

The Common Ground between Plato's Ontology of Ideas and Hans-Georg Gadamer's
Philosophical Hermeneutics

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Abstract

This doctoral thesis argues that Gadamer's hermeneutical ontology is grounded in part in Plato's ontology of ideas. In making this argument, this thesis will aim to substantiate the following claims on the basis of Gadamer's sustained focus on the principles of his hermeneutical ontology and Plato's ontology of ideas, and the hypothesis that the former has a substantial basis in the latter: one, that the hermeneutical object maintains both a unitary and multiple existence; two, that the unity and plurality of the hermeneutical object presuppose their speculative unity within a single, ontological framework; and three, that language functions as the medium between the unitary and multiple existences of the hermeneutical object following their logical separation.

Overall, this thesis aims to make an original contribution to Gadamer studies and his views on language and hermeneutical experience by arguing that his understanding of the ontology of the hermeneutical phenomenon shares a common philosophical ground with Plato's theory of ideas. This thesis begins, therefore, with the idea that the essential finitude of human knowledge necessitates that the conception of truth in Gadamer's hermeneutics rests upon the principles of unity and multiplicity in order to be meaningful. From there, we illustrate that Gadamer locates these principles in Plato's late ontology, and that in developing the central concepts of his hermeneutics he remains faithful to the Socratic turning toward the ideas. Plato clarifies for Gadamer how, in recognizing the internal limits of our knowledge, we efface ourselves in light of the unlimited scope of the ideas that constitute our understanding of the world, and necessitate that this understanding is shared and developed with others.

In addition to the introduction and conclusion, this dissertation has five chapters. Chapter one demonstrates that the hermeneutical object has both a unitary and multiple existence, and that the truth that hermeneutical reflection obtains must therefore attend to both the essential unity and multiplicity that belong to this object. Chapter two uncovers Gadamer's approach to Plato's theory of ideas, principally through his understanding of Plato's participation thesis and the *arithmos* structure of the λόγος. Chapter three demonstrates that, because of its essential historicity, hermeneutical consciousness does not require a standard of objective certainty in order to validate its truth-claims extra-historically or extra-linguistically. It is shown, rather, that such standards are known historically and are therefore subject to change in light of our shared experiences of them. Chapter four elaborates Gadamer's characterization of hermeneutical understanding as theoretical, i.e. as a mode of participation in the intelligible structures of reality that implies the practical activity of the participants. This chapter also examines the speculative structure of language that Gadamer applies to his hermeneutics, and how he uses this structure to situate the Platonic One and Many historically. Finally, chapter five further elaborates Gadamer's identification of hermeneutics as a practical activity as a way to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic experience. In light of this distinction, this chapter demonstrates that authentic experience necessarily implies a justificatory demand toward others that secures solidarity and goodwill in social and political institutions.

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Abbreviations

AS	Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 2012. <i>Die Aktualität des Schönen</i> . Stuttgart: Phillip Reclam jun.
BT	Heidegger, Martin. 1962. <i>Being and Time</i> . Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
DD	Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1980. <i>Dialogue and Dialectic. Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato</i> . Trans. P. Christopher Smith. New Haven: Yale University Press.
GR	Palmer, Richard, ed. 2007. <i>The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings</i> . Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
GW II	Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1993. <i>Gesammelte Werke Band 2: Hermeneutik II: Wahrheit und Method, Ergänzungen Register</i> . Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
GW V	Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1985. <i>Gesammelte Werke Band 5: Griechische Philosophie I</i> . Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
GW VII	Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1991. <i>Gesammelte Werke Band 7: Griechische Philosophie III: Plato im Dialog</i> . Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
GW VIII	Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1993. <i>Gesammelte Werke Band 8: Ästhetik und Poetik I: Kunst als Aussage</i> . Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
IG	Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1986. <i>The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy</i> . Trans. P. Christopher Smith. New Haven: Yale University Press.
PDE	Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1991. <i>Plato's Dialectical Ethics</i> . Trans. Robert M. Wallace. New Haven: Yale University Press.
PH	Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1976. <i>Philosophical Hermeneutics</i> . Ed. David E. Ling. Berkeley: University of California Press.
RAS	Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1981. <i>Reason in the Age of Science</i> . Trans. Frederick G. Lawrence. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
RB	Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1986. <i>The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays</i> . Ed. Robert Bernasconi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- TM Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 2006. *Truth and Method*, 2nd revised edition. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. London: Continuum Publishing Group.
- WM Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 2010. *Gesammelte Werke Band 1: Hermeneutik I: Wahrheit und Method*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

