# JOURNAL OF FORMAL AXIOLOGY: THEORY AND PRACTICE

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"I thought to myself, if evil can be organized so efficiently [by the Nazis] why cannot good? Is there any reason for efficiency to be monopolized by the forces for evil in the world? Why have good people in history never seemed to have had as much power as bad people? I decided I would try to find out why and devote my life to doing something about it."
Robert S. Hartman

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# THEORY AND PRACTICE



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# The Journal of Formal Axiology: Theory and Practice
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## *Memorial Tributes to David Mefford*



**A SUGGESTED TOPIC FOR 2015:** This Journal does not usually suggest topics for its issues, but we hope that our readers will consider and perhaps write something to be considered for possible publication in our 2015 issue on the following issue. First, read the quote from Hartman on this and every front cover. Then consider this question: "WHY is Evil Easier to Organize than Good?" Hartman clearly assumed THAT it is, but what explains this? Of course, articles on other axiological topics will also be considered. Please try to meet the "official" due date for articles, which is March 1, 2015.

# THE INTENTIONS OF AXIOLOGICAL INTERPRETERS

**Clifford G. Hurst**

"Every interpretation is the product of a schema of explanation…" (Natanson, 1973, 17)

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## Abstract

Something is generally missing from our practice of interpreting the Hartman Value Profile. What is missing is acknowledgement of the prejudices we bring to the very act of interpretation. In this essay, I seek to build upon C. Stephen Byrum's description of axiological hermeneutics by proposing that we follow Hans-Georg Gadamer's advice and acknowledge our own mental horizons. We can do this by foregrounding the prejudices inherent in our intentions as we practice this work of interpreting profiles. I describe four prejudices that are inherent in the intentions of axiological practitioners and one prejudice that is inherent in our own value structures. I call on us all to become deliberately aware of the limitations in each of those prejudices as we do our work. By situating this recommendation within recent discourses regarding the phenomenological turn in hermeneutics, I conclude by positing that this practice suffices to explain the same phenomena that Doug Lawrence described as being a fourth dimension of axiology (2013, 39-54).

## What We Overlook

In the pages of this Journal, in debates both formal and informal at our annual conferences, and in workshops leading to credentialing of consultants, coaches, and educators to use the *Hartman Value Profile* (HVP) with their clients, it strikes me that we overlook something important. We generally leave out of our discussions about interpreting the profiles any conscious acknowledgement of the intentions of the axiologist who is doing the interpreting of another's results. This omission limits the value of our interpretations to the recipient and, I believe, causes confusion among us practitioners whenever we meet to discuss our various approaches to interpretation. I propose in this essay that we bring our own intentions to the forefront of every interpretation and that we also bring them to the forefront of every discussion we have with each other regarding various ways to interpret the *Hartman Value Profile*.

We often speak omnisciently about respondents' scores, as though we know the other person better than that person knows himself, because we are formal axiologists. We are the ones who understand the HVP. There is a certain haughtiness to this stance that should make us wary of ourselves.

## Axiological Hermeneutics

Byrum (n.d.) has done a great service to those who interpret HVP scores for a living through his counsel regarding how to counter this tendency towards omniscience. In an undated paper delivered to the annual conference of the RSHI circa 2005, Byrum went to great lengths to describe what he terms axiological hermeneutics. By this he means, it is not the respondents' scores of the HVP, nor is it the written descriptions of those scores provided by various providers of computer-generated reports that provide the real richness of the HVP. It is, rather, according to Byrum's method of axiological hermeneutics, the mutual interpretation of those results as they arise in dialogue between the axiologist and the respondent that yields the greatest richness of interpretation. I agree. My purpose in this essay is to propose that we develop Byrum's method one step beyond what he has prescribed.

I wish to add a prelude to Byrum's methodology. I recommend that—prior to interpreting another person's scores, and prior to discussing among other axiological practitioners how we make meaning out of HVP scores—we reflect first upon the purpose for which we are doing this particular interpretation to begin with. That is, we should reflect upon our intentions. We should also remind ourselves of our own value structures. We ought to acknowledge these horizons or prejudices of the axiological interpreter as a preface to interpretation. I had never paid attention to the need for doing this until Lawrence (2013) wrote of an atmospheric dimension of axiology. He delivered a presentation about his notion of a fourth atmospheric dimension at the 2013 RSHI Annual Conference, after which Niblick gave a presentation about his findings from *The Genius Project*™ (2009) at the same conference. Together, Lawrence and Niblick got me to thinking in ways that have led to this essay. Let me explain my journey.

