

REFORMULATION OF THE CONCEPT OF UNDERSTANDING  
IN HEIDEGGER'S AND GADAMER'S HERMENEUTIC  
THEORIES

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**ABSTRACT****REFORMULATION OF THE CONCEPT OF UNDERSTANDING  
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The goal of the present dissertation is to display the reconstruction of the concept of understanding which has down through the history of philosophy been used as the synonym of knowing. Hence, my main intention is to focus on the Heidegger's and Gadamer's critique of epistemological conception of understanding and their reevaluation of this concept in terms of ontology. Finally, I will try to examine the similarities and dissimilarities between the philosophers and try to call attention to their emphasis on finite and historically conditioned human understanding. To fulfill the task I put forward, I shall apply to early Heidegger's magnum opus *Being and Time* (1927) and Gadamer's most influential book *Truth and Method* (1960).

Keywords: understanding, ontology, epistemology, hermeneutics, phenomenology, tradition, history, subject/object dichotomy, effective-

historical consciousness, fusion of horizons, dialogue, language, prejudice,  
finitude, historicity.

## ÖZ

### HEIDEGGER VE GADAMER'İN HERMENEUTİK TEORİLERİ IŞIĞINDA ANLAMA KAVRAMINI YENİDEN FORMÜLE ETMEK

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Bu çalışmanın amacı, felsefe tarihi boyunca bilme kavramı ile eşdeğer olduğu düşünülmüş olan anlama kavramını yeniden yapılandırmaktır. Bu nedenle, temel niyetim, Heidegger ve Gadamer'in epistemolojik terimlerle düşünülen anlama kavramına getirmiş oldukları eleştiriler ile filozofların bu kavramı ontolojik bir bakış açısı uyarınca nasıl yeniden kurdukları üzerine odaklanmaktır. Son kısımda ise filozofların benzeyen ve benzemeyen yönlerini açığa çıkarmaya ve en büyük benzerlik olarak insanın anlama yetisinin temelde sınırlı ve tarihsel olarak koşullandırılmış olduğu sonucuna vardıkları gerçeğine dikkat çekmeye çalışacağım. Bu amacı gerçekleştirmek için Heidegger'in erken dönemine ait baş yapıtı *Varlık ve Zaman* (1927) ile Gadamer'in en geniş kapsamlı ve en etkili kitabı *Doğruluk ve Yöntem'e* (1960) başvuracağım.

Anahtar Kelimeler: anlama, ontoloji, epistemoloji, hermeneutik, fenomenoloji, gelenek, tarih, özne/nesne ayrımı, tarihsel bilinç, ufukların kesişimi, diyalog, dil, önyargı, sonluluk, tarihsellik.

To My Parents

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I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original in this work.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of the present dissertation is to study the problem of “understanding” and “interpretation” in Heideggerian and Gadamerian philosophies and the revolutionary effect they have on 20<sup>th</sup> century hermeneutics. To go about my task, I am planning to follow Heidegger’s magnum opus *Being and Time* and Gadamer’s most important work *Truth and Method*, both of which has a considerable affect on the new spirit of philosophy which is released from the way of thinking offered by Cartesian methodology. Although the picture, which I will put forward, seems to be limited to the concept of “understanding” (*Verstehen*) as it is used in human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) and textual interpretation, it is in fact related with the most comprehensive conception of *Being-in-the-world*, the term, which is used by Heidegger to reify his answer to the ontological question “What is Being?” From this perspective, which can be accepted as the innovation of Heidegger, the question “What is understanding?” will be tried to be replied in terms of ontology, rather than epistemology.

On the other hand, in this thesis, by studying the problem of understanding, I hope to display how the concept in question has been repeatedly robbed of its practical aspect down through the history of

philosophy, especially in the modern era commenced by Descartes. For me, by the critique he directed to traditional thought established on subject/object schema, Heidegger deserves to be put in the focus of our attention, for he can be accepted as the first one who relegates the understanding, as in the form of knowing, grasping, etc. from the throne it is seated to mere practice. Seen from this perspective, present work can be seen as the redemption of the corrupted concept *practice* as well. This perspective, whose frame is contrasted especially by Gadamer, is an ontological paradigm in which “doing something” and “understanding and interpreting what is done” are not two different occupations.

So, I can recapitulate the goal of the present work as characterization of two important philosophers’ attempt to reach a meta-position, which they both think to be *beyond* “objectivism” and “relativism”. Why is this so? What does it mean to overcome both objectivism and relativism? Is there a third alternative? These are the questions which will be replied in this dissertation by emphasizing the innovations of early Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s way of thoughts.

Throughout this work, I will use the term “objective” as the adjective which qualifies the disinterested and theoretical standpoint from which the true knowledge of what is investigated is envisaged to be attained. This claim to objectivity can be thought to be stemming from Plato’s *ideas* and consummated in scientific endeavors. That which is characteristic to Platonic philosophy, i.e., to denigrate the world in which we live as the corrupting factor which prevents us from seeing the things in their ideal forms, has

enduring effects on the progress of philosophy after him. This derogatory conception of the world in which we live our everyday lives is recurred in Descartes' methodological approach, in which the aim of the philosopher is determined to put into parenthesis this everydayness in order to grasp the reality itself. Leaning on the contention that mathematics, as the apriori content of our thinking, provides us with the true knowledge of things outside us, Descartes became the most prominent representative of the ideal of "objectivity". Hence, with Descartes, to purge the distorting content issuing from the commonsensical beliefs and superstitions away from the reason and clarify our minds became the most important task of philosophy. Indeed, what is implied by Cartesianism is that, there is a harmony between the mathematical construction of mind and the order which makes up the things, viz., *nature*. Therefore, the meaning of the concept "understanding" turns out to be *reflecting* the appearances transmitted by the perceptions on the apriori/mathematical content of human reason.

This ideal of objectivity can be said to have been the guide of thought during Enlightenment; even if there appeared several perspectives asserting how the true knowledge of things can be attained, the qualification of truth remained to be characterized based on the disinterested judgment which was separated from the world by the Cartesian move of body/mind dualism. Thus, it can easily be claimed that, the philosophical debates during the modern times, including the philosophical movements like German Idealism and Romanticism, the focus of the problems has been about how to construct a "subject" in order that it can reflect the outer world which was labeled as

“object”. As it is widely accepted, one of the most complicated metaphysical approaches to delineate a picture of subject and to investigate how knowledge of nature is possible was developed by Kant. For me, Kant is especially important because in his philosophy, the subject/object dichotomy is highly prominent. His well prepared conception of subject insulated from the world in which it lives is the measure of objectivity we can find in his first Critique. Here, we can attest to the fact that objectivity of a piece of knowledge concerning nature issues from the *communicability* of it among the people, and the source of this communicability is the logical/structural identity of human mind which processes the intuitions in the same way if it is not perverted by the daily/superficial content which presses upon it.

Besides all these attempts that made the *cognition* of the nature the main theme, another problematic that went along with it was about how to reach the objective knowledge when the object of knowledge turns out to be human beings, and the products they produced. In fact, this problem has long been studied under the rubric of *hermeneutics*. Although it has for a long time been occupied with as in the form of biblical interpretation and the interpretation of the ancient texts handed down to us, hermeneutics couldn't become a prominent intellectual occupation until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Two of the most important figures who play a considerable role in shaping hermeneutics as the *theory of interpretation* are Schleiermacher and Dilthey. Schleiermacher is the one who expands the region of hermeneutics from the biblical and ancient texts to *all* texts, including law, literature, historiography, etc. It is especially with Schleiermacher that hermeneutics

become rather a psychological investigation, in the framework of which the task of the interpreter is determined as putting himself in the place of the author of a text, actor of an historical era, etc. in order that the interpretive process is fulfilled. For Schleiermacher, the scientific conception of “thing itself” can be said to be substituted with the “intention of the actor, author, etc.” Where the main target of natural sciences is the “thing itself” not to be corrupted by the presuppositions, superstitions, beliefs, etc. of the observer, the same is hold true for the interpretive theory as well; i.e., to maintain the selfsameness of the thing itself, say, a literary text, while interpreting it. Thus, we can say of Schleiermacher that, although the subject matter he tackles is different from the natural sciences’, his conception of “object” is alike with scientific conception, so is the target of investigation; to *re-construct* the object in the subject, without disrupting the *essence* of it.

Dilthey, as a member of the German Historical School and the writer of the biography of Schleiermacher, stresses the historical aspect of understanding process in opposition to the psychological overtone emphasized by his predecessor. Dilthey charges Schleiermacher and Historical School with ignoring the historical dimension of understanding. Full understanding cannot be realized by self-endangering as claimed by Ranke; nor is it possible to understand the writer ‘more than he understands himself’ as articulated by Schleiermacher. Meaning can only be extracted from history only by researching the general atmosphere of the age. Dilthey calls this



general atmosphere as “mind-affected world” or “life”.<sup>1</sup> Only in so far as we can understand the conditions of life of the era we investigate, we can succeed in comprehending the inner logic of events. Understanding is not only based on philology and psychology as is imagined by Schleiermacher; the historical aspect of it is also crucial.

We do not carry the meaning of the world into life. We are open to the possibility that meaning and significance arise only in man and history, not in the isolated individual but in man as a historical being. For man is something historical.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, Dilthey agrees with Schleiermacher in that, the nature of understanding in human sciences, historical science, literature, etc. is based on *hermeneutical circle*.

We must construct the whole from its parts and, yet, the whole must contain the reason for the meaning given to the part and the place assigned to it. We have already seen that the mainspring of historical work is the mutual interdependence of conclusions reached, in this case interdependence of whole and part. History must teach what life is; yet, because it is the course of time, history is dependent of life and derives its content from it.<sup>3</sup>

What we can testify to from the paragraph quoted above is of a great importance both for Heidegger and Gadamer, because it declares the fact that understanding the human products is an infinite process between the

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<sup>1</sup> See Dilthey, Wilhelm. 1961. *Meaning in History: W.Dilthey's Thought's on History and Society*. Ed. and Int. by H.P.Rickman. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. p.120, where he argues “It is the medium in which the understanding of other people and their expressions take place. For everything in which the mind objectified itself contains something held in common by the I and the Thou.”

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 168.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.74.

whole – life – and the part – history. What we learn about history expands our knowledge about life, and what we experience during our lifetime makes easier for us to understand the historical texts we tackle. This back and forth movement between the parts and whole implies the fact that, understanding the historical texts is not established on a scientific schema by putting the individual cases under the predetermined universals; instead, these universals are reproduced in every act of understanding and interpretation.

This characterization of understanding put forward first of all by Schleiermacher, and then developed by Dilthey as in the form of hermeneutic circle can be said to have inspired the conception of *finitude* of human beings in both Heidegger and Gadamer. But this inspiration does not prevent us from seeing the ontological characterization of Heidegger and Gadamer quite apart from the methodological endeavor of traditional hermeneutics. Why is this so?<sup>4</sup>

In the next three chapters, when characterizing Heidegger's and Gadamer's conceptions of understanding, I will have replied this question by emphasizing the *finite/hermeneutical situation* of human beings and the historical understanding horizons of them. During the next three chapters,

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Ermarth distinguishes what he calls "radical hermeneutics" of Heidegger and Gadamer from "traditional hermeneutics" of Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Historical School by propounding three reasons: 1. Where the traditional hermeneutics extends the area of its interest from canonical texts to *all* texts, radical hermeneutics extends it to universal human being. Hence, whereas the former is epistemological, the latter is ontological. 2. Where the traditional hermeneutics sees the textual expressions expressions of subjective states of mind, the latter finds it superficial. In other words, the traditional categories of subject/object, inner/outer, self/world are rejected by the radicals. 3. Where the former sees the interpretive process as the re-creation of the meanings intended, the latter emphasizes the event character of interpretation and understanding. For them, understanding *happens* in the encounter between past and present. For more information, see Ermarth, Michael. 1981. The Transformation of Hermeneutics: 19<sup>th</sup> Century Ancients and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Moderns. In *Monist* (Vol.64), pp.175-177.

*Verstehen* (understanding) will be characterized as an ontological term; that is, an aspect of *Being-in-the-world* in the section ascribed to Heidegger, and *Wirkungsgeschichtliche Bewusstsein* (historically affected consciousness) in the section allotted to Gadamer. In the fourth chapter, by including the language into focus of our problem, I will try to deepen the ontological dimension of the concept “understanding”. As an overall thesis, in this work, my aim will be to display the selfless character of understanding; my contention will be that, understanding is not a self-conscious project as it is envisaged by traditional metaphysics, but it is a highly complicated *event* (“*Ereignis*”), which plays itself out through us.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **HEIDEGGER'S ONTOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF "UNDERSTANDING"**

#### **2.1. Heidegger's Critique of Traditional Ontology**

One of the reasons Heidegger can be accepted as one of the most important philosophers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is his radical critique of traditional ways of thinking. He objected to the subject/object schema of Cartesianism and the epistemology based on it. A pupil of Husserl the father of phenomenology, Heidegger redefined phenomenology "letting things appear as they are" instead trying, as natural scientists did, to apply scientific categories to what they see. In this sense, phenomenological ontology must be the prior occupation of philosophy. But for Heidegger, all the ontologies from Plato to Husserl are unsuccessful to give an answer to the question of Being. He called for a more fundamental ontology starting not with the consciousness of a person looking out on a world of objects but with the "Being" of a human being in a world, embedded in a history, a language, and with an open horizon of personal possibilities.

Cartesian thought, as it is known, starts with *ego cogito* [I think]. According to this view, two kinds of substance can be acknowledged: *mind* — which thinks and knows — and *body* — which is thought and known. Ontologically, these are two kinds of being: mind and matter. According to Descartes, if the distorting factors like desires, sensations, wishes and the passions can be overcome and put aside by the mind which thinks, the objects which surround it in the surrounding outer world will be known by it *clearly* and *distinctly*. That is to say, insofar as the “I” which thinks is liberated from the distorting contents of mind, the objects will be able to be reflected in that mind. Descartes calls these pictures that are reflected in a pure mind as *ideas*. The purer this mind is the clearer and more distinct these ideas become.

Descartes was a mathematician as well as a philosopher. He invented the calculus, for instance. So another important aspect of Descartes' philosophy, which has supported all kinds of subjectivism in the modern thought, is his trust in mathematics. It is nearly always mathematical ideas that are the most clear and distinct. Since he sees the structure of mind mathematical or, in other words, the mathematical knowledge as *a priori* — i.e., innate — Descartes can also be accepted as one of the most important thinkers with Galileo who inspired the modern technological-scientific efforts. Because these scientific efforts work always with the same instrument to investigate nature as their object: “mathematical physics”. So, the main idea that should be deduced from this observation is the fact that, under the influence of Descartes, an indubitable harmony between the “subject” and its

“object” is widely assumed even today. In other words, this is to claim, with Cartesianism, that if the knowledge of nature is attainable by using a priori mathematical content of mind, the measure of “truth” can only be found in the “correspondence” between the content of an assertion due to the outer world, and the outer world itself. This is called “correspondence theory of truth” by Heidegger.<sup>5</sup> It is clear from the summary I tried to outline so far, that if the inhibiting effects of consciousness close off the pure mathematical base structure of mind, the ideas, which belong to the objects, will not be capable of reflecting them; and the judgments due to these objects will not be “true”.

Despite their effort to overcome the Cartesianism which tries to determine the object of knowledge primarily as nature that must be understood by using mathematics, Schleiermacher and Dilthey sees their subject matter, viz. human beings, also from within this Cartesian perspective, although they realized that the object of so called “human sciences” [*Geisteswissenschaften*] is as same as the subject of investigation. Because neither Schleiermacher nor Dilthey could succeed in eluding the subject/object dichotomy which is dominant in Western thought since Descartes. Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics, though dialogical, is not an appropriate theory so as to give a method in interpreting the human writings because of the psychological factors it emphasizes. For him, to understand is to communicate with the soul of the writer, the “dark thou.” Nor can it be claimed that Dilthey is more successful than his predecessor in

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<sup>5</sup> Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Trans. By John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper and Row. (Original work published in 1927 under the title *Sein und Zeit*). p., 257. Hereafter, BT.

making up a hermeneutical theory, although his holistic concept of “life” is found to be more inspiring by Heidegger. Both Schleiermacher’s portrait of interpretive process which consists of a dialectics between the “objective” and “psychological” sides of the interpreter and Dilthey’s attempt to understand “life” by using the historical categories, which are similar to Kantian categories, can be charged of continuing the same dichotomy between a well constructed subject, equipped with a self-sufficient consciousness, and an object which stands before that subject. As we have noted, these two philosophers also ignore the “question of Being” as most of the philosophers have done during the history of philosophy, although they sometimes came nearer the main problem.

Although he affirms, like Husserl, that phenomenology must be the only method to disclose the nature of objects of all sciences, metaphysics, and even ontologies, Heidegger does not agree with his predecessor in that “transcendental subjectivity” is the ultimate locus in which the phenomenological “essences” can be discovered. For him, the “thing itself” in Husserl’s phenomenological watchword “*Zu den Sachen Selbst*” (To the things themselves!) suffers from the same defect as all the philosophical systems down through the history of philosophy did. Heidegger diagnoses the same Cartesian dichotomy here, since for Husserl, it becomes possible to reflect the objects in their essential forms for consciousness, if the distorting factors in our everyday world can be bracketed out. Husserl asserts, especially in his late work, *The Crisis in European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936, published 1954, translated into

*English 1970*), that there is a shared life-world (*Lebenswelt*) which underlies all the human activities such as natural and human sciences, but he believes that by putting into brackets all the theoretical point of views such as mathematics, method of natural sciences etc., we could let the life-world appear with the essences it consists of to the sight of our consciousness. Heidegger appreciates the idea of a life-world which constitutes the background of common understanding of all human beings, but he rejects the idea that this world is easily made open to our sight by phenomenology. It is on this very point that Heidegger runs counter to Husserl and traditional philosophy; since, for Heidegger, the so called conscious subject is no longer assumed to be aware of the undercurrent moves which direct him/her during his/her life time; his/her self-reflective capacity is thought to be *conditioned* by the environment it deals with; he/she becomes part of a holistic structure which Heidegger calls "world"; he/she becomes *Dasein*.

After this brief explanation of Heidegger's critique, it is now easy to realize that the focus of his problem is with the concept of "understanding" which has insistently been characterized as a mere cognitive act. It would not be wrong to contend that, what Heidegger wants to uproot in order to rehabilitate the concept of "understanding" as a *cognitive faculty* is this separation between the self-transparent subject and the object, which is open to be fully reflected in the consciousness of this subject. Heidegger thinks that this model is not sufficient to understand what "understanding" is, because it presupposes unquestioningly a detached ground for the subject,



from which all the objectifications due to the outer world and the subject itself can be accepted as the “rock bottom”, behind which there is nothing.

In order to apprehend why Heidegger wants to deconstruct this ontology, which assumes two separated substances as “body” (object) and “mind” (subject), it is enough to find out that, for him, this indifferent position which is to be taken to gain objective knowledge must be replaced with our understanding as it operates in our “everyday lives”, if we want to explain the human “experience” of being and life conveniently by the help of a *fundamental ontology*. In this point, from the point of view of traditional ontology, our everyday experiences [*Erfahrungen*] can and must be rehabilitated by the help of a methodological approach, if the so called objective knowledge is desired to be attained. Since this epistemic attitude tacitly presupposes that the objects which surround us in our environment can only be known or understood by being abstracted and objectified in an atemporal manner, it becomes impossible *legally* to mention different aspects of them under different conditions in our everyday manner. Here, it should be helpful to remember that, for both Descartes and Husserl, to attain the objective knowledge of the outer world or the knowledge of the “essences” respectively, the primary condition that must be satisfied is to put into parenthesis the distorting factors of our daily lives. However, according to Heidegger, it is this *everydayness* that is being neglected for the sake of objective knowledge, which provides human beings with the primary conditions of every kind of understanding. His magnum opus *Being and Time* can be accepted as a project which takes over the task of analyzing this

everydayness, whose sense is similar to that which is called *Being-in-the-world of Dasein* and the entities surrounding it.