1. Introduction: The Platonic origin of Gadamer's hermeneutics

1.1: General Introduction

This doctoral thesis argues that Gadamer's hermeneutical ontology is grounded in part in Plato's ontology of ideas. In making this argument, this thesis will aim to substantiate the following claims on the basis of Gadamer's sustained focus on the principles of his hermeneutical ontology and Plato's ontology of ideas, and the hypothesis that the former has a substantial basis in the latter: one, that the hermeneutical object maintains both a unitary and multiple existence; two, that the unity and plurality of the hermeneutical object presuppose their speculative unity within a single, ontological framework; and three, that language functions as the medium between the unitary and multiple existences of the hermeneutical object following their logical separation.

It is important at this initial stage to clarify what this dissertation is setting out to do, or not do. The central thesis that this dissertation will defend is that certain fundamental principles of Gadamer's hermeneutical ontology share a common philosophical ground with Plato's ontology of ideas. This is different from the claim that Gadamer's hermeneutics and Plato's theory of ideas have similar philosophical characteristics, as this latter claim does not require Gadamer to have read Plato at all, though of course he did. It must also be emphasized that in claiming that the ontology of the hermeneutical phenomenon is deeply Platonic, this dissertation is not suggesting that Gadamer's hermeneutics, in its entirety, is essentially Platonic, as it is obvious that the principles of Gadamer's hermeneutics as a whole are also drawn from Aristotle, Augustine, Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger, to name a few. Finally, by proposing that Gadamer's hermeneutical ontology is grounded in part in Plato's ontology of ideas, this dissertation is not

reducing Gadamer's reading of Plato to just the core principles of Plato's ontology that will sustain our focus on his work in relation to Gadamer's.

1.2: The single and multiple existences of the hermeneutical object

In order to substantiate the claim that the hermeneutical object maintains both a unitary and a multiple existence, we must reconcile an apparent conflict between two equally fundamental aspects of the hermeneutical phenomenon. Gadamer describes this phenomenon as an "event" (*Geschehen*) in which the meaning of being becomes understood through language: the back-and-forth movement of play (*Spiel*) presents meaning in the "event of being" (*Seinsvorganges*) or the "coming into being of meaning" (*Sinn-geschehens*; TM, 115, 157; WM, 122, 170); and the world (*Welt*), the original content of our shared experiences, is manifested in the "event of language" (*sprachlichen Geschehen*, TM, 446; WM, 453) or the "event of speech" (*Geschehen der Rede*; TM, 464; WM, 473). Gadamer describes the conditions under which this event occurs from two different perspectives. On the one hand, our understanding of the meaning of being depends upon our application of it to our particular, historical situation. Thus the hermeneutical object—the text or its analogue—"must be understood at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way" (TM, 308). On the other hand, our understanding of the meaning of being also depends upon its capacity to present itself to us. It is due to its autonomy that the hermeneutical object can be applied within many different historical contexts without losing its essential identity. Thus in his foreword to the second edition of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer explains that his concern has been to reveal philosophically "not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing" (TM, xxvi). The event-structure of understanding is also described, therefore, as an "an event that

happens to one” (*das ein Geschehen ist*) through the “activity of the thing itself” (*der Sache selbst*; TM, 460; WM, 469).