## Background

When I first began to chew on this matter I believed that it arose in my mind without precedent after our most recent annual conference solely as a consequence of trying to digest the discussions triggered by Lawrence and Niblick. As I dug further into the topic, though, I realized that what I thought was uniquely my personal "Aha!" moment was actually one small part of an ongoing debate in philosophy that is known as the phenomenological turn in hermeneutic thought. Palmer traces the historical development of hermeneutics through the works of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer. According to Palmer, this phenomenological turn reaches its fullest expression in Gadamer. One sentence captures the gist of Palmer's review of hermeneutics, "Interpretation is shaped by the question with which the interpreter approaches his subject" (1969, 66).

To discuss the broader debate in which the current smaller one takes place requires us first to visit the specialized and still-evolving lexicon of hermeneutics as a philosophical discipline. For that purpose, allow me to digress into a description of five terms that Gadamer (1989) uses in explaining phenomenological hermeneutics. These terms are: prejudgments (or prejudice), foregrounding, horizons, situations, and tradition.

## Intention

What I am calling here in my contemporary American idiom the intention of the axiological interpreter, Gadamer refers to as prejudgments. In a single thought, Palmer sums up this idea by citing first Gadamer, then Bultmann:

> 'For this reason the prejudgments of the individual are more than merely his judgments; they are the historical reality of his being'. In short, prejudgments are not something we must or can dispense with; they are the basis of our being able to understand history at all.
>
> Hermeneutically, this principle can be stated as follows: There can be no 'presuppositionless' interpretation' (Palmer, 1969, 182).

## Foregrounding

I next seek to argue for the importance of what Gadamer (1989), describes as foregrounding our own prejudices. This calls for noticing them for what they are (i.e. prejudices), naming them, and keeping them in the front of our mind as we proceed with interpretation. For the benefit of those whose *Hartman Value Profiles* axiologists interpret, such foregrounding ought to be an integral part of our interpretive practice. If we also include this practice of foregrounding of prejudices whenever we discuss amongst ourselves the meaning of HVP reports, we will have greater clarity as to each other's approach to the subject of axiological interpretation.

## Horizons

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (1989) refers analogously to horizons as the mental equivalent of visual horizons. Stand in a tall thick forest and your visual horizon is quite close; you cannot see very far. Climb a mountain to a place above the tree line on a clear day and you enjoy a greatly extended horizon. You can see quite far. Our mental horizons are similarly constrained, not by lines of sight, but by our prejudgments. In Leon Pomeroy's (2005) descriptive phrase, we might say that our mental horizons, as well as those of our clients, are constrained by our habitual evaluative thought patterns. I add only that the interpreters' horizons are also constrained by our intentions—that is, by the purposes for which we are planning to do axiological interpretation of a person's HVP scores.

## Situations

Hermeneutics is most simply defined as the art of the interpretation of texts. Its roots are in Biblical exegesis. But, in the 20th century, with the phenomenological turn, hermeneutists began to expand the definition of text to encompass, first, spoken language; then, symbols in general; and eventually, our perceptions of reality itself. Gadamer (1989) is thinking of this expanded definition when he speaks of situations. For practicing axiologists, the situation at hand is whatever computer-scored and verbally described version of the HVP you are about to interpret. With this concept of situation in mind, let's see how Gadamer expresses the challenge we face as interpreters of the HVP:

> To acquire an awareness of a situation is, however, always a task of peculiar difficulty. The very idea of a situation means that we are not standing outside it and hence are unable to have any objective knowledge of it. We always find ourselves within a situation, and throwing light on it is a task that is never entirely finished….
> We define the concept of 'situation' by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence essential to the concept of situation is the concept of 'horizon.' The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up new horizons, and so forth. Since Nietzsche and Husserl, the word has been used in philosophy to characterize the way in which thought is tied to its finite determinacy, and the way one's range of vision is gradually expanded. A person who has not horizon does not see far enough and hence over-values what is nearest to him. On the other hand, 'to have a horizon' means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it. A person who has an horizon knows the relative significance of everything within this horizon, whether it is near or far, great or small. Similarly, working out the hermeneutical situation means acquiring the right horizon of inquiry for the questions evoked by the encounter with tradition. (Gadamer, 1989, 301-302).