## **2.2. Ontological Turn**

### **2.2.1. Revision of “Object”**

In traditional philosophy, the “object of understanding” is something that has its being “in-itself” standing over against the understanding mind, which can only interpret what it receives. This in-itself generally implies three different aspects of object: (1) that the object has a substance, which it has in common with the other objects, (2) that this substantial structure has its own accidents which differentiates it from the other objects of another kind, (3) that this object, which has a substance and bundle of properties around this substance is analyzable in an objective manner, when it is isolated from the structure to which it belongs and from the human interests to which it is subjected. For Cartesian philosophy, this in-itself is a retention, when the object of theoretical interest is freed from the human interests of every kind; by this move, Cartesianism shows us the right ground on which we must stand, if we want to have a true knowledge only about the surrounding entities in our world whose character is other than that of mind. Besides, different aspects or properties of an object can be searched by isolating this object from the others, or by isolating the properties of interest from its other properties; this is the method of analyzing – breaking something down to its parts. These isolated parts are put together again by *synthesis*. After all

these steps are rounded out, a clear and distinct idea of an object is taken hold of, according to Descartes.<sup>6</sup>

According to Heidegger, this epistemic approach of Cartesianism has had a great influence in various endeavors which try to find the answer to the question “What is Being?”, although he also claims that, this idea of isolated Being firstly appeared in Greek ontology. What Descartes can be charged with, then, is the fact that, he is the first one who converts Being into “object”. Heidegger calls this de-contextualized object of theoretical interest the *present-at-hand*.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, presence-at-hand cannot be understood as a vulgar term; instead, it is one of the three different ways of disclosing those whose character is other than that of *Dasein* -the term Heidegger uses in order to refer to human beings in terms of their Being. Heidegger thinks that *Dasein* encounters the entities which surround it in its environment not in a theoretical, but in a circumspective manner; that is to say, *Dasein* does not reflect upon the discriminating properties of these entities and just look at them; instead, it uses them for this purpose or that purpose; viz., in its everyday dealings, *Dasein* manipulates some item of equipment. And the kind of being these tools have is what Heidegger calls *readiness-to-hand*.<sup>8</sup> What should be accepted as the crux due to the difference between what is

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<sup>6</sup> Guignon, Charles B. 1994. *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. pp. 20-29. Hereafter, HPK.

<sup>7</sup> BT 79.

<sup>8</sup> BT 98.

present-at-hand and ready-to hand, then is the fact that, whereas present-at-hand has static, categorical-formal properties, what ready-to-hand has:

...are not properties at all, if the ontological structure designated by the term 'property' is that of some definite character which it is possible for Things [present-at-hand] to possess... Anything ready-to-hand, at worst, appropriate for some purposes and inappropriate for others...<sup>9</sup>

This quotation seems not to be informing us very much about the nature of the ready-to-hand, but it should be remembered that this investigation is not an ontical one, which gropes for some concrete properties of an object which must be subsumed under an absolute formal-categorical schema in order to be comprehended, but an ontological one, which tries to disclose the being of understanding in Dasein's encounter with the entities in its environment. So, one of the most important aspects of the so called ontological turn is the fact that, here, the investigation is not of the *whatness* of the present-at-hand-in-itself at all, but the *howness* of Dasein's encounter with its environment in its everyday dealings. In this point, it is obvious that Heidegger's conception of "in-itself" is completely different from the traditional conception. "As long as we take our orientation primarily and exclusively from the present-at-hand, the 'in-itself' can by no means be ontologically clarified".<sup>10</sup> Because "readiness-to-hand is the way in which entities as they are 'in-themselves' are defined ontologico-categorially".<sup>11</sup> These two assertions of Heideggerian ontology can easily be understood as a vigorous challenge to the traditional-

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<sup>9</sup> BT 114 -115.

<sup>10</sup> BT 106.

<sup>11</sup> BT 101.

epistemological ontology, because whereas the latter claims that nothing can be understood unless it is isolated from the everyday world, the former brings these isolated items back to “life”, so as to have them apprehended as they are in-themselves. In this very point, it becomes clear that why Heidegger claims that ready-to-hand precedes and establishes the possibility of the present-at-hand; the reason is that, only to the extent that Dasein has a pre-cognitive familiarity with its environment [*Umwelt*] in its everyday circumspective dealings, can it be capable of forming a theoretical-scientific framework through which it observes the entities within the world in a scientific manner. Everyday dealings form the basis upon which scientific approach can be developed and not vice versa. So, only insofar as there happen to be a breakdown in Dasein’s everyday dealings with the equipments in its environment, does it make that equipment the theme of its theoretical interest. In this breakdown, ready-to-hand becomes *unready-to-hand*, which is the third and last way of showing itself of an entity whose character is other than that of Dasein.

But does Dasein, in its dealings with ready-to-hand items, encounter them one by one? In its using a piece of equipment whose being is ready-to-hand, is Dasein just concentrated on that particular equipment and nothing else – whether it be another piece of equipment, or the work with which Dasein is occupied and so on? The answer which must be given to these questions will, on the one hand, help us to penetrate into the being of the ready-to-hand deeper, and on the other hand will support us in understanding the being of transition from ready-to-hand to present-at-hand. And only when

we clarify this point, will we have finished the task of investigating the three ways of showing themselves of the entities whose nature is other than that of Dasein.

Heidegger thinks that an item of equipment whose kind of being is ready-to-hand can only be encountered insofar as it belongs to an *equipmental whole*. A piece of equipment finds its meaning and its use in a nexus of equipments with which it is to be used. Apart from this equipmental nexus, it would not be possible for circumspective concern to manipulate any ready-to-hand equipment at all.

Equipment -in accordance with its equipmentality- always is in terms of its belonging to other equipment: ink-stand, pen, ink, paper, blotting pad, table, lamp, furniture, windows, doors, room.<sup>12</sup>

In this point, for the sake of clarifying this part-whole relation more, it would be helpful to go back to Heidegger's example of hammer. First of all, Heidegger claims that hammer can be understood as it is in-itself only in the act of "hammering". This claim is compatible with the thought of Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations*, which propounds that meaning is use:

Equipment can genuinely show itself only in dealings cut to its own measure (hammering with a hammer, for example); but in such dealings an entity is not *grasped* thematically as an occurring Thing, nor is the equipment-structure known as such even in using. The hammering does not simply have knowledge about the hammer's character as equipment, but it has appropriated this equipment in a way which could not possibly be more suitable. In dealings such as this, where something is put to use, our concern subordinates itself to the "in-order-to" which is constitutive for the equipment we are employing at the time; the less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the

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<sup>12</sup> BT 97.

more primordial our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is -as equipment.<sup>13</sup>

The “in-order-to” of an equipment can be understood as the function of that equipment, or, in other words, its “serviceability-for”. Hammer is for hammering, pen is for writing, etc. But there is another word in Heidegger’s terminology which seems to be considering functionality: “towards-which”. The difference between these two terms can be found out in the fact that, whereas “in-order-to” refers to the pre-interpretedness of an item of equipment, “towards-which” considers the interpretation of some particular user. Putting it differently, whereas “in-order-to” indicates the location of particular equipment in equipmental totality, “towards-which” focuses on the human interest which is absorbed in using that equipment as an activity. If hammer is encountered as an item of equipment, this amounts to the fact that, Dasein understands and manipulates it as something *with the nails in order to* make something fast. But insofar as we consider the purposive character of an action, we make a move from “in-order-to” to “towards-which”. To make this point more clear, let us use the example of Hubert Dreyfus: “I write on the blackboard *in* a classroom, *with* a piece of chalk, *in order to* draw a chart, as a step *towards* explaining Heidegger, *for the sake of* my being a good teacher.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> BT 98.

<sup>14</sup> Dreyfus, Hubert L. 1991. *Being-in-the-World (A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time, Division I)*. Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: The MIT Press. p.92. Hereafter, BW.

It sounds normal, from the sentence quoted above, to derive propositions like these: “A classroom is a place in which one teaches by the help of a blackboard and a piece of chalk”, “A piece of chalk is something with which we draw or write something on a blackboard”, or, “A blackboard is something on which we draw or write something with a piece of chalk”. But does not it sound weird, if we utter a sentence like: “A classroom is a place where a teacher teaches Heidegger” or “A blackboard is something by the help of which one tries to be a good teacher”?

From the analysis which I made above, it can be concluded that: (1) A piece of equipment makes sense only insofar as it is with some other equipment -in our example, a piece of chalk with the blackboard. So long as its equipmental character is considered, it can easily be seen that it is impossible to define a piece of equipment without thinking another one. On the other hand, if it is defined always in the same way by using the formal categories of theoretical approach, this item of equipment loses its equipmentality and become a *Thing*; viz., present-at-hand. (2) This “Being-with” and “in-order-to” of equipment gives us a clue about its conventional usage – this is what I called earlier *pre-interpretedness* (or *conventional usage of something, or the way the things are normally done by the members of the society to which we belong*). This pre-interpretedness is not *learned* by Dasein in the literal meaning of the word; instead, it is handed down to it by tradition in which it has been thrown. In our example, chalk’s being with the blackboard -and not with the wall, for example - in order to write or draw something on it can be read off as the conventional usage of it as a ready-to-



hand being. (3) This pre-given meaning of an item of equipment makes up the background on which the other possibilities due to its usage and meaning are constructed by Dasein, which understands itself and its environment in its *future* through its purposes. It becomes possible to join a piece of chalk with the wall, instead of the blackboard, only when this futural-purposive character as in the form of *understanding* (and *interpretation*) comes across with the *meaning* attached to the ready-to-hand equipment. So, it can be concluded from here that, the literal meanings of the words which are taken from the lexicons are full of frozen “with-which”s and “for-which”s. But this is not tantamount to the fact that we have to dispose of them; we need them as human beings, because they present us the basic meaning on which we can make projections towards our future.

Nevertheless, “to explain everyday transparent coping we do not need to introduce a mental representation of a goal at all. Activity can be *purposive* without the actor having in a mind a *purpose*.”<sup>15</sup> This quotation also gives the nature of the rejection of subject-object schema of Cartesian thinking and Husserl’s concept of intentionality in his transcendental phenomenology very well. But before explicating what this quotation means, we have to delineate the picture of Dasein which is the substitute term for “subject” in Heidegger’s hermeneutical phenomenology.

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<sup>15</sup> Dreyfus, BW, p. 93

### 2.2.2. Revision of “Subject”

The whole project of *Being and Time* can be read off as a search right after the answer to the ontological question “What is Being?” But on the other hand, Heidegger claims throughout the book that his aim is to investigate the primordial / existential structures of Dasein. So, the important point which must be comprehended well here is the fact that, in *Being and Time*, the answer to the question concerning Being is sought after in Dasein’s understanding of *it*; “[T]he analytic of Dasein remains wholly oriented towards the task of working out the question of Being”.<sup>16</sup> Besides, in contrast to traditional view which tries to delineate subject and object separately, Dasein and its understanding cannot be characterized apart from the totality of entities surrounding it in its environment – whether they are ready-to-hand or present-at-hand – and other Daseins which make up the society and culture in which every Dasein is born. Whereas this totality of ready-to-hand entities and *others* characterize the “world”, Dasein’s understanding is portrayed as an ineluctable form of *existing*; i.e., *Being-in-the-world*. This is to say that, it is impossible to encompass the meaning of “understanding” and “interpretation” ontologically, unless we have delineated the essential aspects of the *Being-in-the-world* as it is used throughout *Being and Time*.

In the former section, the phenomenon of *world* was portrayed as the totality of entities whose character is other than that of Dasein. But what it means for Dasein to be *in* that world still remains as a question that must be

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<sup>16</sup> BT 38.

replied, if we want to comprehend what Heidegger means when he is using the term “understanding” and “interpretation”. Because “understanding” is one of the ways of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world among the other *existentiale* (i.e., existential structures). When we finish the task of portraying what these *existentiale* are, we will have found out that “subject” – like “object”, as we have seen in the former section – is also a construction of traditional Western thought, behind which there stands a pre-ontological life world which is in any case immune from any kind of observation or reflection. This *pre-reflective* life world, which is the possibility of every kind of theorizing, knowing, communicating, etc., can be accepted as one of the strongest contributions of Heidegger to philosophy of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

According to Heidegger, “Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very being, that Being is an *issue* for it”.<sup>17</sup> This is to say that, whereas the entities within the world whose character is other than that of Dasein are indifferent to the question of Being, this question *matters* to Dasein. But this privileged position of being the only entity which is capable of asking the ontological question – What is Being? – is not concomitant with the fact that this question can be answered in a manner in which the sciences interrogate the nature; Being cannot be subjected to any ontological investigation as long as it is envisaged as an “object”. Rather, that which scrutinizes and that which is scrutinized is one and the same thing here; it is Being itself. In other words, Being is not seen as an abstract property which is common to

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<sup>17</sup> BT 32.

everything in the universe as it is for the pseudo-ontologies, which equate Being and “substance” down through the history of philosophy. The fact that this substance has always been conjured up as something *consummated* in itself paved the way for excluding the “time” factor from the idea of Being. The meaning of the oblivion of the question concerning the meaning of Being is commensurable with “time” factor’s being discarded; only in this case that Being, as in the form of substance, can be tackled as something which makes possible for the entities to be what they are – i.e., provides them with the *essences*. In the former section, we tried to show that, in an everyday manner, the entities within the world are not encountered as they are present-at-hand objects whose very Being is thought to be hidden in their substance. In this section, what we are trying to explain is that, what Heidegger has in mind when saying “Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities”, is that Dasein’s essence also does not emanate from some substance, rather “*The essence of Dasein lies in its existence*”.<sup>18</sup> If “existential analytic of Dasein” is the equivalent task of answering the question “What is Being?”, then, to give a comprehensive explanation for the term *existence* will be enough to grasp the endeavor in *Being and Time* due to the revision of subject.

“Existence” can be understood as a term which is used by Heidegger in order to overcome the transcendental overtone inherent in the concept of “reason” or “consciousness” coined by modern philosophy. The most prominent aspect of this “reason” can be accepted as its potentiality of

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<sup>18</sup> BT 69.

becoming “God’s eye view” by insulating itself from the *history* it belongs. The transition from the finite-historical disposition to the all-embracing visual disposition of divine intellect (it is “reason” here) can be conceived as a transmutation of the position from which one *is seen* into a position one *sees*. When we remind ourselves of the traditional ontological tenet which equates *the idea of Being* with *being in the presence of an all-embracing intellect*, it becomes normal to propound that the only possibility to carry out an ontological investigation is to ascend to the position from which it turns out to be possible to *see without being seen*. And this “without being seen” implies that the investigator is capable of having a position behind which there simply is nothing. The essence of Heidegger’s ontological revolution lies primarily in the fact that he is the first one who asserted that it is possible for us to come across Being only in an “hermeneutical oscillation”. Secondly, in this fro and con movement between the whole and parts, it is impossible for us to grasp the whole at all. By the same token, only insofar as we do not relegate *that which is seen* and *that which sees* into a twofold structure which comprises of two separate substances, can we be capable of conceiving these two as merged into one holistic structure which is characterized as Being by Heidegger. I think that I am entitled to define Being as a *holistic structure* because it is not the product of the way of objectifying thinking which stems from subject/object dichotomy; instead, what gives way to a kind of thinking which assumes this dichotomy is Being itself.

Starting with Descartes, a clear distinction is drawn between what is given in the mind as perceiving, willing, imagining,

desiring, and other mental acts, and what exists in the external world and is represented by such mental acts. The subject becomes the center around which all other entities revolve as “objects” of experience: the self is the “*sub-jectum*” -that which is “thrown under” and underlies beings. . . [W]hat is new in the Cartesian turn is a picture of the inner self as completely self-defining, with no essential bonds to anything else in the cosmos.<sup>19</sup>

Cartesianism, which leans on a pure, isolated subject playing the role of final jurisdiction, gives way to the idea that Being is not different at all from that which is put in the *presence* of consciousness, whether it be the consciousness of “God” or “reason”. Whereas rationalist tradition groped for the *objectifying principle* mostly in the consciousness of human beings, empiricist tradition thought that this principle is in every case derived from the outer world; although Kant has been thought to be the one who ended this quarrel in his endeavor to span the chasm between body and mind by the help of his division between *phenomena* and *noumena*, his well equipped subject became the main problematic of German Idealism until Hegel, and by this move, he inadvertently contributed to the view which weights epistemology and ontology in the same scale. His analysis investigating the categorical structure of *pure reason* contributed, on the one hand, to the fact that subject is put in the center of philosophical thinking as a self-conscious “I”, and on the other hand only that which is *known* or *cognized* – or “represented”, in terms of Kantian terminology – as in the form of objective knowledge can be *real*; in other words, can *be*. That is why Heidegger sees him as a milestone in the history of the oblivion of “being”. He appreciates Kant in that he does not fall

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<sup>19</sup> Guignon, *HPK*, pp. 17-18.

prey to the Cartesian way of constructing the “I” isolated from what it thinks; rather, in Kantian philosophy a pure “I” apart from the “I think something” is not imaginable. Nonetheless, Heidegger thinks, what Kant could not see is that this “something” implies the phenomenon of “world” which makes possible every act of thinking, cognizing, knowing, etc. possible.<sup>20</sup> “*In saying ‘I’, Dasein expresses itself as being-in-the-world*.”<sup>21</sup> In short, Kant’s insistence upon the twofold structure of “I” as the “form of representations” and as the “transcendental I” which makes *apperception*, as an “I think” accompanying every kind of perception, possible prevents him from conceiving the “I” as “Being-in-the-world”; that is why Kant’s philosophy misses the question of being and remains in the “ontical sphere”, although it comes nearer to the ontological one.

In the light of what I summarized above, it turns out to be tenable to emphasize with Gadamer that Heidegger’s thinking can be accepted as a *selfless* thought<sup>22</sup>, insofar as the “problem of subject” is our main focus. This *selflessness* issues from the fact that Dasein is always thought of as a “placeholder” in a *self-realizing* holistic structure to which it belongs. In this self-realization “world”, as the totality of ready-to-hand entities and other Daseins, performs its *worldhood*. Throughout *Being and Time*, it can be claimed that *worldling of the world* replaces the conscious acts of human subjects who are surrounded by objects. Nevertheless, it would be a big mistake, if it is thought

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<sup>20</sup> BT 368.

<sup>21</sup> BT 368.

<sup>22</sup> Gadamer, Hans Georg. 1944. The Thinker Martin Heidegger in *Heidegger’s Ways*. Trans. John W. Stanley. Albany: State University of New York Pres. p. 65.

that this self-realization of the world has an *eschaton* or a *telos* as it is the case with the *Geist* (spirit) of Hegel.