Gadamer’s critics argue that he prioritizes either the autonomous structure of the things themselves or the subjective determination of their meaning as the primary measure of truth within the act of interpretation. They argue that as a result, Gadamer promotes, on the one hand, ideological conservatism in thought and interpretation, or on the other, nihilistic relativism. Chief in the former camp is Jürgen Habermas (1980), who claims that Gadamer does not equip hermeneutical reflection with an appropriate critical apparatus for identifying and correcting ideological forces in understanding. Similarly, Michael Gibbons (1985) and Brice R. Wachterhauser (1988) find that Gadamer’s hermeneutics suffers from an overly strong emphasis on the authority of tradition. Well-known in the latter camp is E. D. Hirsch Jr. (1965), who argues that Gadamer incorrectly collapses the distinction between meaning and significance. He claims that the meaning of a text is identical with the author’s intention and that its significance, which is what he says Gadamer really means by “truth,” is particular to each individual reader.

One of the general goals of the present study is to therefore to demonstrate that the hermeneutical event of understanding encompasses both of these aspects, such that the true locus of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics is the dialectical mediation between the autonomy of the things themselves and their manifestation, presentation, or application in particular, historical contexts. Mark C. Taylor (1978) argues that meanings are located within a synchronic and diachronic web of relations and that truth is therefore relative, but that the truth of these relations are internal and necessary to being itself. Similarly, Paul Armstrong (1986) and Robert Shusterman (1988) suggest that understanding and interpretation are sensitive to both normative features of a shared social reality and the particular contexts in which these features emerge. We

will see over the course of this dissertation that Gadamer develops a hermeneutical ontology of identity and difference in order to explain how the hermeneutical object maintains an essential identity with respect to its autonomy over and above any interpretation of its content, and at the same time can sustain a plurality of interpretations from a variety of historical and cultural contexts that constitute our shared understanding of it.

1.3: The single-world ontology of the hermeneutical phenomenon

The intended consequence of the previous claim is that the logical separation between the unitary and multiple existences of the hermeneutical object presupposes a prior unity between these aspects. It is with respect to this presupposition that Gadamer uncovers the importance of the ontological question of the participation of the Many in the One for his hermeneutics. The philosophical origin of these principles for Gadamer is Plato's *Parmenides*. Commentators on this dialogue are divided over what they think it shows about Plato's theory of ideas, namely whether or not it reveals his commitment to a one- or a two-world ontology with respect to the ideas and their appearances. In Gadamer's view, the *Parmenides* presents, albeit negatively, two key theses: first, that the Platonic ideas should not be understood as discrete, transcendent entities, but rather as existing in a web of relations to each other; and second, that the ideas do not occupy a transcendent realm wholly apart from sensible reality, but rather that they are immanent in sensible things without being identical to them (Wachterhauser 1999, 5). Gadamer therefore argues that the *Parmenides* demonstrates Plato's commitment to a one-world ontology, but that in order to defend his participation thesis, Plato reformulates in this dialogue the

ontological relationship between intelligible and sensible reality in terms of the logical relationship between the One and the Many.¹

Gadamer recognizes that the question of Plato's intellectual development with respect to the participation thesis is of the "utmost importance," and so he is upfront about the fact that his own understanding of this development is opposed to those commentators who locate a dramatic shift in Plato's thought regarding his theory of ideas.² In *Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, Gadamer argues that, far from critiquing the ontological problem of participation, Plato is reinforcing the "logical connection of the many to the one" (IG, 11). Against the strong developmentalist thesis, he maintains that Plato had always intended to problematize the participation of appearances in ideas. It is not the case, Gadamer says, that this problem went unnoticed for so long that Plato only admitted to its potentially unsolvable logical difficulties in his later works. One of the philosophical features of the *Parmenides* is thus to make the reader aware of the younger Socrates' oversimplifications of this problem in his efforts to avoid both "the trouble of dialectic" that is inherent in the theory of participation and also the difficulty in elaborating the relationship between the One and the Many. In doing so, Gadamer says, Plato illustrates the inherent dogmatism of the "inappropriate" solutions to this problem which Parmenides then elaborates, i.e. promoting unity at the expense of plurality and plurality at the expense of unity (IG, 9-10, 16).