In his final sentence quoted above, Gadamer refers to tradition as an aspect of history. This is because many hermeneutical investigations involve interpreting ancient texts. Today's axiologists are also embedded in our historical traditions extending at least as far back as the life and times of Robert S. Hartman. For purposes of this essay, we can think of tradition to include specifically two matters relating to interpreting the HVP. The first is the reliance of most practitioners upon using whichever written interpretations are provided by our choice of an axiological service provider. We have, each of us, adopted a tradition of interpretation by that very selection. We ought to note the limits of the horizon defined by that choice. Second, it refers to our habitual habit of speaking as if we are capable of objectively interpreting someone else's value capacities via the HVP. It is clear that Gadamer challenges us to figure out what is the right horizon of inquiry that we ought to be bringing to the act of axiological interpretation. I have identified five such horizons. By naming them and foregrounding them, I hope to make visible our own prejudices. I will return to this theme momentarily.

## Prejudices

In contemporary American idiom, "prejudice" is an emotionally loaded word. Yet, the principles of prejudice and judgment play a special role in Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy. He writes, "The recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust" (1989, 272). It was an eye-opener for me to learn from Gadamer that, prior to the Enlightenment, the word prejudice did not bear the negative connotations with which it is saddled today. He writes, "Actually 'prejudice' means a judgment that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been fully examined" (273). Hartman (1967, 112) says much the same thing. He writes that the process of applying systemic concepts to actual things is an act of prejudging them. Doing so is a "model of prejudice."

That is why prejudice is such an important part of phenomenological hermeneutics. Without prejudice, we could not make judgment calls until all the evidence determining a situation has been

fully examined. If we accept the hermeneutical nature of axiological interpretation of the HVP, as advanced by Byrum, this means that all of the evidence will never be fully available. Given that the truth emerges through dialogue, it follows that without prejudgment, we could exercise no judgment at all. We could never interpret anyone's HVP report. Nor could someone even write a computer-generated report of the HVP because the very act of description requires judgment—judgment as to which words or concepts to select for use in our description.

So, prejudice is real. It can't be made to go away. It is a part of life, itself. Accepting this invites the question, what do we do with it? Gadamer's answer: We foreground it. What does this mean? Once again, I'll let Gadamer explain.

> The discovery of the true meaning of a text or work of art is never finished; it is in fact an infinite process…. Foregrounding a prejudice clearly requires suspending its validity for us. For as long as our mind is influenced by a prejudice, we do not consider it a judgment. How then can we foreground it? It is impossible to make ourselves aware of a prejudice while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but only when it is, so to speak, provoked. (1989, 298)

Gadamer continues, "This is why our situation is so difficult. The interpreter doesn't know that he is bringing himself and his own concepts into the interpretation" (1989, 404). The good news is that axiological practitioners can know our own prejudices because we have a metacognitive lens—that of formal axiology itself—by way of which we can foreground our own prejudices.

## The Four Prejudices of Axiological Intentions

In my experience, there are four approaches to axiological interpretation that are commonly practiced today. All of them are valuable. All four are good. By recognizing and foregrounding the prejudices inherent in each, we can bring greater clarity to our work and richer value to our clients when called for.

Here are four ways in which *The Hartman Value Profile* is used by practitioners today. First, it is used in hiring and selection. Second, it is used for professional development within a work context; third, it is used for job matching; and, fourth, it is used for personal development of the respondent. Practitioners who use the HVP in the first three ways tend to be organizational consultants. Although there is some cross-over in my schema here, practitioners who use the HVP for personal development include life coaches, psychotherapists, counselors, and educators. Admittedly, the boundaries separating these four practices are probably more elastic than my schema might indicate. Nonetheless, these four classifications can serve as a starting point for discussion of the horizons inherent in each approach to using the HVP.

