America aboard the *Fidèle*, Gadamer's modern world of alienating bureaucracy and instrumental rationality, or our own issues with deception and dishonesty in the twenty-first century, discovering and affirming solidarity with each other cannot come at the sacrifice of honesty, good will, and hermeneutic virtue.

[77] West, "Metaphysics, Money & the Messiah," 112.