On the other hand, if it is reasonable to purport that the idea of “self-consciousness” gained persistency through the reflections upon the “self” down through the history of philosophy, then, it turns out to be clear that in Heideggerian philosophy the meaning of the “self” is so different from the traditional sense of the term that it becomes questionable whether there really is a “self” in *Being and Time*; because Dasein is deprived of its capability of reflecting on its self. Additionally, if we regard the traditional version of “self” as an entity which has a substance of its own, then it becomes apparent that this self is a *consummated subject* as an *essentia* (essence) which waits to actualize its potentiality (*existentia*) emanating from the very substance it has.<sup>23</sup> This substantial conception of “self” is tantamount, on the one hand, to the fact that it turns out to be something *possible*, but possible as in the form of *not-yet-actualized*, and on the other hand to the fact that, because of the preceding reason, it, as a present-at-hand entity, becomes something which can be subjected to every kind of scientific inquiry and every kind of reflection which tries to grasp its *nature* in all its *determinedness*. There are two consequences of this move: Firstly, as the substantial structure playing the role of final jurisdiction which qualifies every kind of impression due to the outer world as “objective” or not, the “self” happens to be the most important object of philosophical investigation as it is the case, say, in Husserlian

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<sup>23</sup> Heidegger, Martin. 1996. Letter on Humanism. In Lawrence E. Cahoon (ed.). *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology, vol.2*. Trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, with J. Glenn Gray and David Farrell Krell. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers. p. 282-283. Hereafter, LH.



phenomenology; and secondly, only that which is cognized or known by this “self” is entitled to *be*. However, contrary to this traditional analysis of the “self”, the “self” of Dasein as Being-in-the-world reminds us the fact that the *sub-jectum* of the self disappears, when Dasein’s Being-in-the-world is thought of as an *ecstatic* movement in a nexus of meanings constructed by the public world in which Dasein is born. In other words, “self” of Dasein becomes a product of the culture which he does not choose. *Ecstasis* is a word which is used by Heidegger in order to explicate the meaning of the “there” in Dasein.

[M]an occurs essentially in such a way that he is the “there”, that is, the lighting of Being. The “Being” of the *Da*, and only it, has the fundamental character of ek-sistence, which is different from the metaphysically conceived *existentia*. Medieval philosophy conceived the latter as *actualitas*. Kant represents *existentia* actuality in the sense of the objectivity of experience. Hegel defines *existentia* as the self-knowing Idea of absolute subjectivity.<sup>24</sup>

Heidegger changes the spelling of the word *existence* into *ek-sistence* in order to emphasize that there lies the meaning “to be out” in the “ex-“ of existence.<sup>25</sup> By this move, Heidegger rends human being off from the “I-Thing” in which it is imprisoned and put it into the “world” again. So, only by way of reminding ourselves of the *ekstatic* aspect of our Being it would be possible for us to comprehend why Heidegger tackles Being as it is *in-the-world*, instead of *in-the-mind*. If the answer to the question of Being is to be looked for in Dasein’s understanding of it, then, transmitting this

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<sup>24</sup> LH, p.283.

<sup>25</sup> Here, it would be helpful to remember the English verbs “in-clude” and “ex-clude”.

“understanding” from the objectifying consciousness to the Being-in-the-world would amount to widening the area in which Being is sought after. In other words, this idea of conditioned Being-in-the-world which is ecstatic tells us Being can never be included in a *consciousness*; rather, the so-called consciousness is always destined to be in Being, and to be *finite*. This also replies the question why Heidegger defines his ontological endeavor as hermeneutical; by defining his ontology as hermeneutical, Heidegger acknowledges that he also has a finite-historical consciousness, which has no other chance than to search Being from within Being.

Even if we ask ‘What *is* Being?’, we keep within an understanding of the ‘is’, though we are unable to fix conceptually what that ‘is’ signifies. We do not know the horizon in terms of which that meaning is to be grasped and fixed.<sup>26</sup>

As long as the horizon in terms of which we try to grasp the meaning of the ‘is’ remains invisible to us, any attempt to scrutinize this meaning will have to be an *approach*, rather than to be an absolute explanation. This impossibility of giving a static meaning to Being becomes evident when comparing the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl and hermeneutical phenomenology of Heidegger, as Richard E. Palmer did:

Phenomenology is a means of being led by the phenomenon through a way of access genuinely belonging to it. Such a method would be of highest significance to hermeneutical theory, since it implies that interpretation is not grounded in human consciousness and human categories but in the manifestness of the thing encountered, the reality that comes to meet us. But Heidegger’s concern was metaphysics and the question on being. Could such a method put an end to subjectivity and speculative

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<sup>26</sup> BT 25.

character of metaphysics? Could it be applied to the question of being? Unfortunately the task is complicated by the fact that being is not really a phenomenon at all but something more encompassing and elusive. It can never truly become an object for us, since we are being in the very act of constituting any object as object.<sup>27</sup>

Now that we have seen that subjectivity is not the final jurisdiction which is capable of reflecting what Being is by making it an object, we can come to grips with searching what kind of structure the “Being-in” of “Being-in-the-world” has. By this investigation we will have comprehended better why the traditional concept of “self” is replaced with Dasein on the way to disclose the meaning of “being”. Thereby, we will also see the reason why Heidegger changes the meaning of the concept of “understanding” and “interpretation” in order to overcome the *cognitive* overtone of the concept used by the former hermeneutical traditions.

## **2.3. “Understanding” as “Being-in”**

### **2.3.1. Facticity and State-of-Mind**

In the previous sections, I have occasionally emphasized that Heidegger’s conception of Dasein excludes the idea that human beings are, first of all, insulated subjects fixed up with some cognitive faculties. Rather, his analysis of Dasein initially presupposes that human life can be imagined thoroughly as a *socialization process* spanning the period from born to death. This is to say that, contrary to the traditional way of thinking which at the

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<sup>27</sup> Palmer, Richard E. 1969. *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. pp. 128-129. Hereafter, H.

outset reifies the substance of man, Heidegger chooses as his starting point *man as a cultural Being*; that is, Dasein. His very important concept “thrownness” signifies that Dasein is not capable of choosing the culture in which it is born. This culture in which Dasein is delivered over makes up the building stones of its average, everyday life.

The fact that Dasein exists is not based upon a free projection of itself; rather Dasein has always been delivered over to its “that it is”. It has been “thrown” among beings. Thrownness is the “facticity” of Dasein, but this facticity is distinguished existentially from the actual occurrence of a present-at-hand. It is the facticity of Dasein’s being delivered over to itself. . . Dasein is factual; that is, it finds itself in the midst of beings as a whole. This finding oneself among beings always occurs in a completely determined “how” as a state-of-mind of being-in-the-world.<sup>28</sup>

Dasein’s thrownness into its world amounts to the fact that it *finds* itself amidst the beings. This “finding itself” is one-to-one translation of the German verb “*sich befinden*” as it is used in a sentence like “*Wie befinden Sie sich?*” which means “How are you?”.<sup>29</sup> This verb is used by Heidegger deliberately, in order to emphasize that Dasein’s Being-in-the-world is not a conscious act of integrating itself to its world; rather, this integration is something to which Dasein is exposed to. This exposition is called by Heidegger “state-of-mind” (*Befindlichkeit*). “What we indicate *ontologically* by the term ‘state-of-mind’ is *ontically* the most familiar and everyday sort of thing; our mood, our Being-

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<sup>28</sup> Pöggeler, Otto. *Martin Heidegger’s Path of Thinking*. Trans. Daniel Magurshak and Sigmund Barber. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc. (Originally published as *Der Denkweg Martin Heideggers*, 1963). p.41.

<sup>29</sup> *BT* ftn.172.

attuned”.<sup>30</sup> This statement amounts to the fact that Dasein does not integrate itself to its world in a manner in which it *learns* where this world is with a moodless mind, say, encumbered with logical categories. Rather, Being-in-the-world of any Dasein demands from it to align or attune itself to the environment to which it belongs. Dasein is not an empty mind which mirrors what it experiences, nor is it mentally a well issued subject which is ready to conceptualize what he sees “in” the world. Instead, this “in” indicates that Dasein is Dasein, insofar far as it is *in* the world; i.e., Dasein is its *stance* towards its world. Its world *matters* to it and only in this mattering of the world which echoes in Dasein’s state-of-mind, its “there” discloses to Dasein.

Understanding is never free-floating, but always goes with some state-of-mind. The “there” gets equiprimordially disclosed by one’s mood in every case -or gets closed off by it. Having a mood brings Dasein *face to face* with its thrownness in such a manner that this thrownness is not known as such but disclosed far more primordially in “how one is”. Existentially, “*Being-thrown*” means finding oneself in some state-of-mind or other. One’s state-of-mind is therefore based upon thrownness. My mood represents whatever may be the way in which I am primarily the entity that has been thrown.<sup>31</sup>

In this very point, we once more grab a chance to attest to how Heidegger assaults the traditional ontological view which purports the idea that Being-in-the-world is something that is to be established epistemologically. Besides, it would be a very big mistake if one conceives that, while claiming that Being discloses itself to us when we are in a mood, Heidegger’s point is about a *perverted* reason gone astray because of the

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<sup>30</sup> BT 172.

<sup>31</sup> BT 389.

sensations, desires, passions, etc., which otherwise could be capable of reflecting “what *is*” in an objective manner. This is not what he says. For me, what he is trying to propound is that the “affection” received by Dasein from its world cannot be subsumed under a causal relationship between two separate present-at-hand-things. In other words, it is not the case that first Dasein *is* and so *is* the world; then Dasein comes to its world and the reaction between them begins. Instead, Being-in-the-world and “Being-in-a-state-of-mind” or “having a mood” are one and the same thing. If there is not any “understanding the world” without moods, then there remains nothing to be disturbed or perverted because of the moods one has. Any act of perception, understanding, sensation, etc. becomes an act of historically affected Being-in-the-world which is in any case having a mood. To summarize, Being discloses itself to Dasein “as something” insofar as Dasein is in a mood, and this *as* comes from the *pre-interpretedness* of the world in which Dasein is thrown; Heidegger’s ontology lets Being “be” by disburdening *it* from the obligation of *being in the presence of a well defined consciousness* in order to *be*. He permits Being be even if we do not think of *it*. This is the innovation of his thought. Dasein’s “there” makes itself manifest in the *periphery* of so-called consciousness; that is to say, the more we step out of the *subjectivity*, all the more chance do we have to come nearer the position from which we can pose the question “What is Being in general?”.

As something *pre-given* in Dasein’s thrownness, moods are prior to every kind of cognition, knowing, volition.

[T]he world which has already been disclosed permits what is within-the-world to be encountered. This prior disclosedness of the world belongs to Being-in and partly constituted by one's state-of-mind.<sup>32</sup>

If world is disclosed to Dasein *only* because Dasein is *in* it as having a mood, this “already” implies that only on the basis of moods can Dasein comport itself to its world. This statement has two important consequences: (1) All kinds of activity, including scientific activity and also ontology, issues from these moods, which, along with the fore-structures of understanding, gives Heidegger's ontology its transcendental character<sup>33</sup>, and (2) it is not possible to master these moods.

According to the first claim, every attempt of Dasein to make the world intelligible to itself is situated on a state-of-mind. On the other hand, Dasein is not capable of mastering the moods it has, because when reflecting on one state-of-mind, it will be in another; “[W]hen we master a mood, we do so by way of a counter-mood; we are never free of moods”.<sup>34</sup> The mutual relationship between these two important claims makes up the basic phenomenal content of moods, because it is this relationship that

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<sup>32</sup> BT 176.

<sup>33</sup> BW, pp. 174-175. But Dreyfus calls this transcendence as “originary transcendence” , in order to distinguish it from Husserl's “ontic transcendence: “While both reductions isolate Dasein as “solus ipse”, and both reveal to the natural attitude that takes intelligibility for granted that intelligibility must be produced, Husserl's reduction reveals the transcendental ego as *the absolute source of all intelligibility*, while anxiety [*a certain specific mood which is emphasized by Heidegger*] reveals Dasein as *dependent upon a public system of significances that it did not produce*” (p.177).

<sup>34</sup> BT 175.

decentralizes any kind of “subjectism” (*Subjectivität*)<sup>35</sup> and gives way to *hermeneutical ontology*.

### 2.3.2. Pre-ontological Understanding of Being

Heidegger uses the word “understanding” not in the sense it is used by traditional/epistemic ontology. Until Heidegger it has widely been persuaded that the concept “understanding” refers to a kind of *knowing* or *grasping*.<sup>36</sup> According to this traditional tenet which was primarily under the influence of Cartesian subject/object dichotomy, the locus of understanding was assumed to be the place, in which moodless and presuppositionless reason in the guise of subject can represent the objects which surround it; that is, *consciousness*. And what was necessary for this consciousness, in order to be capable of monitoring the pure reflections of these objects was to purge away from itself all the disturbing content and to remain as a pure logical form.

What Heidegger objects to, when constructing his concept of “understanding” as a way of Being-in-the-world is, first of all, this fiction of understanding isolated from the world established by subject/object dichotomy.<sup>37</sup> If Being is to be characterized in Dasein’s understanding of it,

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<sup>35</sup> H, p.144, where Palmer states: “Subjectism is a broader term than subjectivity, for it means that the world is regarded as basically measured by man. In this view the world has meaning only with respect to man, whose task is to master the world”.

<sup>36</sup> See BW, p.184, where Dreyfus says: “To get the right approach to [*Heidegger’s usage of*] understanding it is essential at the outset not think of understanding as a cognitive phenomenon” (*italics added*).

<sup>37</sup> BT 88.



and Dasein is Being-in-the-world, then the phenomenon of understanding must also be characterized as something “in-the-world” from the outset. “Even if it were feasible to give an ontological definition of ‘Being-in’ primarily in terms of a Being-in-the-world which *knows*, it would still be our first task to show that knowing has the phenomenal character of a Being which is *in* and *towards* the world”.<sup>38</sup> This move of Heidegger, which tackles “understanding” as an ontological phenomenon instead of an epistemological one, reminds us of the fact that it operates primarily in our everyday lives in which we do the things not consciously, rather *automatically*. The phenomenon whose Being is endorsed as ineluctable by Heidegger is a “pre-conscious familiarity” of Dasein with the world in which it is thrown, which turns out to be the basis of any act of understanding, despite its potentiality to change during the life of an individual as a result of his/her different encounters in the world.<sup>39</sup> The analysis of this preconscious familiarity of Dasein is what Heidegger calls “fundamental ontology”. Although that which is hoped to be disclosed by the fundamental analysis of Dasein accounted for by Heidegger as something that lies at the bottom is reminiscent of Husserl’s *life-world*, the most important difference between their phenomenological endeavors is hidden in the fact that, whereas Husserl sees this life-world as something attainable by

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<sup>38</sup> *BT 87*, my italics.

<sup>39</sup> See HPK, p.67, where Guignon asserts: “. . . even though the assumptions of science, common sense, and the tradition are to be set aside, we nevertheless have a mode of access to the question of Being in our plain, prereflective sense of reality. In our everyday lives . . . we already have some ‘*vague, average understanding of Being*’. By virtue of the fact that we have taken up the task of living and are already coping with the world, we have a ‘pre-ontological understanding of Being’ which can serve as the basis for a thematic and explicit conceptualization of the meaning of Being.”

transcendental consciousness, Heidegger thinks that since the world in which we were thrown is the only source that provides us with a fore-understanding, it evades every attempt of reflection.

The pre-ontological understanding of Dasein issues from the fact that *its* world is handed down to it as pre-interpreted whole through the mediation of language. This pre-interpretedness of the world refers to the common ways of “coping with” the world by “manipulating” the “referential whole” of ready-to-hand-entities. The pre-interpretedness that belongs to the referential whole is called “significance” (*Bedeutsamkeit*) by Heidegger.<sup>40</sup> In its everyday encounters with the totality of ready-to-hand entities Dasein does not re-invent the articles it plans to use, nor does it re-ascribe some certain functions to them; since the world as the pre-interpreted referential whole is bequeathed to Dasein, it would go on to manipulate, use or, if we pronounce it hermeneutically, “interpret” the handy devices not by directing its mind on them in a concentrated manner, but just by following the pre-given ways of using them. We saw above that which equipment is used with which one, which equipment is used towards this purpose or that are predetermined in advance as a net of ready-to-hand entities, as that in which every entity is bound to the others by referential relationships of “with-which”, “in-order-to” and “towards-which”. So, when using a specific instrument for some purpose, that which must have been comprehended beforehand is the totality of

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<sup>40</sup> For an analysis of “significance” and the “relational whole”, see H., p.134. Here, Palmer states that: “However much words may shape or formulate meaning, they point beyond their own system to a significance already resident in the relational whole of world. Significance, then, is not something man gives to an object; it is what an object gives to man through supplying the ontological possibility of words and language”.

equipments, to which the equipment that is about to be used belongs. But this comprehension of the totality of ready-to-hand entities is not attained by *thematizing* them in a theoretical manner; Dasein is familiar with this nexus of equipments and it does not know from where this familiarity issues. For example, a child does not learn what a refrigerator is first of all in the school, after he joins a class and takes a physics course about the working mechanism of white goods. Instead, his familiarity with a refrigerator stems from the fact that he was born in a culture in which using a refrigerator is an ordinary practice to cool the foodstuffs. These foodstuffs are apprehended as that with which meal is prepared in the kitchen. The kitchen is where the family members cluster together around a table in order to eat something, etc. This example can be widened until we have been exhausted from speaking. But even if we stay in the limits of our example, we could have a chance to have an idea about what these pre-understandings are. Even in such a limited environment we have portrayed, which in fact is widened to the world by Heidegger, it becomes clear that we know the refrigerator in an unconscious, unreflective way, for it is referred to by the other members of our limited set, and refers to the others. The main idea which must be concluded here is that, the equipments we are accustomed to manipulate in our daily lives are not grasped one by one by thematizing them, by making them object of analysis in a theoretical manner by abstracting some certain properties of them. Rather, meaning of an article is attached to it only by means of other equipments with which it is used and the purposes towards which it is manipulated. In its everyday dealings, every single act of

understanding and interpretation of Dasein stems from its pre-understanding of its world which makes up the final totality.<sup>41</sup> It is not the case that fore-structure of understanding is established on the theoretical understanding of the things; instead, every scientific investigation and every theoretical interest is established on this underlying pre-ontological familiarity with the world.

If some certain specific entity whose character is that of ready-to-hand can be understood in this way or that way, this means that this entity is involved in the totality of referential whole of equipments, which consists of the with-whichs and the assignments of the in-order-tos and towards-whichs. But this is not the whole picture.

In every act of understanding, Dasein projects its Being upon possibilities. As being-in-the-world whose Being is an issue for it, Dasein is capable of making future plans. Its future is an open possibility for it although it is *not yet* actualized. Since this future which is not yet happened cannot be excluded from the “who” of Dasein, Heidegger defines it as “Being-ahead-of-itself”.<sup>42</sup> As circumspective concern to which the world matters, Dasein comports itself to its future in a purposive manner. Up till now, from the

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<sup>41</sup> Marx, Werner. 1971. *Heidegger and the Tradition*. Trans. by Theodore Kisiel and Murray Greene. Int. by Theodore Kisiel. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. (Originally published under the title *Heidegger und die Tradition* in 1961), p. 88-89, especially where he says: “Dasein’s ‘modes of comportment’, the modes ‘of being its here’, are given a decisive direction when they are characterized as modes of *Being-in-the-world*. Being and Time actually deals with the world only as an ‘environment’ within which man dwells with the things he uses in a circumspective manner. The worldliness of this world is defined there as a meaningful totality of references. This referential totality of differences confers a significance upon the Being of things as well as upon the Being of man which the traditional ontologies and anthropologies oriented to substance and subject had completely passed over.”