## Hiring and Selection

Almost every organizational consultant who uses the HVP uses it, in part, for employee hiring and selection. In this use, the axiological interpreter defines the job conceptually in terms of valuational patterns required by any person who performs the job, as those patterns are measured by the profile. Once this is done—a process known as job benchmarking—then, a job applicant's scores are compared with the demands of that particular job. Clearly, in this application of formal axiology, the person (an intrinsic object), is valued according to a conceptual, or systemic understanding of

the requirements of the job. This is a good thing. In fact, the axiological practitioner working to achieve this purpose can be described axiologically as bringing an $I^S$ intention to his work. This is, as we all know, the sixth highest "good" in axiological ordering. That is why it is a good thing. But, it is not the richest possible use of the profile. A practitioner engaging with a client for this purpose must recognize the limits of the horizon inherent in this application of the HVP—the prejudices inherent in an $I^S$ application, if you will. There are other uses of the HVP that lead to outcomes that are richer in value.

## Executive Coaching

A richer application of the HVP is to use it in service of what is generally known as executive coaching. In this instance, an axiological service provider is hired by an organization to help a particular employee perform better in his or her role in the organization. The focus here is on improving organizational results through growth of the employee. This is a way of evaluating the person (an intrinsic object) in terms of actual performance on the job (an extrinsic form of valuation). The person (I) is being coached to produce better results (E). We can write that in axiological shorthand as $I^E$. It is the fourth highest application of axiological valuation. It is richer in value than the first use we discussed; yet, it is still limited by the horizons and related prejudices inherent in the $I^E$ intentions of the axiological practitioner.

## Job Matching

A higher use, still, of the HVP would be for a practitioner to use it for job matching. In job matching, the nature of the job is modified to fit the strengths of the person doing the work. I have rarely seen this done by organizations in practice, other than in start-ups. But it can be a radically effective way of managing a workforce. It is one that, axiologically speaking, would bring richer value to the organization and to its people than the first two practices already described. In this instance, the job (E) is being evaluated intrinsically in terms of the person (I). We can express this axiologically as $E^I$, which as you know, is the second richest value combination in formal axiology.

This is a practice that W.L. Gore & Associates, now a company of 10,000 employees, has been following since its founding in 1958. There are few job titles at Gore; only associates. When a new associate is hired, he or she is given neither a job description nor a job to do. Rather, he or she is encouraged to take time to explore various projects that need to be done in that part of the organization and figure out, in collaboration with existing associates, where he or she will contribute most, by doing what he or she does best and likes to do most. At that point, a commitment is made with a team of associates, under the guidance of a mentor. Here is a summary of Gore practices in the company's own words:

> How we work at Gore sets us apart. Since Bill Gore founded the company in 1958, Gore has been a team-based, flat lattice organization that fosters personal initiative. There are no traditional organizational charts, no chains of command, nor predetermined channels of communication.
>
> Instead, we communicate directly with each other and are accountable to fellow members of our multi-disciplined teams…. Teams organize around opportunities and leaders emerge. This unique kind of corporate structure has proven to be a significant contributor to associate satisfaction and retention.

> We work hard at maximizing individual potential, maintaining an emphasis on product integrity, and cultivating an environment where creativity can flourish. A fundamental belief in our people and their abilities continues to be the key to our success.
>
> How does all this happen? Associates (not employees) are hired for general work areas. With the guidance of their sponsors (not bosses) and a growing understanding of opportunities and team objectives, associates commit to projects that match their skills. All of this takes place in an environment that combines freedom with cooperation and autonomy with synergy. (W.L. Gore & Associates)

Does it work? Well, according to a case study published by Babson College, "The voluntary turnover rate at Gore was round 5%--one third the average rate in its industry (durable goods) and one-fifth that for private firms of similar size" (Babson, 2012). In addition, Gore was ranked in the top five on the 2013 World's Best Multinational Workplaces list by the *Great Places to Work® Institute*. And it ranked by *Fortune®* magazine as one of the "100 Best Companies to Work For" list in the U.S. for 17 consecutive years. It has been similarly named as a best place to work in France, Germany, Italy, Korea, Sweden, the U.K., and, most recently, China. (W.L. Gore & Associates).

Not only do management practices such as those of W.L. Gore & Associates evoke the second highest application of formal axiology possible, they also represent, as far as I can decipher, the highest good that can be done by a practitioner who is working with the express intent of benefiting the organization.

