In his essay, *Temporality and Alterity: Dimensions of Hermeneutic Distance*, Jay Garfield says, ‘the bottom line, I think is that cross-cultural interaction is not only possible, but imperative. But how does one achieve this in a way that avoids the pitfalls of Orientalism?’ He then goes on to offer several suggestions as to how it is he believes we can engage in intercultural philosophical exchange both fruitfully and what I am taking to be ethically, without repeating many of the mistakes of our Orientalist forebears. Such notions as collegiality, the learning of languages and reciprocity make it onto the list of recommended practices.

In this paper I would like to expand upon Garfield’s discussion of ethics and hermeneutics in the cross-cultural context. I will be arguing not only that once we understand our exchange as taking place between historically situated people or groups of people its ethical dimensions become of urgent significance but also that much of what we need concern ourselves with can be understood in terms of Gadamer’s hermeneutics. In particular, I would like to explore the possibility of the notions of self-critique or reflectivity and reciprocity as providing an adequate framework through which the ethical concerns associated with cross-cultural philosophical exchange can be expressed and manifested. Both of which are concepts foundational to the structure of hermeneutics according to Gadamer.

As with Garfield, I will couch my discussion in terms of Gadamer’s hermeneutics, with the emphasis being on interpretation as a process of understanding as opposed to interpretation as an activity oriented toward the end goal of acquisition of knowledge. The dimension of this praxis upon which I shall be focused will be of an ethical nature. In the broadest possible sense I will be addressing the question of what it is to get it right when engaging in such an intercultural interpretive praxis, where getting it right not only means extraction of truth and meaning from alien literature but also ensuring that our exchange as reading, writing and speaking is conditioned by notions of equality, reciprocity and reflectiveness, for example.

According to Gadamer, interpretation and subsequent understanding is a dynamic and fluid interplay between the interpreter and that which is to be interpreted both conditioned by the historical structures in which they are embedded. That as interpreters we are always temporally located in a relationship to our past as history, present and future entails for Gadamer that we always bring to our acts of interpretation prejudices that mould and inform our interpretations. These prejudices are in their turn conditioned by the history of which they

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are a consequence. Just as we as interpreters are historically embedded so too are all the facets of the alien traditions we encounter. This poses great potential problems for our ability to engage with alien traditions and their philosophical systems. We are left with questions such as is it even possible to understand and work within another tradition given that we are not embedded within the history, language and culture that informs that tradition? I would like to argue in this paper that it can be done, to some degree at least, and what needs concern us at this present moment is not only how it can be done but also how it can be done well.

Following on from Jay Garfield’s discussion in *Temporality and Alterity – Dimensions of Hermeneutic Distance* I will be suggesting that intercultural philosophical exchange ought not be conceived of as merely a relationship between readers, texts and their heritage but rather as a larger humanistic enterprise in which people or groups of people are engaged with one another as readers, writers and speakers. I will argue that once we understand the exchange in such a way what impresses itself upon us immediately is a concern with the more ethical dimensions of our praxis. Namely, how are we to get it right, where getting it right means not only a concern with cogency and clarity of say translational work but also a concern with other dimensions of exchange such as power differentials.

Whilst there is an undoubted richness that characterizes all inter-human interaction, I would like to focus in particular on the notions of reflectivity and reciprocity. According to Gadamer, self-critique is or ought to be the first moment of interpretation, for it is only by understanding the nature of the prejudices carried into our acts of understanding that we are to have any hope of understanding what the object of interpretation has to say for itself. I would like to suggest that not only is such a self-critique essential to our ability to do justice to the material at hand but an open display of willingness to critique our philosophical assumptions could only serve to fortify the relationship between interlocutors of traditions. Reciprocity is likewise an important facet of exchange and I will argue that we need to endeavour to display for example a willingness to engage with the philosophical systems of other traditions in such a way as to be as much students as teachers.

In short, I would like to expand upon Garfield’s presentation of the ethical demands of cross-cultural exchange by suggesting the notions of self-critique and reciprocity as expounded in Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* as candidates for the expression of the ethical dimensions of such an exchange.