As we will see, Gadamer's hermeneutical ontology presupposes the same conceptual unity between the unitary and multiple aspects of the hermeneutical phenomenon. Central to Gadamer's hermeneutical project is the relationship between identity and difference in the

¹ In particular, see Gadamer's essays "Dialectic and Sophism in Plato's *Seventh Letter*" and "Plato's Unwritten Dialectic," translated by P. Christopher Smith in *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*.

² DD, 128-129. For a defense of the strong developmentalist thesis, see Vlastos (1954), Gill (1996), and Allen (1997).

interpretation of meaning. He defends the thesis that the text or its analogue maintains a selfsame identity that presents itself in many different historical contexts in a way that does not threaten to undermine this identity nor restrict the openness of hermeneutical experience. It is thus due to their failure to appreciate this ontological presupposition that Gadamer's critics identify his hermeneutics as promoting some form of either ideology or relativity in thought and interpretation.

1.4: The medium of language and the paradigm of number

Gadamer refers to Plato's use of number (ἀριθμός) as the paradigm of the relationship between the One and the Many. In his view, knowledge for Plato does not consist in knowing that there is an eidetic reality that persists behind the manifold of changing appearances. The insight that sensible appearances participate in something stable and unchanging is a necessary presupposition and precondition of actual knowledge. Knowledge consists, rather, in knowing "how it is possible in the first place that one can be many and many, one" (DD, 147). The problem is that the appearances that are attributed to an idea are supposed to constitute the nature of that idea without being identical to it. Number becomes paradigmatic as this concept explains how an entity is both one and many. Each number is "the unity of a multiplicity bound together" (DD, 147). Its value is just how many units are counted up in order to reach that number, yet the number itself cannot be reduced to its units. It has attributes, e.g. even or odd, that cannot be predicated of any unit (DD, 132). Each number is therefore both a "whole" that is constituted by nothing other than its parts and also a "sum" that exists over and above these parts.

In Gadamer's view, the concept of number is thus Plato's mathematical inroad toward true, dialectical knowledge of the ideas. With respect to moral phenomena, for example, Gadamer writes that it becomes clear for Plato that moral behavior cannot be measured against

the conventions and standards that coalesce around public opinion. Rather, moral behavior must be measured against normative principles that transcend the realm of public discourse and therefore “*display themselves* to our moral consciousness as incontestably and unalterably true and right” (IG, 18; emphasis mine). The inherent finitude of human thought means that we can never comprehend the nature of something as a whole. Whereas mathematically each number is a definite “so-many,” ontologically the ideas cannot be known with such precision. The circumstances in which the ideas are manifested are constantly changing, and so the Many that constitutes the nature of the One is likewise in a state of flux (DD, 146). Dialectic therefore functions in order to mediate between these differences and the unity of the idea that sustains them. Gadamer thus finds that Plato does not abandon the separation between sensible and intelligible reality, but in fact reinforces it as a fundamental condition for the possibility of interpreting the nature of the ideas as they present themselves to thought.

Language, in which the *arithmos* structure of the λόγος is manifested, is thus the bridge that connects the manifold array of sensible experiences with their necessary ground or cause in the ideas. For Gadamer, Plato’s theory of ideas reflects “a moral understanding [*Ordnungswissen*] that knows that there is disorder and uncontrollable contingency in the event of experience [*Geschehen*], so that all so-called knowledge is set by a different limit than experience” (GW VII, 346). Gadamer characterizes hermeneutical experience as “idealistic” in the same way: hermeneutical experience reveals how “the ideality of the meaning lies in the word itself,” and that this experience “of itself seeks and finds words that express it. We seek the right word—i.e., the word that really belongs to the thing—so that in it the thing comes into language” (TM, 417). Language, as the medium of the event of understanding, thus bridges the

contingency of our historical experiences with the necessary principles that constitute our shared reality.