<sup>42</sup> BT 236.

picture I depicted due to Dasein's encounter with its world in a circumspective manner (and not "theoretical"), it can be concluded that Dasein is the passive addressee of the effects applied on it by the world as the totality of ready-to-hand-entities. But seeing the subject matter from this perspective would just be tantamount to the reversal of the point of view of the traditional substance philosophy. It is neither the case that as a well-equipped subject, Dasein is the only actor who is capable of grasping the entities as they *really* are, nor is it that it is a passive receiver of the outcome issuing from the internal dynamics of its environment under the effects of which it drifts hither and thither. For Heidegger, both extremes would be tantamount to the violation of the "worldhood of the world".<sup>43</sup>

Above, when I was explaining the states-of-mind of Dasein, I have tried to show that it is another way of pronouncing "finding-itself-in-the-world" (*Befindlichkeit*). The meaning of this "finding-itself" (*sich befinden*) is that Being-in-the-world is not a "property" which Dasein has. Dasein is "Being-already-in-a-world". Dasein's Being-in-the-world is not a moodless standing in and "just staring" at the world. To explicate that every understanding is accompanied by a state-of-mind as I told in the former section, Heidegger claims that Dasein is "Being-ahead-of-itself-in-already-being-in".<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Guignon redresses the balance between Dasein and referential totality by defining "active" and "passive" sides of Dasein, especially where he says "The Being of Dasein just is its self-interpretations in the stand it takes on its life as a whole. Seen from the passive aspect, Dasein is *not yet* what it can and will be. As long as I am alive, there are still open possibilities before me, and my life is outstanding and incomplete. Seen from the active aspect of being-ahead-of-itself, however, Dasein is already what it is not yet in its factual Being. My plans and goals always point beyond what I have been so far, so I *am* as Being-toward-the-end." See HPK, C.B. Guignon, p.92.

<sup>44</sup> *BT* 236.

The upshot of that analysis was that referential totality of significance (which as such constitutive for worldhood) has been 'tied up' with a "for-the-sake-of-which". The fact that this referential totality of the manifold relations of the "in-order-to" has been bound up with that which is an issue for Dasein, does not signify that a 'world' of Objects which is present-at-hand has been welded together with a subject. It is rather the phenomenal expression of the fact that the constitution of Dasein, whose totality is now brought out explicitly as ahead-of-itself-in-Being-already-in . . . , is primordially a whole. To put it otherwise, existing is always factual. Existentiality is essentially determined by facticity.<sup>45</sup>

This quotation briefly states that there is a mutual relationship between the fore-structure of understanding as the relational whole of significance of ready-to-hand entities and Dasein's aims as the "for-the-sake-of-whichs". In other words, Dasein's interpreting, i.e., using or manipulating equipments "in-order-to" work out such and such a task goes hand in hand with its "self-interpretation". Neither of them has a priority over the other. If my biggest dream is to be a gardener, it is true that I try to make a headway against the difficulties which may happen to be on my way and unswervingly train myself to use the stuff which are ordinarily used by a gardener. However, it would also be the case that, to be acquainted with the equipments used in gardening – say, because of my having been grown up in a small village or of my father's being a gardener – could motivate me in dreaming myself as a gardener. The *circular* character of understanding emanates from a kind of back and fro movement which I make between the "I" as I imagine it to be as a completed process (Being-towards-the-end) and the totality of equipments as "the world" in which I was thrown. A young person who lives in a small

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<sup>45</sup> BT 236.

village has less chance to be a computer engineer than a young person who lives in a metropolis mostly because of the fact that the set of equipments with which he is acquainted in his/her circumspective dealings, when compared with the young person's who lives in a big city, has less associations with the set of equipments a computer engineer uses.

### **2.3.3. Falling and Inauthentic Understanding**

Until now, I have delineated the concept of understanding as a self-understanding and as a know-how knowledge in daily dealings of Dasein with its environment. But there is still something missing, if our aim is to encompass Dasein's understanding as an aspect of its Being-in-the-world; that is, "Dasein-with" (*Mitsein*).

We saw in the former sections that ready-to-hand entities can be said to be *available*, not *occurent*, insofar as they belong to a totality of equipments. Likewise, they lose their character of availableness if there were not any Dasein to use and manipulate them. On the other hand, we also found out that Dasein can be conjured up as Being-in the-world, so long as it is not to be envisaged apart from its world as totality of equipments. Moreover, if we want to round out the mission of understanding what 'understanding' is for Heidegger as an aspect of Being-in-the-world, what we have to include to this picture is the fact that Dasein is Dasein, only insofar as it is with other Daseins which can be imagined neither under the category presence-at-hand, nor under readiness-to-hand. The essence of human being cannot be thought of as a biological fact; nor can it be imagined as

metaphysically constructed substance. On the other hand, neither anthropology, nor psychology could be capable of giving us this essence at all. Man's essence is established on its factual existence (i.e., Being-ahead-of-itself-in-already-being-in) as Being-with. Heidegger thinks that the theoretical disciplines mentioned above will not be capable of giving an ontological or a primordial definition of "human being", as long as they think of *it* as an insulated substance which he pronounces as the "I-Thing". The Being of the "Others" is not attainable to a Dasein in a way in which it first reflects on its own self and then gets over to the selves of the Others.

By 'Others' we do not mean everyone else but me – those over against whom the 'I' stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does *not* distinguish oneself – those among whom one is too.<sup>46</sup>

So, the "with" of the "Being-with" does not imply a mere "adding up" one's self to that of the same species; this "with" is not a mathematical, but an existential category. Heidegger emphasizes this point very much in order to make us apprehend the fact that the historical effects emanating from Dasein's facticity that are *for the most part* caused by the "Others" are not exterior to Dasein's structure. If it is true to claim that Heidegger searches for an answer to the question of Being in Dasein's everyday mode of Being, it would also be significant to claim that man, in an everyday manner, does not experience his/her "self" or "identity" as a perverted "substance" gone astray by the arbitrary encounters with the "outer world" and the "others", which would otherwise be capable of fulfilling the "potentiality" it has. When the

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<sup>46</sup> BT 154.



primordial Being of Dasein as Being-with is considered, Heidegger thinks that human beings are *always* in a “with-world” (*Mitwelt*).<sup>47</sup>

Being-with-the-others, as facticity and existence, is immanent to Dasein’s structure as well, so long as its essence is Being-in-the-world. The world in which we are born accommodates the other people. The core of Heidegger’s ontological argument about Being-with-the-others lies in the fact that, the identity of any individual Dasein is a product or an outcome of being in a society and the common *discourse* produced by it. Only on the basis of such a public linguistic atmosphere can the intelligible ways of coping with the world, communicating, producing, etc. can be provided with a commonality. In our everyday manner, we do the things as “Anybody” (*das Man*) does.<sup>48</sup> This makes us part of a society. But partaking in a society as Being-with-one-another has a price: doing the things as everybody does is also affective on our understanding. It prevents us from differentiating or *individualizing* ourselves through our future plans:

Publicness proximally controls every way in which the world and Dasein get interpreted, and it is always right - not because there is some distinctive and primary way of Being in which it is related to ‘Things’, or because it avails itself of some transparency on the part of Dasein which it has explicitly appropriated, but because it is insensitive to every difference of level and of genuineness and thus never gets the ‘heart of the matter’. . . . By publicness everything gets obscured, and what has thus been covered up gets passed off as something familiar and accessible to everyone.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> BT 155.

<sup>48</sup> BT 164.

<sup>49</sup> BT 163.

So, the public character of average intelligibility has twofold affect in our interpreting the world and ourselves: first, it supplies our fore-understanding, on the ground of which we comport ourselves to the world and partake in it; and second, it corrupts us by hindering us from becoming *authentic* Daseins. But I will come back to this point once again in the third chapter, where I will compare Gadamer's concept of understanding with that of Heidegger's.

To summarize, any individual Dasein's Being-in-the-world comprises of a threefold structure: (1) since it is thrown into some specific culture, Dasein's understanding and interpreting the world is always historically conditioned; that is, Being of Dasein is always factual; (2) since its Being can be an issue for it, Dasein presses onto future possibilities; in other words, Dasein's mode of Being is existence; and (3) it is immanent to the Being of Dasein that in its world, it is always with other Daseins; since it has always a tendency of losing its *authentic* self in the average intelligibility of the *inauthentic* Anyone (*das Man*), Dasein is accepted as *falling* from its individualizing, authentic possibilities to the with-world which is mostly dominated by banality stemming from this average intelligibility of the public; that is, Being of Dasein is "falling".<sup>50</sup> This threefold structure is defined as "care" by Heidegger, and it would become impossible to comprehend what he means by the term "understanding", without tackling it in this care structure.

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<sup>50</sup> BT 219-220.

Until now, I have tried to portray the Heideggerian concept of understanding as an existential phenomenon, rather than an epistemological one. In the next chapter, while I am explicating the Gadamerian conception of understanding, I will try to put it in a parallel position with Heidegger's. I will try to show how Gadamer, as follower of Heidegger, contributes to the destruction of epistemological conception of understanding as it is constructed on Cartesian subject/object schema.

## CHAPTER 3

### “UNDERSTANDING” IN GADAMER’S PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS

#### 3.1. Critique of Methodologism

In this chapter, my aim will be to demonstrate the immeasurable contribution of Hans Georg Gadamer to the hermeneutical turn, which is initiated, as was tackled in the previous chapter, especially by Martin Heidegger’s effort to underline the ontological aspect of the debates of the century on human understanding. As far as I am concerned, to comprehend the nature of hermeneutical turn in the 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy, one is under an obligation to understand the bridge between Heidegger and Gadamer. This bridge can be thought of as an attempt to span the chasm between the so called “subject” and the “outer world” in a manner in which it becomes impossible to conjure up these two pseudo-substances separate from each other.

That which plays an important role in contemporary philosophical debates about objectivism and relativism, i.e., the Cartesian subject-object differentiation, can also be thought as one of the most prominent aspects and interests in hermeneutical theories of 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophers such as

Heidegger, Gadamer, Rorty, Ricoeur, Kuhn, etc. The most important theme which is common to the writings of these philosophers is their emphasis upon the hermeneutical aspect of human understanding which is concomitant with the critique they direct to the subject/object schema of Cartesian thinking. By overcoming, as Bernstein calls it, "Cartesian Anxiety"<sup>51</sup>, this hermeneutical movement aims at extending the scope of hermeneutics from the narrow area of *textual interpretation* to a wider task of making *life* and *interpretation* equal; that is, surrendering to life its hermeneutical character:

I maintain that the hermeneutical problem is universal and basic for all inter human experience both in history and the present moment, precisely because meaning can be experienced where it is not actually intended.<sup>52</sup>

Insofar as they conceived the traditional conception of human subject as totally plunged into the world in which it is born, the problem of how the reality is mirrored in the conceptual scheme of human understanding in an objective manner was replaced with the problem of how *life* understands *itself* from within itself in a circular manner.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Heidegger is accepted as the first philosopher who acknowledged the circular character of human understanding. In his magnum opus *Being and Time*, he depicts the concept

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<sup>51</sup> Bernstein, Richard. 1983. *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. p. 17., hereafter, BOR, where he says: "With a chilling clarity Descartes leads us with an apparent and ineluctable necessity to a grand and seductive Either/Or. *Either* there is some support for our being, a fixed foundation for our knowledge, *or* we cannot escape the forces of darkness that envelop us with madness, with intellectual and moral chaos."

<sup>52</sup> Gadamer, Hans Georg. 1976. On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Problem. In David E.Linge (trans. and ed.), *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 30.

of “understanding” as constituting the *futural* aspect of Dasein’s temporality, which attests to the purposive character of human beings. However, this conception cannot be fully grasped unless the fore-structures of understanding (*Vorhabe*, *Vorsicht* and *Vorgriff*) on the one hand, and its falling from its “authentic-self” to inauthentic “they-self” on the other, are taken into consideration. As we have seen above, Heidegger stresses that fore-structures of understanding and the state-of-mind of Dasein are the *past* characteristics of its temporality, while *falling* is his “now” (present). Although it seems to be the case that “understanding” cannot be tackled apart from the threefold structure as in the form of temporality, Heidegger continually emphasizes that it is basically futural. Because “understanding” is seen as the only possibility which directs Dasein to its authenticity. This is the point where I diagnose the basic strain of his theory of understanding: a strain between the conditionedness of understanding and its being lost in the *idle talk* (*Gerede*), and its potency to tear itself off from its past and now and free itself towards the future possibilities. So, it can be contended that, by his emphasis on “tradition” which forms the inheritance of every understanding, Gadamer takes a stand on the opposite side of Heidegger.<sup>53</sup>

In light of the thoughts, which I asserted above, the main problematic of this chapter is to emphasize the importance of Gadamer as a philosopher,

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<sup>53</sup> Grondin, Jean. 2002. Gadamer’s Basic Understanding of Understanding. In Robert J. Dostal (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 48-50, where he says: “Closely related to this difference of focus is Heidegger’s insistence on the fact that understanding is oriented toward the future, to future existence and the resoluteness it calls for, whereas Gadamer prefers to insist on the determination of understanding by the past.”

who portrayed the task of hermeneutical theory as a narrative about what *happens to us* when we understand something, rather than what we *do* or what we *ought to do*.<sup>54</sup> According to Gadamer, philosophical hermeneutics is philosophical in character not because it seeks to show us the best method, in order for us to reach the fulfilled understanding in human sciences, but because it just tries to portrait what happens to us when we are understanding. This radicalization of the philosopher's role merely as an observer can be thought as the phenomenological aspect of his theory. What is worth attention about the philosopher is the fact that, he is not the one who guides us in our endeavor to find the best way to understand the human world; but on the contrary, he is one who just tries to theorize what happens to us when we claim to understand something that belongs to our human world.

So, it can easily be said that Gadamer's hermeneutical theory is far from being critical in its character because of his rejection of the classical/metaphysical differentiation between subject and object. The traditional conception of subject being considered here is distinguished from its object by the help of its consciousness. What is meant by consciousness here is that it is atemporal or ahistorical. In other words, it is everywhere at the same time, and its knowledge about its object is immediate. This prejudice about the consciousness is regarded as the most important defect

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<sup>54</sup> Gadamer, Hans Georg. 1991. *Truth and Method*. Trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Crossroad (Original work published in 1960), pp. xxiii, xxviii. Hereafter, *TM*.

of the classical metaphysics according to Heidegger; this is what gives his philosophy its special character:

His [Heidegger's] ontological critique of consciousness found its watchword in the assertion that Dasein is "being-in-the-world". Since that time many have come to regard it as absurd and wholly obsolete to ask how the subject arrives at knowledge of the so-called "external world". Heidegger has called the persistence of this question the real scandal of philosophy.<sup>55</sup>

On this very point, Gadamer is totally in agreement with him. Beyond temporality and historicity, there is no consciousness at all. Consciousness is consciousness in its temporal situatedness. So, it is in vain for a philosopher to try to discover the best path on the way to absolute knowledge in the guise of *method*, as if this philosopher has a chance to break the circle encompassing him and making him a *historical agent*. Any persistent attempt to find the "Archimedean point" envisaged firstly by Descartes is destined to be unsuccessful.<sup>56</sup>

In his magnum opus *Truth and Method*, what Gadamer tries to succeed is to show up the fact that what he calls as *finitude* of consciousness is the only way for us, as the human beings, to understand the outer world and the *others*. In other words, Gadamer gears to the concept *finitude* a positive overtone, rather than using the word in a derogatory manner. Thereby, the concept of method turns out to be the main target of Gadamer's critical endeavor, for it represents the ideal of *infinite* consciousness.

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<sup>55</sup> Gadamer, Hans Georg. 1962. The Philosophical Foundations of the Twentieth Century. In David E.Linge (trans. and ed.). *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. University of California Press. pp. 118-119.

<sup>56</sup> BOR, p. 16.



Although it seems that the book regards only aesthetic and historical knowledge, *Truth and Method* embraces all kinds of knowledge about the human world, including the nature. Throughout the book, Gadamer tries to emphasize the exaggerated role of method on the way to absolute truth, which can otherwise be considered as pseudo-truth in the sense that it is not permanently valid. It is due to the hegemonic character of natural sciences that, they impose the idea that a discipline can have a claim to truth (and by this way validate itself), as long as it has an intelligible method. That is why Gadamer's endeavor in *Truth and Method*, like Heidegger's in *Being and Time*, can be recapitulated as a "critique of scientific rationality" which tries to replace the "finite human understanding" which stands right in the middle of history with the conception of "self-transparent subject" standing outside the history:

The primacy of consciousness, which must be considered the hallmark of modern philosophy, is closely connected with modern concepts of science and method. For modernity's concept of method is distinguished from ancient ways of understanding and explaining the world precisely by the fact that it presents a way of self-certification. The primacy of self-consciousness is the primacy of method. This should be taken literally: only what can be investigated by method is the object of a science. But this implies that there are marginal cases and gray areas of half-sciences and pseudo-sciences that don't fully satisfy the conditions of scientificity and yet are perhaps not devoid of valuable truth. Moreover, the possibilities of modern science are limited in a far more fundamental way. There will always be areas that fundamentally cannot be approached through objectivization and treated as methodical objects. Many of the things in life are of this kind, and a few gain their unique significance from precisely this fact.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Gadamer, Hans Georg. 1998. Praise of Theory. In Chris Dawson (Tr.), *Praise of Theory: Speeches and Essays*. New Heaven: Yale University of Press. pp. 28-29.

### 3.2 Rationality of Selflessness

As Richard Bernstein suggested, the hermeneutical debate between the philosophers before Heidegger and after Heidegger can be taken as a debate between relativism and objectivism. Objectivism is a concept, which stems from the Cartesian philosophy in its sense which we understand it today. Cartesianism, which is accepted as the starting point of modernism, is based on the subject-object schema. It would be reasonable to search for the source which gave way to this dichotomy in Descartes' attempt, initially to prove his own existence, after bracketing all his knowledge due to himself and the outer world. The aim of the philosopher, when suspending all his relations to the world, was to purge all the prejudices away, which he thinks to be the blinding factors on the way to objective knowledge. He thought that the power of reason would be disclosed only by *epoche*, which implies the survival from the prejudicial content of our knowledge. The aim of his exploitation of the method of bracketing was to make the subject transparent to itself as a pure *ego cogito*, which was the main court of objectivity; therefore, it should have been purified as a *worldless* subject.

Descartes's enterprise to get the subject out of the world in which it is plunged turned out to be the only method on the way to objective knowledge, and hence was inherited by the modern thinkers after him. During the period until Heidegger, this concept of objectivity and Cartesian rationality carried on to be the focus of any philosophical debate; so, epistemology became the most important part of the metaphysical systems, while political, moral and

aesthetical aspects have been taken as secondary; self-conscious subject was put in the center of philosophy.