## Personal Development

There is one final application of the HVP, which potentially generates the richest value of the four methods under discussion. This would, of course, be an application that honors $I^I$. It is an application that values people intrinsically. This, it appears to me, is how the HVP is being used today by clinical psychologists, counselors, life coaches, and educators. This is, to my thinking, the richest application of the HVP by practitioners that is possible. Having used the instrument myself for hiring and selection and as an executive coach, I have come to envy those practitioners whose use of the HVP is first and only to encourage the growth of the person (client) for his or her own sake and not as subordinated to the aims of an organization. Having recently shifted my own career from consulting to college teaching, I look forward to using the HVP in this richer way.

## One Caveat

If you are a life coach, therapist, or educator reading this, don't pat yourself on the back just yet. I must warn you of a possibly slippery slope here. It is very easy—yet wrong—to say that you are using the HVP in this way, when in fact you may be using your role as an expert in one or another system of thought to fit your client or patient into that preconceived notion of what a good outcome of your interpretation should look like. It is quite easy to devolve from an $I^I$ engagement and turn it into an $I^S$ or $I_S$. Hartman warned against this in his autobiography (1994). The psychologist Carl Rogers wrote eloquently of how counselors can avoid such a trap. I strongly recommend Rogers' (1964) article to anyone who practices axiological interpretation of the HVP as part of your practice.

As far as I can identify them, these are the four intentions that underlie current practices of administration and interpretation of the HVP. They are each different. If you make a habit of foregrounding which prejudice you bring to every engagement as a consequence of your intentions, then you will remain aware of the limitations inherent in the horizon that goes with your purpose. If, when we practitioners gather together at our annual conference or at other certification workshops, etc., we are explicit with each other about which intention we are talking about, it seems to me that much misunderstanding can be avoided during our discussions about the application of the HVP to consulting, counseling, and educational practice.

## A Further Horizon

So far I have been focusing on the intentions of the axiological interpreter and how those consciously-held intentions serve as limits to our horizon when interpreting HVP scores. Yet, there remains a fifth horizon of which we also must become cognizant. I refer to the horizon that is defined by the interpreter's own axiological profile.

I have read that psychoanalysts, in order to become licensed, must undergo psychoanalysis themselves. I recommend that those of us who interpret others' HVP scores for a living also ought to undergo axio-analysis or, at least, axiological self-reflection, on a regular basis. When we are interpreting those patterns in others, we must not presume that we are ever entirely free of our own habitual evaluative thought patterns. We are, in Gadamer's terms, prejudiced by our own profiles. We cannot escape this. If this is so, then what should we do? Well, as discussed previously, we should foreground them. This means we regularly bring back to our conscious awareness the patterns of our own profiles. By doing so, we become consciously aware of them and of their effects on our mental horizons.

## What would Hartman Say?

I am not at all certain that Hartman would agree with Gadamer and me. As a student of Husserl, Hartman often wrote of the science of value as providing an objective view of a person's value structure. In the *Manual of Interpretation*, Hartman states: "The test is objective and leaves no room for the exercise of the examiner's intuition" (2006, 43, par. 3.2.1). To the contrary, Gadamer argues that objectivity is neither possible nor desirable.

Hartman was an undergraduate student of Husserl and a contemporary of Gadamer. Gadamer published his landmark Truth and Method in 1960, the year after Hartman published *La Estructure de Valor*, and seven years before Hartman published a revised version in English, entitled The Structure of Value. If Hartman's thinking had been influenced by Gadamer's in those intervening seven years, I expect that he would have mentioned Gadamer in the English version of *The Structure of Value*. He does not. In none of Hartman's books that are published in English can I find reference by Hartman to Gadamer's writing or to Gadamer's point-of-view.

## A Return to my Starting Point

In conclusion, let's return briefly to Lawrence's (2013) concept of a fourth axiological dimension. It is not my purpose here to provide a rebuttal to Lawrence's notion. But it does seem to me that Gadamer's concepts about horizons satisfactorily explain most of what Lawrence is trying to describe when he talks of the atmosphere in which axiological valuations take place. To me, there

does not exist a fourth atmospheric dimension. Rather, there do exist different mental horizons that we practitioners bring to our engagements with our clients, patients, and students. The closer of these horizons arises from our intentions. I have described four of these. There may be others. The farther one arises from our own axiological patterns. The tricky part is to become consciously aware of our prejudices inherent in our horizons through the practice of foregrounding them. By owning up them, we are no longer owned by them. Our interpretive practice will be richer for the effort.

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