Gadamer's focus on these two aspects of Plato's work—the participation thesis, and its logical reformulation in the paradigm of number—remains consistent over the course of his philosophical career. Parallel with his rejection of the thesis that Plato does not reform, but abandons his theory of ideas, is Gadamer's emphasis on the centrality of the *arithmos* for Plato's ontology. In 1931 Gadamer writes that “the idea of unity does not exclude, but posits together with itself, the idea of multiplicity” (PDE, 97). The unity of the idea itself is taken to include a multiplicity “in regard to which there is unity” (PDE, 97). Thus he comes to the following conclusion about the central claim of Plato's participation:

It is shown [...] that the unity of an Idea can include a multiplicity of Ideas under it. Just this is the basis of the “solution” to the problem of the one and the many which takes place in the *Philebus* of a solution to the insoluble problem (which is formulated there, too) of methexis. The one is shown to be many, but not as the undefined manifold of things that are coming to be but as a definite—which means a comprehensible—multiplicity of unities. (PDE, 97-98)

Referring back to this reformulation in 1968, Gadamer adds that this solution, that the unity of each idea is constituted by a multiplicity of ideas, implies the arithmetical relationship between the One and the Many:

Opposite this scheme of “development” stands the thesis which I have been advocating for more than 30 years now and which I should like to put forward here although only as a hypothesis. It is the thesis that from very early on in the dialogues there are references to what in a word might be called the *arithmos* structure of the logos. (DD, 129)

“The problem of *methexis*,” I wrote in 1931, “is thus not solved, but transformed into another problem and then solved as that other problem.” And today I would add that this solution implies the *arithmos* structure. (DD, 138)

Gadamer locates a version of this structure in a number of dialogues, including the *Phaedo*, *Protagoras*, *Hippias Major*, and *Philebus* (DD, 132 ff; GW VII, 339). In *Truth and Method*, he contends that Plato's ontology of the Beautiful and the Good reflects the separation between

sensible and intelligible reality but also their prior unity (TM, 476). In “Plato’s Unwritten Dialectic,” he explains that the hidden implication behind the logical distinction between the unity of an object and its multiple aspects is that these aspects, “which can be so distinguished from each other only in thought, are, insofar as they are ideas, actually inseparable from each other and belong together, two as one” (DD, 136). In “On Plato’s ‘Epistemology’” Gadamer writes that “what we call reality is conceived in Plato as a ‘mixture’ of *peras* and *apeiron*, that is, from the ideas that are encountered in their being in things,” and that “the existence of ideas in the phenomena, this so-called participation [*Teilhabe*], is for Plato a condition which is never questioned, since the assumption of ideas is self-evident” (GW VII, 336). In his essay, “Mathematics and Dialectic in Plato,” Gadamer states that the essential meaning of the λόγος is its ability to mediate between unity and multiplicity (GW VII, 291). Finally, and perhaps most resolutely, in “Dialectic is not Sophistry” Gadamer contends that the *Parmenides* “is an irrefutable document for the fact that Plato considers that the problem of the individual’s participation in the idea is irrelevant” (GW VII, 344).

That Gadamer bases the ontological question of the hermeneutical phenomenon in Plato’s theory of ideas is made especially evident in the following quotation. Gadamer explains the object of knowledge is:

the relationship of Ideas and the complete articulation of what is meant, which is reached at times as an indivisible *Eidos* as the shared goal of all who seek understanding. Such is in truth the final goal, for which we strive in light of the commonality of the interpreted world. This has to do with the essence of language. I am not capable of seeing how one can see this basic constituent [*Grundverfassung*] of all speaking other than how Plato described it as a relationship of Ideas. That may sound “idealistic.” However, the substitutions of the *Eidos* or the intuitive unity of what is meant with the concept of a rule and its applications—whose validity insists upon itself here in opposition—appears to me as only another way of describing the same eidetic turn that we all perform, even when we only use signs or open our mouths. (GW VII, 345-346; Wachterhauser’s translation)

This quotation strongly suggests that for both Gadamer and Plato, it is precisely because the manifold array of interpretation are grounded in a common reality that their differences can be mediated and a consensus about this reality can be achieved, even if a definitive account of this reality as a whole is always impossible within the natural limits of human thought.