In opposition to the doctrines motivated by objectivity as the claim to supply us a critical and absolute standpoint on which we can stand when we try to understand what happens in our world, relativism can be seen as a counter tenet, whose basic claim is that every knowledge is relative to subjective and historical perspectives. As we learn from Bernstein, the postempiricist philosophy of science can be understood in terms of this objectivism-relativism controversy. Thomas Kuhn, though he was not the first one in the attempts to disclose the paradigm-dependent character of the natural sciences, is one of the most important thinkers who attempted to deconstruct the concept of rationality of his time. The importance of his long essay *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* comes from its emphasis on the incommensurability among the separate scientific endeavors, that is, *paradigms*, though these are about the same subject matter. His concept of *paradigm* can be accepted as an attack against the objectivity ideal of the positivism. According to this paradigm-dependent viewpoint, every scientific endeavor is a separate universe in itself; so, it is in vain to try to find a comparison criterion so as to determine which one is the best.<sup>58</sup> In my point of view, Kuhn's objection to the positivistic stance in philosophy of natural sciences which is insistent upon the progressive and accumulative nature of knowledge can be read as an important endeavor to sabotage the objectivistic ideal of the epoch and its methodologism.

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<sup>58</sup> BOR, 51-56.

On the other hand, when we come to the role of the method in hermeneutical attempts, we can easily see that the first problem with which we must grapple is about the distinction between the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) and natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*). The question here is if we can use the methodology of natural sciences when we are dealing with the human products, whether they are social products or individual ones. Or is it more reasonable, when investigating the history, law, art, literature etc., to concoct a method which is different from the method of natural sciences? As it is widely accepted, Vico was regarded by many as the thinker to emphasize the distinct character of the human world against the nature. Despite his unfortunate position – he is the contemporary of Descartes – the importance of him is appreciated by most of the thinkers who are involved in hermeneutical debates. I think, Vico can be thought as the cornerstone, if we want to understand the controversies on objectivism and methodology; his distinction between the research areas of human sciences and the natural sciences can be established on the fact that, in human sciences, the subject and the object of knowledge are the same, contrary to the natural sciences. So, it is impossible to use the same method in these two distinct areas.<sup>59</sup>

On the other hand, the interpretative endeavors on Bible and the ancient works have also been accepted as another source of the contemporary hermeneutics. In theological hermeneutics, the main problem

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<sup>59</sup> Özlem, Doğan. 1996. "Tinsel Bilimlere Giriş" in Yüzüncü Yılı ve Dilthey in *Metinlerle Hermeneutik (Yorumbilgisi) Dersleri*. İnkılap Yayınevi: İstanbul. pp. 17-22.

was to discover the concealed meaning behind the proclamations of God. During the Middle Ages and up to the Romantic period the hermeneutical attempts have been devoted mainly to the interpretation of the Bible. Schleiermacher was the first philosopher who extended the area of hermeneutics from the Biblical texts to literature. Under the romantic influence, Schleiermacher accepted a rationality principle, in which understanding human products is based on a kind of empathy, by the help of which the interpreter leaves his own tradition and pass to the writer's.<sup>60</sup>

Dilthey's hermeneutical approach, which is under the romantic influence of Schleiermacher, is of great importance here. He can be accepted as the first thinker in the hermeneutical tradition, who appreciates the role of history in human *Verstehen*. The prominent aspect of his understanding theory is based on a hermeneutical circle, according to which understanding a particular product of, say, literature depends on the understanding of its writer. Here the writer can be accepted as the *whole* side of the hermeneutical circle (whose other side is *part*), as long as it is seen as a life project. Besides, the life of the writer as a part of the tradition to which he belongs can also be understood by the help of this whole. Despite this kind of understanding theory which can be described as back and fro movement of interpretation, it can be said that, Dilthey tried to construct the rationality principle of his theory under the influence of Kantian categories. Dilthey occupied himself with searching the *historical categories* which are

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<sup>60</sup> Dilthey, Wilhelm. 1999. *Hermenutik ve Tin Bilimleri*. Tr. And ed. by Doğan Özlem. Paradigma Yayınları: İstanbul. Pp.100-101.

analogous to the categories in synthetic knowledge of nature in Kant's transcendental theory, and which overwhelmed him with a desire to find a method when searching the human world. His attempt of categorization of the historical-human life became the focus of the critique directed to him by Gadamer in his *Truth and Method*. Instead of such a categorization, Gadamer's aim was to emancipate the human understanding from the expertise of methodologism by putting it into its historical position again.<sup>61</sup>

### **3.2.1. The First Step toward a Selfless Philosophy: Phenomenology of Play**

So far, what I have tried to disclose about the concept of objectivity is its connectedness with method in both natural and social sciences; a discipline cannot be a science, in other words cannot be accepted as objective, without having a method. This kind of objectivist view, which conceives method as the only way of having knowledge by subsuming the particulars under the universals, is objected to especially in 20<sup>th</sup> century hermeneutics and postempiricist philosophy of science. My interest will focus on the hermeneutical side of the picture.

In 1927, after Heidegger's magnum opus *Being and Time* is published, there appeared an important challenge to the classical object-subject schema of metaphysics, and this objection was accepted as the 'ontological turn' which is projected by Heidegger himself. By using the concept *Dasein* (Being-there) to define the human beings, Heidegger tried to destruct the

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<sup>61</sup> Polett, Jeff. 1994. Taking the Old Gods with Us: Gadamer and the Role of Verstehen In The Human Sciences in *Social Sciences Journal* (Vol.31, Issue 2). p 171.

Cartesian subject, whose self-transparent consciousness supplies him a privileged position against nature. For now, what is important for us when examining the bridge built between Heidegger and Gadamer is Heidegger's contribution to the hermeneutical disciplines in extracting *Verstehen* from the Cartesian subject's conscious acts and putting it into Dasein's Being-in-the-world. This move amounts to the fact that understanding becomes something which *happens* to us, rather than to be an act of consciousness standing in front of its object in order to cognize it. This change of the definition of understanding characterizes the hermeneutical turn inherited by Gadamer from Heidegger, which makes hermeneutics ontological and practical, rather than an epistemological discipline.

Gadamer, as the pupil of Heidegger, is indebted to his teacher the most important component of his theory: *preunderstanding*. As we saw in the former chapter, what make understanding possible in Heidegger's *Being and Time* are the fore-understandings or fore-conceptions of Dasein. Dasein, in its thrownness into the world, finds everything interpreted before it. So, it can be said that, tradition, as in the form of a network of pre-interpreted components of life, is the initial source of Dasein's fore-conceptions. Here, the fore-understandings are tested against the data which surrounds Dasein in its world; this is the dynamic character of Heidegger's understanding theory, which labels what Dilthey called *life* into *understanding*. By this move, understanding and interpretation becomes a necessary part of Dasein's existence, rather than an act of consciousness, which tries to comprehend the *present-at-hand* objects of life. By transferring understanding and

interpretation to Dasein's Being-in-the-world, Heidegger rejects what he calls *metaphysics of presence*. What Heidegger means by metaphysics of presence is the classical metaphysics' tendency of putting the *essence* in the center of every epistemological attempt. According to Heidegger, essence, which constitutes the main part of an object and remains unchanged even if all other properties of it are changed, is the basic component of the Western thought from Plato's metaphysics to natural sciences. For him, the problem issues from the fact that this epistemological point of view turns out to be so pervasive that, even the ontological question "What is Being?" has also been attempted to be replied by the essential categories of this epistemic tradition.

The "understanding" that Heidegger described as the basic dynamic of Dasein is not an "act" of subjectivity, but a mode of being. By proceeding from the special case of understanding of tradition, I have myself shown that understanding is always an event. The issue here is not simply that a nonobjectifying consciousness always accompanies the process of understanding, but rather the understanding is not suitably conceived at all as a consciousness of something, since the whole process of understanding conditioned at every moment by the historicity of existence.<sup>62</sup>

Gadamer's endeavour in *Truth and Method* can be understood as the continuation of Heidegger's and Dilthey's thought in that he characterizes understanding as "experience" by handling it as an ontological term (*Erfahrung*), rather than an epistemological one. In the first part of *Truth and Method* in which Gadamer criticizes Kant's approach to aesthetics, "phenomenology of play" firstly appears as the basic constituent of his

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<sup>62</sup> Gadamer, Hans Georg. 1962. The Philosophical Foundations of the Twentieth Century. In David E.Linge (Trans. and ed.), *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. University of California Press. p.125.



criticism. This criticism can be read off as the first step in building up a *selfless* philosophy, which is thought to be capable of delineating the *eventful* (*Ereignis*) character of human *Verstehen*.

According to Gadamer, in an ordinary play (for example, the games which are played by the children), it is impossible for us to make a distinction between the subject who plays and the game (as object) that is played. Because, most prominent aspect of play is that, that which is accepted as subject of the play thus far forgets himself in the play. This is not a kind of self-extinction as is claimed by Ranke, when he was trying to explain the ideal mental state of a historian, who must bracket his own position or tradition, when searching a particular epoch in history. Here, that which is tried to be emphasized by the self-forgetfulness is the fact that, it is not we who put the game under control, nor is the game itself that control us; "instead play merely reaches presentation (*Darstellung*) through the players"<sup>63</sup>.

One of the most important consequences of the phenomenology of play is that, that which is defined as a game as some certain totality of rules cannot be conceived apart from its being *performed*, in order to be a game. That which is tried to be achieved in the performance throughout the play is the task of play itself, and this task is immanent in it. This immanence of the task is concomitant with the fact that, by externalization of any kind of purpose which belongs to the player, game becomes a closed world.

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<sup>63</sup> *TM* 103.

One can say that performing a task successfully “presents it” (stellt sie dar). This phrasing suggests itself in the case of a game, for here fulfilling the task does not point to any purposive context. Play is really limited to presenting itself. Thus its mode of being is self-presentation. But self-presentation is a universal ontological characteristic of nature. . . [T]he self presentation of human play depends on the player’s conduct being tied to the make-believe goals of the game, but the meaning of these goals does not in fact depend on their being achieved. Rather, in spending oneself on the task of the game, one is in fact playing oneself out. The self presentation of the game involves the player’s achieving, as it were, his own self-presentation by playing -i.e., presenting-something.<sup>64</sup>

The player is thought to be so immersed into the play that, it becomes impossible for him to reflect on the motivations he/she has exterior to the game. The “make-believe” task asserted by the game itself turns out to be the prior purpose of the game. That is why Gadamer gives priority to the self-presentation of the game, rather than the intentions of the self transparent subjects. But the self oblivion of the players who are absorbed by the game is not by itself enough to disclose the phenomenon of game. After all, the self-presentation of the players is also important besides the self-presentation of the game. On the one hand, it can be asserted that a game, since it has some pre-defined rules and a task immanent to it, disburdens the player from initiating something as it is the case in the normal life of the player. On the other hand, I believe that, whenever a player derives some other purposes and some other motives throughout the game, this game becomes the game in another game. Who can claim that the chess game which is played between two players who come across for the first time in a tournament is as same as the one which is played between two friends, in the friendship of

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<sup>64</sup> *TM* 108.

whom rivalry is the most prominent motive? Can it be asserted that the possible moves of these two pairs in the same game are not affected by the motivations they have in their minds? I believe that these two games will be different games only because they are in different games. But even if this is the case, Gadamer is right; because, in any case, human being can be thought to be *in* a game, on the borders of which there lies always some purposes which are immune from reflection. Game, as a closed world which performs itself rather than to be the object of our conscious acts is reminiscent of the fact that, we are always encompassed by the borders of *it*. Human beings are always in the game of *existence*.

A game is “only a game” and not “serious”; as a game, however - starting with the game itself now -it has a holy kind of seriousness. Indeed, someone who does not take it seriously “spoils the game”. The game has its own dynamics and goals independent of the consciousness of those playing. It is not an object over against a subject; it is a self defining movement of being into which we enter. The game and our participation in it, becomes the true “subject” of our discussion. Our participation in the game brings it into a presentation, but what is presented is not so much our inner subjectivities as the game: the game comes to stand, it takes place in and through us.<sup>65</sup>

As I mentioned above, contrary to this emphasis on the seriousness-non-seriousness dichotomy, that which must be stressed is the function of play which discards the subjectivity as something all embracing consciousness. If seriousness is seen as the main point, the dichotomy between “real-life of an individual” and “relaxation in a playful mood” would

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<sup>65</sup> Palmer, H, p.172.

become ineluctable.<sup>66</sup> And in this very point, the following question becomes unavoidable: Where is the limit of this seriousness? Since the word “seriousness” seems to be indicating the line which distinguishes the self-conscious acts and the acts carried out in self-oblivion, it would turn out to be a pitfall into which we may fall; but, if we conceive this only as an approach or an analogy with the human life, it would become clear that the only being which plays itself out through us is *life* itself. If we want to disclose the phenomenon of play to fruitfully examine the phenomenon of understanding as an existential aspect of human life as in the form of Being-in-the-world, that which we must always remind ourselves of turns out to be the fact that consciousness is embedded in the play of history, and not vice versa. This is the only function I understood from Gadamer’s phenomenology of play.

### 3.2.2. Aesthetic Experience

Gadamer’s views on aesthetic experience can be read off as another facet of the movement whose aim is to supersede the subject/object dichotomy. His inclusion of the concept of play when attempting to explain what kind of being the work of art has helps us to understand the event (*Ereignis*) character of art work. By overcoming the views of both Kant and Hegel due to the aesthetic experience, Gadamer, with Heidegger, can be said to pioneer the radical claim which suggests that artwork can also be a locus of “truth”.

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, p.72. See also the next paragraph, where Palmer says: “The player chooses which game he will give himself to, but once he chooses he enters a closed world in which the game comes to take place in and through the players. In a sense the game has its own momentum and pushes itself forward; it will also be played out.”

In the former section, I have stressed Gadamer's attempt to decentralize the "self" when carrying through a phenomenology of play. And I have also emphasized that this phenomenology is a preparatory analysis on the way to constructing a selfless philosophy. "Selflessness" is the word which is used by Gadamer in order to define Heideggerian analysis of Dasein's Being-in-the-world. We have already seen that, because it is embedded in and conditioned by history, Dasein's self-reflective capacity can never level up the expectations of the traditional philosophy which coined and concretized the concepts like "self", "consciousness", "self-consciousness", etc. Now we will try to grasp the nature of understanding as Being-in-the-world, which stems from the aesthetic experience.

Gadamer assigns the first part of *Truth and Method* to the critique of Kantian aesthetics, which he thinks to be the recurrence of the problematic of subject/object schema. What is important for us here, when examining the selfless point of view stemming from the analysis of aesthetic experience as play, lies in the Kantian dichotomy between the "work of art itself" in its aesthetic determination, and the "effect on its spectator".<sup>67</sup> This isolation of the artistic production from its spectator is what externalizes the performative aspect of the work of art and makes it a static object of aesthetic consciousness. It can be claimed that, at least methodologically, what Gadamer calls "aesthetic differentiation" is nothing other than the task which was tried to be achieved in the natural sciences.

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<sup>67</sup> Dow, Kathleen. 1996. Art and the Symbolic Element of Truth in *International Philosophical Quarterly* (Vol. XXXVI, No.2, Issue No.142). p.176.

What we call a work of art and experience (*erleben*) aesthetically depends on a process of abstraction. By disregarding everything in which a work of art is rooted (its original context of life, and the religious or secular function that gave it significance), it becomes visible as the “pure work of art”. In performing this abstraction, aesthetic consciousness performs a task that is positive in itself. It shows what a pure work of art is, and allows it to exist in its own right. I call this “aesthetic differentiation”.<sup>68</sup>

Contrary to this traditional view which separates the artwork as an object from its spectator and makes the spectator responsible for *grasping* the *whatness* of the work in order that the work is objectively experienced, Gadamer thinks that aesthetic experience is relevant to *exposition* rather than *ability*. When considering the Being of the work of art, if the play character of it is emphasized, it becomes clear that the obsolete endeavor of trying to achieve an ability to grasp the whatness of a work of art in a “disinterested manner” is replaced with a kind of *openness*, which regards to be responsive to the call of the work as the most important factor to let the artwork, as a play, present itself. So, “to the extent that one really experiences art, one does not confront it from outside but is ‘taken *in*’ it by its play”.<sup>69</sup> For Gadamer, as long as the identity and permanence ascribed to the Being of any aesthetic production is insisted upon, it would not be possible to imagine the work of art as a play; for, in this case, the performance factor turns out to be missing. But performance is not something exterior to art, instead, it is immanent in it; “the fact that aesthetic being depends on being presented, then, does not imply some deficiency, some

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<sup>68</sup> *TM* 85.

<sup>69</sup> *TM* 174.

lack of autonomous meaning. Rather, it belongs to its very essence”.<sup>70</sup> If the view, which differentiates the work of art *itself* from its performances as possible interpretations of *it* can be called “formalism”, then, what Gadamer insists upon turns out to be that an art work is in fact the “totality of its self-presentations”. The importance of this view issues from its inclusion of the hermeneutical and temporal character of artwork.<sup>71</sup> Any approach, even if it could have developed sensitivity to the hermeneutical aspect of aesthetic experience, remains to be formalist in its essence, as long as it envisages the artwork as a self-identical form, which is filled by content whenever it is performed. What distinguishes Gadamerian approach from the formalist one, then, can be found out in the fact that Gadamer does not conceive the artwork as an encompassed, rounded out structure as a *finished whole*. For him, a performance is not a bare repetition of this structure as in the form of an artwork; instead, in every performance, artwork is created again and again:

In a certain sense interpretation probably is re-creation, but this is a re-creation not of the creative act but of the created work, which

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<sup>70</sup> TM 128.

<sup>71</sup> For a counter claim, which prounds that the formal character of the art work is indispensable in aesthetic experience, see Crowther, Paul. 1983. The Experience of Art: Some Problems and Possibilities of Hermeneutical Analysis. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (Vol. XLIII, No. 3, 347-362), especially where he says: “So, Gadamer is claiming, then, that the purely ‘aesthetic object’ is fragmented between particular observers, and leaves no room for objectivity in interpretation. These points can be answered by a single argument, as follows. Although the constitution of a purely aesthetic object is a function of a cognitive activity of those who observe an artwork, we are not entitled to say it is just a function of that activity. We are guided, surely, in forming our attitude by the perceptible formal features of the work, and are able in principle to justify and argue the validity of our response by reference to them. This capacity, indeed, gives a rational continuity to aesthetic consciousness”, p.353.

has to be brought to representation in accord with the meaning the interpreter finds in it.<sup>72</sup>

This sentence can be accepted as the declaration of the fact that every interpretation of an artwork should be seen as a performance of the historically conditioned consciousness of an interpreter which is different from the artist himself/herself. Since it is impossible for an interpreter to insulate himself/herself from the tradition he/she is embedded, and to lodge himself/herself into the unique position of the artist who has his/her own tradition, that which is re-created by an interpretive endeavor is not the creative act; instead, the “work itself”. On the other hand, we saw above that Gadamer rejects the idea that the “work itself” is a kind of frozen structure, which has endured during the time until we come across it, though it has been performed many times.

Play is a structure -this means that despite its dependence on being played it is a meaningful whole which can be repeatedly presented as such and the significance of which can be understood. But structure is to play, because -despite this theoretical unity- it achieves its full being only each time it is played. That both sides of the question belong together is what we have to emphasize against the abstraction of aesthetic differentiation. . . We ask what this identity is that presents itself so differently in the changing course of ages and circumstances. It does not disintegrate into the changing aspects of itself so that it will lose all identity, but it is there in them all. They all belong to it. They are all contemporaneous (gleichzeitig) with it. Thus we have the task of interpreting the work of art in terms of time (Zeit).<sup>73</sup>

As is easily understood from the paragraph above, Gadamer excludes the idea that the meaning of a work of art is to be groped for in a timeless,

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<sup>72</sup> *TM* 119.