In my view, not enough attention has been given to Gadamer's focus on these principles in his work on Plato's late ontology, and, given the length of his focus, the bearing that they have on the parallel development of his own hermeneutical ontology. Much of the commentary on Gadamer's approach to Plato focuses on the complex relationship between Gadamer, Heidegger, and the Greeks. Heidegger's reading of Plato and Aristotle clearly had a very strong influence on the development of Gadamer's hermeneutics: in *Plato's Dialectical Ethics* Gadamer presents a reading of the *Philebus* based in Heideggerian phenomenology; his use of Aristotelian *φρόνησις* to elaborate the nature of application (*Anwendung*) in hermeneutics is almost identical to Heidegger's description of *φρόνησις* in his lectures on Plato's *Sophist* (Heidegger 1997, 34-40; cf. TM, 310-321); and in *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy* Gadamer explains that his hermeneutical project is designed in part to withstand Heidegger's claim that Plato initiated the metaphysical forgetfulness of Being in the Western tradition (IG, 5). To this end, in *Postmodern Platos* Catherine Zuckert engages with Plato's influence on Gadamer and other 20th century thinkers. She focuses primarily on Plato's approach to philosophy as a practical and political activity and the question of Gadamer's relation to Heidegger. While Zuckert identifies Gadamer's insight into the importance of number for Plato, she spends relatively little time on this particular subject. Stanley Fuyarchuk also explores Plato's influence on Gadamer in *Gadamer's Path to Plato*. However, most of Fuyarchuk's discussion in this book is devoted to the relationship between Gadamer and Heidegger within the philosophical and

political climate of early- to mid-20th century Germany, and so his coverage of Gadamer's interest in the Platonic number is related primarily to Gadamer's unitary reading of Plato and Aristotle in contradistinction to Heidegger.³

Helpfully, Brice R. Wachterhauser has made significant advances regarding the central problems that occupy the present study. In his book, *Beyond Being: Gadamer's Post-Platonic Hermeneutical Ontology*, Wachterhauser defends the thesis that Gadamer's work on hermeneutics can be most fully understood in light of his work on Plato, and in particular the One and the Many in Plato's ontology. Where my approach mainly differs from Wachterhauser's is that I offer a more extended analysis of relevant passages in Plato's work. Wachterhauser recognizes the importance of number for Plato, but despite Gadamer's focus on the presence of this paradigm in the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* he does not discuss either of these two dialogues in his book. He owes his deficit of direct engagement with Plato to his own lack of training in Classical philosophy (Wachterhauser 1999, 4). Having a strong background in Platonic studies, I am well-prepared to undertake such an analysis. Doing so will not only help to substantiate the plausibility of Gadamer's interpretation of these dialogues, but also defend the general thesis of this dissertation.

We will begin in chapter one by outlining several meanings of truth that Gadamer develops in the context of his hermeneutics. We will see that what is common to these meanings is that, in contrast to the certainty that scientific methodology obtains, they all characterize understanding as having to do with the evident nature of things. For this reason, Gadamer characterizes the articulation of meaning in hermeneutics as first and foremost a *possible* truth. Perhaps most prominent among these meanings of truth is the definition of truth as disclosure or

³ On Gadamer's relation to Heidegger and Plato, see also Smith (1981), Dostal (1997), and Lammi (1997).

unconcealment that Gadamer inherits from Heidegger.⁴ The idea that each articulation of meaning simultaneously conceals and reveals something about the nature of being is intrinsically related to the recognition of the inherent finitude of human thought and reason. For Gadamer, this limitation is also present in the meaning of truth that describes the relation between whole and part. Hermeneutical interpretation employs what Gadamer calls the “fore-conception of completeness.” This is the assumption that the subject matter under consideration is a unified, coherent whole, and that as a whole the subject matter itself constantly supercedes any particular interpretation of it. As above, truth also has the meaning of an event (*Geschehen*). The event of understanding is the moment of application in which one manifests something of the meaning of the universal, ontological structure of the things themselves in the contingent circumstances of one’s historical situation. Gadamer maintains above all that truth is dialectical. That is, truth is something that exists between the partners in a discussion about a subject matter that they have in common. The nature of their conversation presupposes, however, that the interlocutors accept that what the other asserts about the meaning of being is at least potentially valid and therefore worth considering. This presupposition maintains the openness toward the other that is necessary for the development of hermeneutical consciousness.

Chapter one concludes by addressing some of the principle criticisms of Gadamer’s work. As suggested above, commentators tend to argue that Gadamer prioritizes either the unity of the text or the multitude of interpretations that emerge from it. E. D. Hirsch Jr. claims that Gadamer confuses textual meaning with significance, reducing the former, which Hirsch contends is identical with the author’s intention, to the latter, which refers to any particular reading of a text. For Hirsch, truth in Gadamer’s hermeneutics is at best relativistic, at worst

⁴ See “Truth in the Human Sciences” and “What is Truth?” translated by Brice R. Wachterhauser in *Hermeneutics and Truth*.

nihilistic. By contrast, in his earlier work on Gadamer, Wachterhauser argues that Gadamer identifies hermeneutical truth with tradition, thus constraining interpretation within a *status quo*. Michael Gibbons takes a similar approach, arguing that the openness that is essential to hermeneutical consciousness is always responsive to tradition and therefore necessarily contains a conservative element. This chapter concludes with the provisional claim that throughout his work Gadamer endeavors to mediate between these two positions in order to show that the things themselves maintain an autonomous existence, such that they can become manifested throughout various historical contexts, but that their meaning for us nonetheless remains relative to our particular, historical situation.

In chapter two we will turn more directly to Plato's development of the principles of the One and the Many. Beginning with the *Parmenides*, we will elaborate Gadamer's understanding of Plato's participation thesis in light of the objections to this thesis that are raised in this dialogue. Gadamer finds that Plato remains committed to his theory of ideas despite the difficulties facing the ontological separation (χωρισμός) between ideas and appearances and the participation (μέθεξις) of the latter in the former. He argues that Plato reformulates the ontological relationship between ideas and appearances in logical terms as the relationship between the One and the Many, not in order to abandon or replace the earlier theory of forms, but in order to defend it.

Gadamer uses Plato's paradigm of number (ἀριθμός) in what he calls the *arithmos* structure of the λόγος in order to elaborate the nature of the participation of the Many in the One. In his view, the *Theaetetus* and not the *Parmenides* provides the clearest positive representation of the dialectical relationship between the One and the Many and its implication for Plato's theory of knowledge. Specifically, Socrates' analysis of the interaction between

elemental and compound entities, represented by letters and syllables, illustrates the logical interaction between the One and the Many (DD, 133). In order to substantiate Gadamer's claim, we will examine this and one other key section of the *Theaetetus*. Furthermore, we will elaborate Gadamer's approach to the ontological orientation of the *arithmos* model in the *Sophist*. He argues that subsequent to the definition of οὐσία as δύναμις, i.e. the relational capacity inherent in beings, the grammatical analysis of the λόγος provides the final proof of the participation of the Many in the One. This analysis demonstrates in Gadamer's view that judgments about sensible reality imply an eidetic structure (GW VII, 364), thereby showing how language mediates between the contingency of lived experience and the necessary ground of this experience.

In chapter three we will further refine the function of language as the medium through which the principles of unity and multiplicity unfold in a hermeneutical dialogue. A central component of Gadamer's hermeneutics is that all understanding and interpretation is grounded in a bias or prejudice toward meaning. The development of self-understanding is therefore fundamentally dialectical, as this model of understanding identifies two necessary properties of genuine, hermeneutical experience: first, that the interlocutors have a common subject matter that unites them; and second, that by recognizing the claim of the other as potentially valid each partner in the dialogue brings into question their own presuppositions of meaning. As the vehicle for hermeneutical experience, language is meant to mediate between the manifold perspectives that can be sustained within the universal, ontological structure of reality.