<sup>73</sup> *TM* 119, 120-121.



ahistorical unity which presents the intentions of its creator. The identity of an artwork has to be searched for, above all, in the “history of its performances”, the first of which could be accepted as the creative process of *it*. This proposition has three important consequences: (1) As the artist himself is also thought of as a historical agent who is dependent upon and restricted by the culture he/she belongs to, the work of art produced by him/her exceeds the intentions he/she entertains. (2) Since a work of art is a historical product which cannot be encompassed by any self reflective scrutiny, aesthetic interpretation turns out to be a historical investigation, too. And (3) the art work is relegated from being a substantial whole whose *selfsameness* is conceived as the photograph of the state of mind and intentions of its creator, to an “occasion”, on which historically conditioned consciousness of an interpreter partakes in the self-presentation of an artwork as play.

My thesis, then, is that the being of art cannot be defined as an aesthetic consciousness because, on the contrary, the aesthetic attitude is more than it knows of itself. It is a part of the *event of being that occurs in presentation*, and belongs essentially to play as play.<sup>74</sup>

In his analysis about the Being of a work of art, Gadamer does not acknowledge the idea which assumes an artwork has a similar structure with a *sign*, whose initial task is to disappear after it refers the structure of which it is a sign. Nor does he accept the idea that artwork is *symbolic* in character, whose aim is to take the place of that which is pointed out. When the former view is considered, it would become possible to claim that Gadamer

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<sup>74</sup> *TM* 116.

displaces the idea which asserts that there is something over there which must be represented in the work of art, because for Gadamer, to represent something is to *interpret* it:

Even perception conceived as an adequate response to a stimulus would never be a mere mirroring of what is there. For it would always remain an understanding of something as something. All understanding-as is an articulation of what is there, in that it-looks-away-from, looks-at, sees-together-as.<sup>75</sup>

The relationship between an artwork and that which is represented in an artwork cannot be explained in terms of a relationship between a signifier and a signified. Nor does the “truth claim” of an artwork lie in that.

Contrary to the Hegelian view which thinks of the truth of artwork as something convertible into clearer conceptual terms, and the Kantian view which carefully distinguishes the truth claim of *taste* from the truth which resides in cognitive acts, Gadamer thinks that the truth claim inherent in an artwork cannot be found beyond or outside of it, and it is only this claim which can be acknowledged as “universal”. The universality of the truth which discloses in the aesthetic sphere emanates from its performative character; i.e., it is not a truth which stems from the correspondence between a thing-itself and an enunciated judgment about this thing-itself, say, reality. The kind of truth entertained in the play of an artwork lies basically in the fact that any understanding of an artistic production is a *self-understanding* as well. This analysis of artistic experience as “understanding the artwork self-understandingly” deprives the *selfsameness* and *essence* of artwork from it,

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<sup>75</sup> TM 90.

and lets us be aware of the fact that this experience is essentially an *event*. Neither in the creative process of the artist himself/herself, nor in the interpretive experience of an interpreter or spectator is a selfsameness conveyed from the outer world and represented in the self-conscious subjectivity. Rather, that which is represented or interpreted is re-created again. Since the consciousness of artist is embedded in a tradition and full of historical data, his/her pure consciousness cannot be the locus where the representations are carried out. The same is true for the spectator or the interpreter, too. Insofar as the temporal distance between the interpreter and the “original” work is considered, a kind of “empathy” which was formerly prophesied by Schleiermacher becomes a mere dream; origin of the work of art lies in the “history of the interpretations and re-creations of it”.

### **3.2.3. Tradition and the Role of Prejudices**

In the former section, we saw why aesthetic experience has the character of a selfless play or a happening which takes place in the encounter between the artwork itself and historically conditioned spectator, interpreter, or even the artist himself/herself. Besides, I have also tried to explain why Gadamer gives the aesthetic consciousness a hermeneutical overtone. In this section, I will try to summarize the role of “tradition” and the “prejudices” inherent in it in every act of understanding especially in historical science and the human sciences.

Contrary to the neo-Kantian approach which locates the human understanding outside the tradition as a mere logical structure, or the

empiricist school which tends to portray it as a *tabula rasa*, Gadamer conceives the human understanding not apart from the tradition to which it belongs from the outset. Here, understanding's being in a tradition from the beginning is commensurable with "thrownness of Dasein" or its "facticity", which I tried to delineate in the chapter ascribed to Heideggerian philosophy. Under the influence of the hermeneutical ontology of Heidegger, Gadamer can be said to vindicate the prejudices which are blackened especially by Enlightenment philosophy as the distorting factors on the way to objective knowledge. This affirmation of the positive role of prejudices (*Vorurteile*) as the pre-judgments (*Vor-urteilen*) handed down to us by the continuity of tradition through the language as the medium, gives the ontological character to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. As it is the case in Heideggerian existential analysis of Dasein, the concept of "understanding" turns out to be an ontological leitmotif in Gadamerian hermeneutics, as long as it is thought to be constructed on pre-ontological or pre-reflective accumulation of pre-judgments or prejudices, which makes up the *sensus communis* of the tradition in which we are born.<sup>76</sup>

Self reflection and autobiography . . . are not primary and are therefore not adequate for the hermeneutical problem, because through them history is made private once more. In fact history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand

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<sup>76</sup> For a wider analysis of Gadamer's conception of *sensus communis* in comparison with Makkreel's usage of it, see Hance, Allen. 1997. The Hermeneutic Significance of the *Sensus Communis*. *International Philosophical Quarterly* (Vol. XXXVII, No. 2, Issue No. 146, 133-148), especially where he says: "In construing the *sensus communis* as a formal structure that relates us critically to the matter of tradition, Makkreel tacitly endorses Kant's equation of tradition with 'vulgar understanding' and everyday common sense, that is, with the empirically given set of inherited beliefs (prejudices) that must be tested by the *transcendental sensus communis*." p.143.

ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being.*<sup>77</sup>

As we can easily understand from the passage quoted above, Gadamer thinks that the surface of the mirror of subjectivity is not as smooth as the reflexive philosophy imagines it to be. Rather, it is rough and does not display uniformity from era to era, place to place, when the hermeneutical problem of understanding is considered. The conceptual schemes by the help of which understanding the cultures of our antecedents, life style of alien societies, some certain events which happened in the past, etc. becomes possible, changes from community to community. Nor are they durable; they change from time to time. It can be claimed that, it is because of its fluid character, this fore-structure of understanding which underlies every individual act of interpretation has been found to be vulgar by Enlightenment philosophy. By giving precedence to epistemology and rearranging the subject as the locus of objective knowledge – say, Kantian zeal to fix up the subject with twelve categories and to stabilize it – Enlightenment tried to cope with this difficulty.

Gadamer thinks that this endeavor of Enlightenment philosophy is tantamount to the fact that an overwhelming formalism and scientism inhibited the philosophers of the era from tackling the hermeneutical problem of understanding rightly. According to him, what prevents the Enlightenment

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<sup>77</sup> TM 276-277.

thought from conceiving historical agent as the core of “situated rationality” is, under the effect of Cartesian philosophy, its condemnation of prejudices as the factors, which are asserted by blind authority. Gadamer intervenes here by propounding that authority can be authority as long as it entertains more “good reasons” to persuade the members of a community than anyone else does; “this is the essence of the authority claimed by the teacher, the superior, the expert”.<sup>78</sup> He also remarks that the form of authority that is advocated by him is that which he owes to the romantic criticism of Enlightenment; that is, the authority of “tradition” as the court of commonsensical validity.<sup>79</sup> What distinguishes the authority of tradition from the blind conception of authority imagined by Enlightenment is the fact that, whereas the latter is thought to be emanating from the will of some certain group or a person, the former issues not from a certain focus; instead, it is always already *there* in the society as the court of intelligibility of any possible judgment enunciated or act went about. Gadamer uses this relatively mild conception of authority in a contrary manner to the dictatorial overtone lurking in the Enlightenment interpretation of it, in order to present it as a dynamic, rather than a conservative and banning factor.

It can be shown that the concept of prejudice did not originally have the meaning we have attached to it. Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the

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<sup>78</sup> *TM* 280.

<sup>79</sup> *TM* 280-281.

world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something – whereby what we encounter says something to us.<sup>80</sup>

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and his thesis due to the prejudices which are bequeathed us through the linguistic medium of tradition can be read off as a resistance to the view which, by formalizing and objectifying the human behavior and human products, tries to provide human sciences with a deductive character. His objection to Dilthey's endeavor to grasp what he calls "objectifications of life" by historical categories proves that Gadamer holds the scientific approach at bay. He drastically refuses the idea which imposes that the character of understanding in both human sciences and historical science consists of putting the individual cases, products, occurrences, etc. under predetermined universals. His insistence upon the impossibility of presuppositionless understanding implies the historicity and finitude of human beings. For him, understanding *happens* in the collusion between historically affected consciousnesses consisting of pre-understandings bequeathed them from the tradition they belong and an historical object, which can be accepted as a human product. The most important difference that is worth consideration between the inquiry in the natural sciences and the human sciences, then, lies in the fact that, in human sciences, the consciousness of the inquirer is always affected by that which is investigated. In historical science, for example, an encounter between the historicist and that which is under question is possible, insofar as the

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<sup>80</sup> Gadamer, Hans Georg. 1976. The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem. In David E.Linge (trans. and ed.). *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 9.

historicist have an impression about its subject matter, which consists of the fore-structure of his/her understanding, which Gadamer calls prejudices.

If we are trying to understand a historical phenomenon from the [temporal] distance that is characteristic of hermeneutical situation, we are always already affected by history.<sup>81</sup>

So a traditional text to be understood cannot be the *object* of our interest in terms of natural sciences, for we cannot stand outside of it and take a disinterested stance towards it. This continual affect of history on us is the basic *hermeneutical situation* for Gadamer, and is called “history of effects” (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) by him.

This hermeneutical situation in which every historical individual is what “represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence essential to the concept of situation is the concept of ‘horizon’”.<sup>82</sup> Gadamer thinks that understanding happens when two separate horizons, say, belonging to different traditions, fuse. Although they are finite<sup>83</sup> to the extent that their extension is thought to be the volume of prejudices comprising of them,

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<sup>81</sup> TM 300, italics added.

<sup>82</sup> TM 302.

<sup>83</sup> For an evaluation which tackles the “finitude of human understanding” in opposition to Hegel’s notion of “infinite intellect”, see Wachterhauser, especially where he says: “For Hegel the ‘infinite’ was the ‘unconditioned’ and ‘self-determining’. An ‘infinite’ intellect would be its own master, an autonomous, spontaneous source of all its essential activities and contents. In contrast, Gadamer is suggesting that the human intellect is always, at least in part, conditioned and determined in important ways by historical factors outside its control. Hence a human intellect can never become fully autonomous; it remains forever and always ‘finite’. But the presence of a tacit determining factor also suggests another sense in which the human intellect can be called ‘finite’. Such prejudices preclude the possibility of either viewing the subject matter as such, from a perspective-free viewpoint, or of mastering all possible prejudices that one could go freely from one set of prejudices to another until one has exhausted all possible perspectives from which the subject matter could show itself.” Wachterhauser, Brice R. 1988. *Prejudice, Reason and Force (Philosophy)*, 63, pp. 231-232).



individual horizons are not conjured up as concrete and static structures. They are fluid and mobile, and the possibility of understanding issues from their mobility and fluidity. That the content of the prejudices can change only by their encounter with some other prejudices which make up another horizon, and not by applying a certain “method” as is asserted by scientism underlies the fact that every understanding in the human sciences and in the historical science is a kind of *self*-understanding which can always be defined as an open-ended and *unfinished* process.

The illumination of the situation -reflection on effective history- can never be completely achieved; yet the fact that it cannot be completed due not to a deficiency in reflection but to the essence of the historical being that we are.<sup>84</sup>

So, “*to be historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete*”.<sup>85</sup>

The most important point which must be kept in mind when trying to comprehend the way Gadamer depicts the tradition and the prejudices inherent in it is that this claim is just a phenomenological analysis, rather than a critical stance. Although his analysis due to human *Verstehen* as a “selfless” happening as in the form of fusion of horizons implies that Gadamer is not interested in searching for a criterion to distinguish the “true” prejudices from the “false” ones to construct a methodology to be used in human sciences, this is not tantamount to the fact that Gadamerian hermeneutics is irrational in character. On the contrary, rationality of selfless thought lies in the

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<sup>84</sup> *TM* 302.

<sup>85</sup> *TM* 302.

continuity of *dialogue*, which can be accepted as the only locus of truth in the human sciences, aesthetic experience, history, literature, etc. In order to distinguish the *promising* prejudices which supply a dialogue with tradition continuity, from the bad ones, which intervene and stop this flow, all we need to do is to remind ourselves of the dialogical aspect of human understanding.

### **3.3. Dialogical Character of Understanding**

Rather than a monological contemplation as in the form of reflection, Gadamer thinks that the art of understanding is based on a dialogical model, in which the dynamic structure of “question and answer” plays an important role. Understanding is not, after following the pre-determined steps of a method, grasping the core of subject matter. Nor can it be defined as the scientific process of putting the individuals under certain universals. Instead, understanding as the hermeneutic situation must be depicted as the result of “art of conversation”, in the restricted area of which the interlocutors tries to find their way around. As it can easily be noticed, this way of portraying the character of understanding is the parallel explanation of understanding as “fusion of horizons”; that is to say, fusion of individual horizons is possible only in a dialogue. In other words, only in a fruitful dialogue which plays itself out through the interlocutors, can the individual horizons of agents fuse to make up a single horizon which exceeds the boundaries of its components.

The importance which is ascribed to dialogue as the model of understanding issues from Gadamer’s appreciation of Socratic dialogue, which can be encountered in nearly all writings of Plato.

If language has its authentic life only in conversation, then the Platonic dialogue will awaken a living discussion now as before, and will achieve the fertile fusion of all horizons in which, questioning and searching, we must find our way in our own world.<sup>86</sup>

Dialogue presents us a medium in which we can test our prejudices by putting them into risk. Although there happens to be a general contention which conceives a conversation as a contest of arguments and counterarguments, Gadamer, by underscoring the primary role of “question” over the answer, argues that dialogical process cannot be exhausted by achieving a consensus on one of the truth claims entertained in the dialogue. According to him, dialogue is an infinite process; that is why it characterizes the finite hermeneutical situation of human beings best.

For a genuine dialogue, the subject matter which initiates conversation must matter to the interlocutors in equal degrees. Only insofar as the interlocutors of a conversation are *open* enough to join the play of question and answer, could an authentic dialogue take place. Besides, this readiness for being part of a genuine dialogue does not arise from a will to beat the other, instead, emanates from being wishful to surrender oneself to the event of dialogue. In other words, to partake in a real conversation demands the fact that one must be willing enough to risk his/her pre-understandings by provoking the objections directed to himself/herself, rather than trying blindly to overcome them.

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<sup>86</sup> Gadamer, Hans Georg. 1991. Gadamer on Gadamer. In Hugh J. Silverman (ed. and int.). *Continental Philosophy IV: Gadamer and Hermeneutics*. New York and London: Routledge. p. 9.

To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are oriented. It requires that one does not try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion. Hence it is an art of testing.<sup>87</sup>

If the aim of a dialogue was to be conceived as having one statement race against another in order to catch the true conception of the subject matter being investigated, then the finitude of the hermeneutical situation of the participants would have been ignored. Dialogue is thought of as a model, which displays the finitude of human intellect and selfless character of understanding and interpretation par excellence. It blooms in the point, where the pre-walked ways of methodologism is substituted by groping for one's way on the unwalked paths of thought. In an authentic dialogue, that which is carried through is not to re-describe that which was formerly described and exhausted. Rather, to be involved in a dialogue amounts to the fact that the self-reflective capacities of the participants weaken, and the dialogue itself begins to dominate the process. It becomes impossible to contend that the model of genuine dialogue is the best "method" to communicate the ideas, because it is not something we can shape in advance by determining some certain principles; instead, it makes up itself free from our wills.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> TM 367.

<sup>88</sup> For a counter view which implies that Gadamerian hermeneutics proposes a method and this method is Socratic in character, see Healy, Paul. 1996. *Situated Rationality and Hermeneutical Understanding: A Gadamerian Approach to Rationality*. *International Philosophical Quarterly* (Vol. XXXVI, No. 2, Issue No. 142, 155-171), especially where he says: "In approaching Gadamer from the perspective of rationality, what is most striking in the first instance is his emphasize on openness. As we have seen, the appeal to openness is Gadamer's antidote to the constriction of rule-determined methodologies. At a minimum it expresses his conviction that an attitude of openness is a more important requirement in approaching a topic than are any methodological considerations. If need be, these can be

In the light of what I said above, genuine dialogue seems to be something that happens or not, depending partly on the chance conditions throughout the conversation. By using “chance conditions”, I intend to clarify that, for Gadamer, a genuine conversation is not the product of self-conscious agents’ best choices among the words which they prepare to utter; so, it is not the case that a dialogue happens to be genuine and fruitful because the most convenient words are uttered by the interlocutors. Rather, it must be contended that, a dialogue which is found to be fertile, authentic and variegated may not be the best alternative. After such a conversation, there is always a possibility to find better alternatives (I mean, the words and idioms, or some other way of articulating and communicating an idea) if one ponders over the dialogue in which he was one of the interlocutors. So, there is genuine dialogue, but there is not any *best* dialogue.

It can easily be concluded from above that Gadamer does not give us a formal schema about how a conversation ought to be in order that the agents can communicate their ideas completely. The only point he persistently emphasize is the importance of *good will* and *openness* to the other. For me, what remains questionable in Gadamer’s approach on this very point is whether he associates this “openness” with an *ought* as a rational principle. Which one is more likely: to claim that a genuine dialogue is the product of openness and good will, or vice versa? For the sake of clarifying more, let me formulate a second question: If Gadamer defends the

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worked out in the course of inquiry itself. Of course, in adopting this perspective Gadamer puts himself at odds with those philosophical traditions (such as the Cartesian) which insist on the establishment of a predetermined method and predetermined starting points for inquiry.” p. 167.

first one (and so seems the case), can we conclude that he is but a *refined* methodologist? It seems to be the case that “openness” or “good will” as the moral prerequisite is tightly bound up with the “precedence of the question over the answer” theme. If we reflect on this bind, we can remark that whenever we are willful and open enough before we partake in a conversation, we question the other and try to understand him more, rather than making an effort to defeat him. To be wishful to ask rather than to answer amounts to forsaking the “I” for the sake of dissolving in the “We” — i.e., the real subject of a genuine dialogue. So, if “good will” or “openness” is to be acknowledged as the absolute condition without which an authentic dialogue is impossible, then it must be concluded that this term adds a transcendental overtone to Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that this transcendence is different from the transcendence which traces the information regarding the *thing-in-itself* — for example, scientific transcendence. If we remember that the measure of *truth* is not the correspondence between the thing itself and the judgment regarding that thing, but instead the production which is capable of giving birth to further productions (as the criterion which helps us differentiating the *good* prejudices from the *bad* ones) according to Gadamer, we can better comprehend why his transcendent term (*good will good will* or *openness*) is not as same as the transcendence used by traditional philosophy.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> This claim can be labeled as a postmodern reading of Gadamer, if we remember the importance of the term “production” in Deleuze and Guattari, where they say: “The schizophrenic is the universal producer. There is no need to distinguish here between producing and its product. We need merely note that pure ‘thisness’ of the object produced is

In addition to being a model for every genuine conversation between people, Gadamer contends that dialogue can be a model for every endeavor to understand and interpret the meaning of literary and historical texts as well. Interpreting a traditional text, whether it is historical or literary, is not equal with the task of bridging ourselves with the unique hermeneutical situation of the historical figure under question or the writer by the help of *empathy*. As we saw above, insofar as effective history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) is in charge, it would become impossible for us to see the tradition in which we are and the tradition in which the historical event happened or the writer of a literary text lived separately. Such a disinterested position is not attainable for us. We can understand *the other* in terms of *ourselves*. If this is the case as Gadamer posits, it becomes tenable to claim that every interpretation has a structure of dialogue which represents the finite hermeneutical situation of human *Verstehen* par excellence.<sup>90</sup>

In such a dialogue with the traditional texts as well, the question has precedence over the answer. Gadamer thinks that to understand even a mere sentence is to find the question to which it is an answer.<sup>91</sup>

Thus a person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a

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carried over into a new act of producing." *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 1983, tr. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, University of Minnesota Press, p.7.

<sup>90</sup> For a brief analysis which tackles even the reflective process as a self-conversation in terms of Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics, see Smith, P. Christopher. 1991. Plato as Impulse and Obstacle in Gadamer's Development of a Hermeneutical Theory. In Hugh J. Silverman (ed. and int.). *Continental Philosophy IV: Gadamer and Hermeneutics*. New York and London: Routledge. p.34.

<sup>91</sup> *TM* 372-373.

question. If we go back *behind* what is said, then we inevitably ask questions *beyond* what is said. We understand the sense of the text only by acquiring the horizon of the question -a horizon that, as such, necessarily includes other possible answers. Thus the meaning of a sentence is relative to the question to which it is a reply, but that implies that its meaning necessarily exceeds what is said in it. As these considerations show, then, the logic of the human sciences is a logic of the question.<sup>92</sup>

Although he seems to be emphasizing the importance of finding out the intentions of the writer or an historical agent when dictating the ineluctable role of question, what Gadamer aims at is not to make a distinction between “the question the text intended to answer and the question to which it really is an answer”.<sup>93</sup> It is rather the case that, the question is the locomotive of a genuine dialogue because, first, it provides the dialogue with continuity and second, it underscores the function of the unique historical situation of the one who poses the question. Since the traditional texts *matters* to the one who reads it, to question the text as an endeavor to interpret it becomes an existential task, rather than an intellectual one. To interrogate a traditional text by asking some questions to it is a kind of play, which happens between the unique historical horizon of the text and of the interpreter. It is only by way of question can an interpreter risk his/her prejudices. In fact, the precedence of the question comes from the fact that, only by way of it, an interpreter activates his fore-understandings for the sake of being part of a game between the tradition in which he/she lives and the tradition the text under question belongs. Questioning, not answering, is the opportunity to *test* our

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<sup>92</sup> *TM* 370.

<sup>93</sup> *TM* 372.



pre-judgments in our encounter with the past. That is why Gadamer thinks that every understanding is also a self-understanding. Man understands *questioningly* and *self-understandingly*, not *methodically*.<sup>94</sup>

Now that I have completed the task of portraying the “selfless” character of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, I will, *mutatis mutandis*, try to delineate Gadamer’s debt to earlier philosophy of Heidegger constructed in his magnum opus *Being and Time*. By trying to depict the linguistic character of their conceptions about what understanding is, and by explaining the existential overtone they supply the concept of *experience*, I hope to have unraveled the problem between Heideggerian-Gadamerian endeavor and the traditional conception of philosophy; that is, how to locate our thought *beyond objectivism and relativism*.

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<sup>94</sup> See Ambrosio, Francis J. 1987. Gadamer, Plato, and the Discipline of Dialogue. *International Philosophical Quarterly* (Vol. XXVII, No. 1, Issue No. 105), p. 19.

## CHAPTER 4

# LINGUISTIC AND PRACTICAL ASPECT OF UNDERSTANDING

In the two chapters preceding this one, I tried to lay out how Heidegger and Gadamer converted the epistemological concept of understanding, which is rooted on a more primordial tendency of dividing the world into two spheres as “mind” and “body”, into an existential one. In the chapter ascribed to Heidegger, my aim was to emphasize the internal relationship between his conception of understanding and Dasein’s Being-in-the-world as care. We thereby found out that the theoretical framework constructed by traditional ontology so as to define in what way human beings can understand the outer world, others, self, and most importantly Being was rejected by Heidegger for the sake of a more primordial conception of understanding tackled by him along with the question of Being. After all, the point which I hope to have emphasized enough is the fact that, Heidegger’s objection to this theoretical paradigm as an attempt to derive the meaning of Being from the Reality as a scientific construct is not tantamount to a kind of anti-scientism. Rather, his critical arrays take aim at scientific-theoretical philosophy’s claim to be the only court, which is entitled to adjudicate the *validity* and *truth* of the

judgments regarding the outer world, human beings, and even the ontological question of Being. The revolutionary overtone lurking in early Heidegger's thought is due to his not privileging the scientific occupation as an absolute locus of truth; for him, science is not the only model which guides us in our investigations. Dasein's ways of comporting itself to its world is more variegated than scientific philosophy is accustomed to envisage it to be. Heidegger contends that scientific activity is just one of the activities among others. In the second chapter, while I was mentioning the priority of ready-to-hand over present-at-hand, I tried to bring up the fact that, for Heidegger, any kind of investigation which has a claim on *truth*, including the scientific activity, issues from the pre-understanding of the world as a whole;

. . . the '*commercium*' of the subject with a world does not get created for the first time by knowing, nor does it *arise* from some way in which the world acts upon a subject. Knowing is a mode of Dasein founded upon Being-in-the-world.<sup>95</sup>

Although it seems to be the case that what distinguishes Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics from Heidegger's ontological analysis of the question of Being in Dasein's understanding of *it* resides in the fact that, Heidegger stresses most of all the aspect of understanding which works in the daily dealings of Dasein, whereas Gadamer tackles it in the paradigm of human sciences, the commonality between them has of a greater importance; that is, the fore-structure of understanding. In the third chapter, I brought up Gadamerian concept "horizon" in order to underscore the finitude of human understanding in the framework of philosophical hermeneutics.

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<sup>95</sup> BT 90.

This framework, which can be thought to be derived from Heideggerian conception of Being-in-the-world constitutes the essence of the solution, which is produced firstly by Heidegger himself to mitigate the problems endemic to traditional conception of understanding which has been established on subject/object dichotomy especially since Descartes. On the other hand, tightly related with finitude of man founded upon its historical being, the traditional conception of understanding (as *knowing, grasping, being able to do*, etc.) which characterizes it as something *done* by a self-conscious subject or as mirroring the outer world in self-reflective consciousness of human subjects is abandoned by both of our philosophers. In this point, I believe that it wouldn't be absurd to claim that Gadamer's characterization of *event* of understanding as a dialogue which plays itself out through the interlocutors, puts him to the parallel position with Heidegger, if we remind ourselves of the latter's conception of understanding as a self-forgetful act of Dasein pervaded by its world.

In this final chapter, my aim is to carry out a comparative analysis between Heidegger and Gadamer. I will try to emphasize the importance of the finitude of *experience* ("*Erfahrung*") by laying out Gadamer's reading of Aristotle. On the other hand, I will show up how Gadamer's conception of understanding, as in the form of "fusion of finite horizons", is under the influence of Heidegger's conception of Dasein. Throughout the following section, my purpose will be, *mutatis mutandis*, to disclose the similarities between the philosophers in their conceptions of understanding as a *know-how knowledge*. Then I will consider the linguistic character of human

understanding from the perspective of our philosophers. In the final section, when I am considering the problem of how a good interpretation or understanding can be distinguished from a bad one, I will explain why I find Gadamer's dialogical model of understanding superior to Heidegger's separation between "authentic understanding" and "inauthentic understanding".

#### **4.1. Linguistic Character of Understanding**

Throughout this paper, we have many times attested to the fact that the concept of understanding is related with the historical agents, and not with the self-transparent subjects. According to both Heidegger and Gadamer, a theoretical standpoint which is immune from any historical affection is an impossible dream. One of the most important consequences of this historical-hermeneutical view which avoids positing the human intellect as an ahistorical subjectivity shows up in their conceptions of language.

Neither early Heidegger, nor Gadamer acknowledges the fact that language is a mere instrument which is used to symbolize and signify that which is *known* in a pre-linguistic way — which characterizes the Platonic meaning theory of *seeing* the ideas (or forms), which reduces language to a position in which it is thought of as the mere carrier of these meanings. Although it must be acknowledged that Heidegger gave a central role to the problem of language right after the *Kehre*, it is also possible to come across with some hints expressing Heidegger's views on language throughout *Being and Time*.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger tackles the phenomenon of language along with “understanding” and “state-of-mind”, and states that the whole, in which these three are equiprimordially effective, is nothing other than the Being-in-the-world. As one of the three constituents of the Being-in-the-world, language is characterized as the phenomenon whose ontological foundation is *discourse*.<sup>96</sup> If we remind ourselves of the fact that Being-with-the-others is immanent in Dasein’s Being-in-the-world, it becomes clear why Heidegger gives precedence to the phenomenon of discourse.

The way in which discourse gets expressed is language. Language is a totality of words - a totality in which discourse has a ‘worldly’ Being of its own; and as an entity-within-the-world, this totality thus becomes something which we may come across as ready-to-hand. Language can be broken in the word-Things which are present-at-hand. Discourse is existentially language, because that entity whose disclosedness it articulates according to significations, has, as its kind of Being, Being-in-the-world -a Being which has been thrown and submitted to the ‘world’.<sup>97</sup>

From the passage quoted above, the point which must be stressed is language’s having been characterized as something “which we *may* come across as ready-to-hand”. Heidegger seems to have used the modal verb “may”, which I italicized in the former sentence, deliberately in order to imply the fact that language of mathematics, language of logic, language of natural sciences, etc. are also languages, although they are characterized as present-at-hand. On the other hand, the phenomenon of language in which daily discourse is expressed is seen as something ready-to-hand. We saw in

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<sup>96</sup> BT 203.

<sup>97</sup> BT 204.

the first chapter, the way of Being ready-to-hand has is represented by the entities within-the-world, whose character is other than that of Dasein. Besides, we have also stated that these entities are in fact equipments, which are ready to be used or manipulated by Dasein. So, the only consequence which can be derived from this chain of argument seems to be the fact that, for Heidegger, language is equipment in its essence. But is this conclusion true?

To answer this question rightly, we must first of all intimate the fact that “to have equipment structure” and “to have instrument structure” seem to us as if they are synonym. However, based on the view I put forward in the first chapter, I will claim that equipmentality of something ready-to-hand distinguishes itself from “instrumentality” of something present-hand by the fact that, whereas the former is affective in the understanding of the Being whose Being is at issue for it, the latter can be accepted just a *means* in order to fulfill some certain, planned task.<sup>98</sup> If language was something instrumental, this would be tantamount to the fact that it is a mere reflector of the pre-linguistically attained ideas. But it is clear that this is far from what Heidegger claims about the Being of language.

This point can be supported that, in opposition to Husserl, Heidegger refuses to acknowledge the phenomenological view which sees language as a mere instrument to communicate the sense of the *essences* which are grasped at the end of a pre-linguistic process of *bracketing*. It is impossible to

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<sup>98</sup> See, Chapter 1, Section 2.2.

put language into parenthesis and come face to face with the transcendental subjectivity by insulating oneself from the so-called “outer-world”;

In talking, Dasein expresses itself [spricht sich . . . aus] not because it has, in the first instance, been encapsulated as something ‘internal’ over against something outside, but because as Being-in-the-world it is already ‘outside’ when it understands.<sup>99</sup>

That the world in which Dasein is thrown is a with-world (*Mitsein*) requires the fact that it is language which transfers the common ways of coping with the world to us, as a medium. In the first chapter, I have implied that the pre-ontological understanding of the world is handed down to Dasein from the community and culture in which it is thrown. Dasein overtakes these simple ways of interpreting the environment in which it lives from the average understanding of Anyone. And this average understanding, which forms the fore-structure of understanding of every Dasein, lies hidden in the *public* discourse, which Heidegger calls *idle* talk. So, it can be concluded that, the fore-structure of Dasein’s understanding is inherited by Dasein pre-ontologically, only insofar as the world in which it is born is conceived as a *linguistic world*.

But it is not the case that Heidegger tackles the problem of language and its role in human understanding to a full extent in *Being and Time*. It is rather Gadamer who puts the language as a problem to the focus of his interest, and gives it a priority in every kind of understanding and

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<sup>99</sup> BT 205. See, *HPK*, where Guignon says: “For a key part of Heidegger’s break with Husserl consists in the fact that, unlike his teacher, he leaves no room for anything like an unmediated encounter with things themselves. Our access to things, for Heidegger, is always mediated through a world that is shaped in advance by a mesh of cultural and historical interpretations, and these interpretations may very well turn out to be linguistically articulated.” p. 117.



interpretation. Heidegger's approach clarifies the fact that, as the beings living in a linguistically constructed world, we cannot go beyond the limit which language puts in front of us. So, every kind of endeavor which tries to investigate the kind of Being language has must acknowledge in advance the fact that its quest will always be conditioned by language itself. In other words, any attempt to comprehend the nature of language will be destined to be a *hermeneutical* investigation that can continue its quest only *from within* the subject matter itself. This obligation to carry on an investigation from within the subject matter under question gives Heideggerian ontology and Gadamerian interpretation theory their hermeneutical character.

Gadamer, like Heidegger, sees language not as mere signifier of the world.<sup>100</sup> Besides, he takes one step further and claims that there can be a world for us, only if we have a language; “. . . that which comes into language is not something pregiven before language; rather, the word gives it its own determinedness.”<sup>101</sup> For Gadamer, that which seems or presents itself to us is not the “world itself”; instead, the world presents itself to us as it is mediated in a language. On this point, Gadamer distinguishes himself from the Platonist tradition, which finds the essence of knowledge in the immediate ideas and relegates the language to an instrument.

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<sup>100</sup> Gadamer, Hans Georg. 1976. *Man and Language*. In David E.Linge (trans. and ed.). *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Berkeley: University of California Press, especially where he says: “Language is not one of the means by which consciousness is mediated with the world. It does not represent a third instrument alongside the sign and the tool, both of which are also certainly distinctively human. Language is by no means simply an instrument, a tool. For it is in the nature of the tool that we master its use, which is to say we take in hand and lay it aside when it has done its service.” p. 62, hereafter, ML.

<sup>101</sup> *TM* 475.

That which can be understood is language. This means that it is of such a nature that of itself it offers itself to be understood. Here too is confirmed the speculative nature of language. To come into language does not mean that a second being is acquired. Rather, what something presents itself as belongs to its own being. Thus everything that is language has a speculative unity: it contains a distinction, that between its being and its presentations of itself, but this is a distinction that is really not a distinction at all.<sup>102</sup>

We come into a world in which some certain phenomena and some certain state of affairs are articulated in some certain ways, with some certain words. If this is so, what Gadamer rejects would be the fact that we come across with the things themselves first, and then, during the period we learn our mother tongue, we begin to articulate those which we understood prelinguistically. According to him, there stands nothing out of the language, if anything is understood at all. So, it turns out to be the case that in understanding something, that which is understood cannot be claimed to be the “thing itself” as it is conceived by the Platonic tradition; rather, we understand some other understanding, if we understand at all. And if we remember the fact that every understanding is at the same time an interpretation, and every interpretation is a re-creation of what is articulated, then it becomes clear why Gadamer insists upon the fact that language is the insurmountable horizon of every possible understanding and interpretation.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> TM 475.

<sup>103</sup> For a brief analysis which characterizes language and history as the insurmountable horizons of human understanding in Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, see Wachterhauser, Brice. 2002. Getting It Right: Relativism, Realism and Truth. In Robert J. Dostal (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 57-58.

On the other hand, in this linguistic universe which encompasses us from all around, it is not the “language of things” which speaks itself out to us, as it is envisaged by the scientific philosophies.<sup>104</sup> If this were the case, then the daily language would have to be acknowledged as instrumental in character. Instead, Gadamer advocates the “speculative” nature of language in order to avoid such an anti-hermeneutical position and to emphasize the finitude of hermeneutical situation of human beings when compared with the infinite number of possibilities the words function in different language games. If it is true that for every act of interpretation dialogical model is the right model, in which “coming to an understanding” of two different and finite horizons full of pre-judgments come across, then, in the fusion of these separate horizons that which is disclosed would be nothing other than some certain aspect of the subject matter which is questioned in conversation: “Every appropriation of tradition is historically different: which does not mean that each one represents only an imperfect understanding of it. Rather, each is the experience of an ‘aspect of the thing itself’”.<sup>105</sup> So, in the light of all these, letting the things show themselves to a certain finite and historical standpoint turns out to be the synonym of being *speculative*.

Gadamer, like Heidegger, does not see the language as an ideal structure which endures even if it is not spoken. Rather, the essence of

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<sup>104</sup> Gadamer, Hans Georg. 1976. The Nature of Things and Language of Things. In David E. Linge (trans. and ed.). *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Berkeley: University of California Press, especially where Gadamer says: “It [*language of things*] expresses the fact that, in general, we are not at all ready to hear things in their own being, that they are subjected to man’s calculus and to his domination of nature through the rationality of science. Talk of a respect for things is more and more unintelligible in a world that is becoming ever more technical.” pp. 71-72. (Italics are mine).

<sup>105</sup> TM 473.

language is disclosed in speaking and communication. Speculative character of language and the finite-hermeneutical situation of the interlocutors partaking in a dialogue are the consequences of this “living language” perspective. By stressing language’s living character in a dialogical medium, rather than tackling it as totality of rules as in the form of “grammar”, Gadamer locate himself to the parallel position to Heidegger, who distinguishes the abstract language of present-at-hand as in the form of “assertion” or “judgement” and the language of ready-to-hand which is communicated in everydayness of Dasein.<sup>106</sup> For Heidegger, judgment is a derived mode of a more primordial interpretation which stems from our heritage of understanding. In this language, I mean the language of Anyone, that which is articulated belongs to our commonsensical everyday world. This language is distinguished from the language of theoretical interest which is thought to be wholly open to any kind of examination. Heidegger contends that both of these languages disclose something *as* something. But in the ontological conception of daily language which consists of the moods, pre-understandings, hopes, plans, significations of the ready-to-hand-entities, this *as* functions to display different encounters with the world, which are always conditioned by the factors above. This *as* is called “hermeneutical *as*” by Heidegger.<sup>107</sup> On the other hand, in the restricted universe of theoretical investigations, the language special to them is artificial in character. It is contended that, in scientific or theoretical quest, the language which is used

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<sup>106</sup> *BT* section 33.

<sup>107</sup> *BT* 201.

must reflect the facts under consideration as a mirror reflects the things. The inner logic and the grammar of this language can completely be mastered by the theoreticians who manipulate it, because it is artificial. The *as* which spans the outer world with the paradigmatic conceptions of the investigators is called “apophantical *as*” by Heidegger. So, both philosophers agree in that, language does not stand outside the world in order to represent it; rather, it is also within-the-world. For both of the philosophers, we can understand the world, only if we have already understood it as a whole in our daily languages. And this fore-structure of our understanding is the only factor which predicates our judgments in advance. Hence, Heidegger implies that the hermeneutical *as* is pre-predicative.

If we are to acknowledge Heidegger’s “fore-structures of understanding” and Gadamer’s “prejudices”, the totality of which makes up the “tradition” we belong, as the common denominator of their philosophical approaches, then, we have to admit that it is Gadamer, rather than early Heidegger, who clarified how these pre-understandings are handed down to us, because of the role he gives to language. So, about language, it can be said that what remains implicit in Heidegger’s *Being and Time* is explicated in Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*.

#### **4.2. Practical Aspect of Understanding**

As it is known from *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle puts a distinction between theoretical knowledge (*theoria*), technical knowledge (*techne*) and practical knowledge (*phronesis*). *Theoria* is seen by him as the highest type

of knowledge and is related with the pure thought, which has a conceptual progress unrelated with the empirical data. Contrary to *theoria*, in which the ends and the means are equally important, *techne* is a kind of knowledge which seeks to find the best ways and procedures to certain ends. Practical wisdom or *phronesis* resembles technical knowledge in this means and end distinction; what distinguishes *phronesis* as a kind of know-how knowledge from the technical knowledge lies in the fact that practical knowledge does not search after entrenched means for some certain specific ends. So, it can be concluded that, practical wisdom is not totally related with applying universals to the particular situations; instead, it necessitates that an agent must be capable of having right decisions without applying to the conceptual schemas. This is the crux of Gadamer's reading of Aristotle, because he discovers something common to his philosophical hermeneutics and Aristotle's definition of *phronesis* (moral wisdom). Gadamer thinks that the authentic meaning of the concept "practice" is degenerated by the technological desire to technically master the world:

If abstract relations between initial and terminal limiting conditions become graspable and calculable in such a way that the positing of new initial conditions has a predictable outcome, then the hour of technology has arrived by way of science as understood in this way.<sup>108</sup>

Gadamer uses *phronesis*, rather than *theoria* and *techne*, as the model for his hermeneutical conception of understanding in order to emphasize the finitude of human experience. As we have seen before,

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<sup>108</sup> Gadamer, Hans Georg. 1981. What Is Practice? In *Reason in the Age of Science*. Trans. Frederick G. Lawrence. Cambridge: MIT Press. p.70.

according to him, human understanding is not something which stands outside the experience (*Erfahrung*); nor is its function, as it stands out of the world of experience, to depict the picture of experience by analysis, calculation, etc. Understanding an experience is also an experience for Gadamer, insofar as the conception of a worldless subject fixed up with methodological knowledge which provides him with the *only* opportunity to attain objective knowledge is abjured. By this Aristotelian concept Gadamer acknowledges the moral character of human understanding and interpretation. Instead of being issued with a concrete method, being *experienced* is accepted as an advantage to understand better for Gadamer.

The human sciences stand closer to moral knowledge than to that kind of 'theoretical' knowledge. They are 'moral sciences'. Their object is man and what he knows of himself. But he knows himself as an acting being, and this kind of knowledge of himself does not seek to establish what is. An active being, rather, is concerned with what is not always the same but can also be different. In it he can discover the point at which he has to act. The purpose of his knowledge is to govern his actions.<sup>109</sup>

As it is easily understood from the passage quoted above, Gadamer is insistent upon the interaction between the law and particular situation; so, every understanding, like every moral decision, reconstructs the law one more time. Here, Gadamer stresses the point that the so called universals, which supply us a method, are not primordial, concrete truths; instead, they are open to be shaped again and again. In an example about juridical understanding of applying laws to some certain cases, Gadamer says that:

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<sup>109</sup> TM 314.

“The law is always deficient, not because it is imperfect in itself but because human reality is necessarily imperfect in comparison to the ordered world of law, and hence allows of no simple application of the law”.<sup>110</sup> The possibilities which can be presented by the life to us are so variegated and versatile, that it is not possible for a finite being like man in his restricted horizon to embrace all of these possibilities. To comprehend the importance of this existential aspect, which is strongly stressed by Gadamer, it is enough to understand how important Jasper’s conception of ‘boundary situations’ for him.<sup>111</sup> By this concept, what Jaspers tries to describe are the problematic situations in which we cannot find any method we are used to manipulate to solve the problems. These situations are defined as *existential* situations by Jaspers, for the methods we are accustomed to use when we are solving our problems in ordinary situations do not work in such cases. That the people are generally anxious in the face of such situations proves the fact that, in their everyday lives, men use some pre-given patterns to fix the problems. And this fixation process is nothing other than to apply the universal principles to individual situations. When man comes face to face with the obligation to be creative and to contrive some creative solutions to urgent problems, the real meaning of the word “practice” resurrects. Rhetoric can be given as an example. In rhetorical situation, man’s finitude becomes obtrusive because he is to find the right words in order to present the subject

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<sup>110</sup> TM 318.

<sup>111</sup> Gadamer, Hans Georg. 1976. *The Phenomenological Movement*. In David E. Linge (trans. and ed.), *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp. 137-138.



matter in a complex network of effects acting upon him. The urgency of action does not allow him to tarry in examining the subject matter from all perspectives. The finite horizon of his understanding comes to the fore, and the words uttered before become the source of the others which are on the way. Absence of criteria in such a “rush-hour”<sup>112</sup> causes the fact that progress of conversation is somehow contingent. Latter words are conditioned by the former ones in the fusion of finite horizons, and it becomes difficult to decide where the dialogue comes to an end. In a genuine dialogue, only when it is agreed upon the fact that enough is said, dialogue is terminated. But this does not amount to that the subject matter is exhausted by the interlocutors.

By this existential and Aristotelian move, which equates interpretation, understanding and practice, Gadamer radicalizes the hermeneutical turn, which is initiated by Heidegger. Here, what we must be aware of is the fact that, Gadamer changes the meaning of *experience*; in fact he gives it back its original meaning. Gadamer agrees with Heidegger in that, the desire to technically master the world by the methodology presented by the natural sciences has changed the meaning of experience. Whereas this problem is pronounced by Heidegger as the “oblivion of the question of Being”, Gadamer prefers to solve the problem by returning back to Aristotle.

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<sup>112</sup> See Bruns, Gerald. 2002. where he says: “Rhetoric is a way of improvising moments of order in the absence of standing order of things. It differs from philosophy and science in the sense that it belongs to a world of complex systems where there isn’t time to determine definitive truths. It presupposes a world of randomness and contingency where events come rushing at you and survival requires immediate action.” *The Hermeneutical Anarchist: Phronesis, Rhetoric, and the Experience of Art*. In Jeff Malpas, Ulrich Arnsward, and Jens Kertscher (ed.), *Gadamer’s Century*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, p.50.

Both philosophers think that, as long as experience (*Erfahrung*) is understood as subsuming the particulars under the universal concepts as is done by the scientific approaches, the wound that must be healed will continue to bleed. So, it can be concluded that, by issuing the nature of human understanding as a historically conditioned, open ended practice, what Heidegger and Gadamer tries to eliminate is the scientific conception of experience (*Erfahrung*). “This is what we have to keep in mind in analyzing historically effected consciousness: it has the structure of *experience* (*Erfahrung*)”.<sup>113</sup> Another quotation which can be used here to emphasize the historical facet of experience is: “Genuine experience is experience of one’s own historicity”.<sup>114</sup> What I understand from this quotation from Gadamer is that, only what is historical can be practical. If human experience is to be defined as *Erfahrung*, and not as *Erlebnis* as Dilthey in vain tried to do (in his attempt to produce historical categories), the most important point which must be noticed becomes that experience is something historically conditioned, and it is not predictable as the scientific approach thinks it to be. In other words, where there is no any method, there is experience. As far as I am concerned, this rehabilitation in the meaning of experience is very important to terminate the totalitarian approach of the natural sciences, especially as they have a claim to give us the knowledge of the human world.

Although it seems to be the case that Heidegger and Gadamer agree in objecting to the methodologism and expertism of scientific philosophies for

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<sup>113</sup> TM 346.

<sup>114</sup> TM 358.

the sake of recovering the authentic meaning of Being-in-the-world, there is a considerable difference between their approaches. As we have seen above, when explaining human understanding and experience, Gadamer mostly stresses the role of tradition as the heritage of the past. On the other hand, Heidegger, in opposition to Gadamer, emphasizes the role of futural aspect in Dasein's Being-in-the-world. As I have pointed out in the first chapter, Heidegger conceives the understanding as Dasein's projecting itself into future possibilities, and Dasein is conceived as Being-ahead-of-itself as far as it makes future plans and it understands itself in such and such a way.

The 'before' and the 'ahead' indicate the future as a sort which would make it possible for Dasein to be such that its potentiality-for-Being is an issue. Self-projection upon the 'for-the-sake-of-oneself' is grounded in the future is essential characteristic of *existentiality*. *The primary meaning of existentiality is future.*<sup>115</sup>

Dasein's future stands in front of it, waiting for Dasein to realize the potentiality-for-Being it has. So, Dasein's "understanding" and "existing" turns out to be futural in character. Here, we can conclude that Heidegger agrees with Gadamer in that existence, as in the form of self-understanding of Dasein, can never be something predictable; in other words, human experience (*Erfahrung*) is always an open-ended process; "Dasein in general never becomes accessible as something present-at-hand, because Being-possible belongs in its own way to Dasein's kind of Being. . ."<sup>116</sup> This expression sets forth the fact that the Being of Dasein cannot be investigated by restricted conceptions produced by scientific theories. Unless it is died,

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<sup>115</sup> BT 375-376.

<sup>116</sup> BT 292.

according to Heidegger, it is not possible to identify a Dasein as a unique life project. So, “not to be completed” is immanent to Dasein’s Being as in the form of existentiality.

Heidegger’s stress upon the existential aspect of Dasein’ Being-in-the-world as care issues from the fact that, rather than the past heritage which makes up our fore-structure of understanding, Dasein’s death is conceived by him as the most dominant factor which conditions his projections — i.e., his self-understanding. Death is seen as the impossibility of all the possibilities which belong to Dasein’s Being as *not-yet*.<sup>117</sup> Dasein’s understanding cannot be accepted as *authentic* unless it hasn’t had a *resolute* stance towards its ownmost possibility; i.e., death.

On the other hand, Heidegger does not conceive the phenomenon of death as something communicable, because there is a general tendency to trivialize it in everyday idle talk of the Anyone: “Our everyday falling evasion *in the face of death* is an *inauthentic Being-towards-death*.”<sup>118</sup> Heidegger thinks that death, as something *non-relational*, is always *mine*. In resolute anticipation of its death Dasein wrench itself away from the idle talk of the Anyone and becomes *authentic*. This envisaging of one’s own death individualizes the authentic Dasein. Once this individualizing effect of the authentic anticipation of death is realized by Dasein, then his self interpretations, projections of its own potentiality-for-Being into its own future differentiates him from the others. This individualizing effect of death is

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<sup>117</sup> BT 287.

<sup>118</sup> BT 303.

praised by Heidegger as something which opens the existence into authentic possibilities.<sup>119</sup> Hence, it can be claimed that, in opposition to Gadamer's emphasis on the tradition and historical heritage of our pre-judgments, the futural character of Dasein comes to the fore in Heidegger's point of view.

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<sup>119</sup> For a brief discussion on the importance of future in Dasein's understanding, see Dostal, Robert J. 2002. In Robert J.Dostal. *Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*. Cambridge University Press, p.255, where he says: "Heidegger . . . gives a clear and distinct priority to the futural aspect of time. Whatever it is that we are about and hoping to accomplish shapes most importantly our temporality and understanding. Ultimately, of course, in the account of *Being and Time* what lies ahead is our own death. *Dasein's* understanding of itself as Being-towards-death (*Sein-zum-Tode*) is the leading concept of the existential analysis of *Dasein* in this work."

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

In my thesis, I tried to display the revolutionary role of Heideggerian conception of ontology and Gadamerian conception of philosophical hermeneutics in revising the concept of “understanding”, which has formerly been tackled under the rubric of objectivity vs. relativity debate. The bickering between the scientific conception of objectivism and historicist conception of relativism has dominated the philosophy of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, especially after the knowledge of human world as in the form of “human sciences” became the focus of interest. Both the attempts which tried to produce some certain categories in order to explain the human products and the attempts which ignored any compromise by making the different historical perspectives an excuse were rejected by Heidegger and Gadamer. By emphasizing the role fore-understandings, pre-judgments, pre-conceptions, etc. played in their philosophical approaches, I tried to point out the fact that they were the philosophers *beyond objectivism and relativism*. I think, it wouldn't be a mistake to claim that, by stressing the ineluctable role the pre-understandings overtake, they strive to show us the finitude of human

understanding, in spite of the scientific claim to attain the so called objective knowledge of the world. Thus, I tried to make it clear that, for our philosophers, understanding is not a theoretical concept, which means grasping that which stands there in-itself ready to be objectified with a pure mind. On this point, I hope that I could clarify how the debate between objectivism and relativism is initiated by the Cartesian separation between subject and object.

According to me, Heideggerian ontology and Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics can easily be read off as a critique of Cartesianism and its enduring effects on contemporary philosophy. I have tried to make this point clear many times through the thesis. What is seen as an impossible mission by both Heidegger and Gadamer is Cartesian bracketing, which was then recurred in Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. In such an atmosphere, Heideggerian-Gadamerian endeavor can be seen as a declaration which reminds us of the fact that our experiences cannot be transparent to us, insofar as we are in the world. For Heidegger, the Cartesian move which relegates the daily human experience to an unconscious drifting when compared with the theoretical attitude of self-reflection and bracketing is one of the strongest characteristics motivated the modern thinking in the ongoing oblivion of the question of Being. According to me, the whole project of *Being of Time* can be interpreted as an attempt to rehabilitate the practice or human experience. By putting the understanding in the world and making it a part of Dasein's daily practices, Heidegger can be said to open the path to Gadamer.

Gadamer's approach, although it seems rather to be concerned with the understanding processing in human sciences and history, shares the Heideggerian conception of understanding as Being-in-the-world. His characterization of understanding is based on "play" analogy, which underscores the "eventful" dimension of understanding. As a play, understanding happens in a *selfless* dialogue. Selflessness of understanding, which I emphasized many times before, expresses the fact that, for Gadamer, understanding is not a contemplative act of a monolithic subject; rather, it is an event which happens in the language game between I and Thou. "[S]peaking does not belong in the sphere of the 'I' but in the sphere of the 'We'."<sup>120</sup> In this sense, understanding is depicted by Gadamer as an event (*Ereignis*) which takes place in a public sphere; in communication.

This characterization of the concept of understanding which is defined as an ongoing process of being reshaped of the pre-conceptions in a linguistically shared we-world is common to both Heidegger and Gadamer. However, Heidegger's philosophy is severed from Gadamer's, when he considers the individualizing effect of authentic understanding of death as Dasein's ownmost possibility. As I set forth in the previous section, Heidegger finds the authentic understanding of Dasein in the emancipation from the public discourse (or *idle talk*) and average understanding. Although he does not blacken the thrownness and falling of Dasein as something derogatory, he seems to me to be prophesying a kind of insulation in order to reach salvation.

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<sup>120</sup> ML, p.65.



It must be noted that understanding does not primarily mean just gazing at a meaning, but rather understanding oneself in that potentiality-for-Being which reveals itself in projection. . . . Death is Dasein's *ownmost* possibility. Being towards this possibility discloses to Dasein its *ownmost* potentiality-for-Being, in which its very Being is the issue. Here it can become manifest to Dasein that in this distinctive possibility of its own self, it has been wrenched away from the "they". This means that in anticipation any Dasein can have wrenched itself from the "they" already. But when one understands that this is something which Dasein 'can' have done, this only reveals its factual lostness in the everydayness of the they-self.<sup>121</sup>

Contrary to Heideggerian conception of severance from the public, Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics seems to be insistent upon the fact that every kind of "truth" is disclosed in conversation. In other words, whereas Heidegger conceives the authentic understanding in terms of individuality which is broken off from the others, Gadamer finds it in the continuity of dialogue. But on the other hand, if seen from another perspective, Heideggerian conception of death as the impossibility of any possibility is a more productive framework to emphasize the groundlessness of Dasein in this world. When authentically coming face to face with the individualizing idea of death, Dasein is alienated to the world as a whole. This amounts to the fact that it is insulated from the public meanings, conceptions, values, etc. It grasps its own Being in an authentic way. Dasein understands itself in *anxiety* when it is authentic.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> BT 307.

<sup>122</sup> Hoffman, Piotr. 1993. Death, Time, History: Division II of *Being and Time*. In Charles Guignon (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*. Cambridge University Press. p.203, where he says: "[I]nsofar as anxiety brings an individual face to face with the indefiniteness of death's threat to him, his public world is discovered as failing him. . . . The tie between the individual and his public world is broken; then individual does not 'find' himself in the latter; the meanings and truths making up the fabric of the world become alien to the individual. . . ."

This way of self understanding emphasizes the fact that human beings are historical, finite beings. All conceptions about ultimate truth, ultimate values, and ideal beauty are seen as mere delusion. The ultimate truth which expresses the fact that Dasein lives on “nothing” is disclosed in the threat of death, which is glossed over in the idle talk of the Anyone. In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Richard Rorty claims that, in the absence of an ultimate truth, there is no possibility for human beings other than to be *ironic*. He claims that, the human beings born into *vocabularies* which reflect the world views and the perspectives of some certain societies. Rorty thinks that a vocabulary which belongs to a person is not mere lexical accumulation, but it signifies a world view, a perspective. And he also claims that we have no reason to find one vocabulary superior to another; so, the activities like reading, traveling, trying to know some alien cultures, etc. are not the activities which are done for the sake of a progress in discovering the ultimate truth. The only purpose of an, in Rorty’s terms, ironist can be, then, to expand his vocabulary and to be more experienced.<sup>123</sup>

Rorty’s conception of “vocabulary” to define human experience can be associated with Gadamerian expression “that which is understood is language”. Moreover, his rejection of a final vocabulary is also alike to Gadamer’s moral approach inspired by Aristotle. Both philosophers agree in that in such a world where there is but expressions, narrations, interpretations, etc., the only thing man can do is to strive to get more and

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<sup>123</sup> Rorty, Richard. 1989. *Irony, Contingency, and Solidarity*. Cambridge University Press. See section 4, especially where he defines an ironist as someone who, :”. . .insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself.” p.73.

more experienced. To get more experienced can be interpreted as “understanding something self-understandingly”. For Gadamer, every understanding is also a self understanding.

Gadamer deliberately calls his own intellectual endeavor “philosophical hermeneutics”. But for me, it could be “hermeneutical philosophy” as well. I believe that, like Heidegger, he gives us his own definition of philosophy; his philosophy is “phenomenology” in that it is descriptive in character; it tells what happens to us when we understand. On the other hand, his conception of philosophy is hermeneutic as well; it describes the subject matter not from outside by making it an object of interest; rather, it acknowledges the finitude of human situation, and tries to give us these descriptions *from within*. In Rorty’s terms, irony is nothing other than to be aware of and to acknowledge the fact that all human experience, including theorizing, is conditioned by the world.

Seen from this perspective, only the ones who can be ironist enough not to take his own vocabulary so serious could philosophize. These existentialist perspectives which reject any kind of transcendentalism redescribe what philosophy is. On the other hand, the philosophical movement which was started by Nietzsche’s motto “God is dead!” is carried on by Heidegger and Gadamer with a different watchword: Subject is dead. This standpoint can neither be described as objectivism, nor as relativism. Relativism can be accepted as the dialectical antithesis of objectivism in that it still assumes a ahistorical, objective standpoint, although it asserts that human beings can never reach such a neutral point of view. What prevents us

from describing Heidegger and Gadamer as relativists lies in the fact that, they contend that even such an insulated perspective is also a human construct. There is no presuppositionless understanding for them.

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