Arguably, however, the interpretation of meaning can become distorted through the influence of ideology and thus fail to reasonably present this structure. In particular, Jürgen Habermas is critical of Gadamer's hermeneutics for failing to address the need for a critical

apparatus that can appropriately reflect upon the content of one's prejudices. To this end, Habermas claims that within Gadamer's hermeneutics tradition and language represent forms of ideology that hinder, rather than promote, the openness that is central to hermeneutical consciousness. We will argue that Gadamer successfully defends the universality of hermeneutical reflection by identifying historicity as an ontological precondition for understanding. Consequently, he demonstrates that the apprehension of historical being belongs to the historically effected consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*), which understands this being primarily in terms of its probable or evident structure.⁵ Importantly, in his defense of hermeneutical reflection Gadamer appropriates Plato's concept of philosophical rhetoric as the mode of language that manifests the evident or probable nature of things, i.e., as a potentially valid claim. Plato's philosophical rhetoric is therefore uniquely equipped to reflect the essential openness and finitude of hermeneutical experience. Thus tradition is not something that must be transcended in order to secure truth, as truth is something that emerges between historical situations. The subject matter that unifies the partners in a dialogue is therefore understood in terms of its manifestation in different historical contexts mediated by language.

In chapter four, we will bring into question the activity of the things themselves as well as the nature of our participation in this activity as consciousness of effective history. Gadamer identifies hermeneutics as primarily a kind of practical philosophy (GR, 21). His conception of theory, however, is not that which is typically situated in opposition to practice. Rather, the type of theoretical activity that is relevant to Gadamer's hermeneutics is the traditional Greek

⁵ See "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem" and "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection" translated by David E. Linge in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*.

meaning of θεωρία as participation.⁶ The idea or concept presents itself (*selbstdarstellung*; RB, 23; AS, 38-39) according to its own possibilities of being (*Seinsmöglichkeiten*; TM, 117; WM, 123), and as participants within this activity we manifest the meaning of being with the contingencies of our historical situation. Theory and practice are therefore not opposed within hermeneutics, but rather are reciprocally determined analogously to the One and the Many: the essence of the idea, like the Platonic number, transcends the particularity of its parts; yet the meaning of this idea is nothing other than its presentation in our practical activity over time, just as the number is nothing other than the collection of its units. Significantly, it is through the relation between theory and practice, as well as the speculative structure of language as what manifests the self-presentation of being, that Gadamer situates Plato's logical formulation of the dialectic of the One and the Many on its "true and fundamental ground" (TM, 454), i.e. the finitude of our historical experience.

In chapter five, we will turn more directly to the practical dimension of Gadamer's hermeneutics, and the conditions under which effective social discourse becomes possible. Gadamer is aware of the fact that misunderstanding happens, and it is typically characterized in his work as something that happens when one or more conditions for coming to a shared understanding are not satisfied. To this end, Gadamer usually indicates that where misunderstandings or misinterpretations happen, they can be corrected over time as per the historical nature of hermeneutical experience.

We will argue, however, that there is another phenomenon involved in understanding that is not so easily mollified. To this end, having elaborated what Gadamer thinks understanding is

⁶ See "What is Practice? The Conditions of Social Reason," "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy," and "Hermeneutics as a Theoretical and Practical Task" translated by Frederick G. Lawrence in *Reason in the Age of Science*.

“over and above our wanting and doing,” it becomes necessary to describe what we do or ought to do within this framework. Chapters three and four develop the notion in hermeneutics that the things themselves actively present themselves to thought. However, as an “imitator of reality” (μιμητῆς ὧν τῶν ὄντων; *Soph.* 235a), the figure of the sophist that Plato presents in his dialogues illustrates a serious challenge to this notion. By internalizing being’s power for self-presentation, the sophist effectively takes control over the meaning of truth that gets presented in this way. Gadamer’s describes this kind of sophistical control over the meaning of being in his critique of technology in the 1970’s, whose relevance to the 21st century will show that it is perhaps an inevitable consequence of the growing reliance on forms of technology to mediate our experience with others.

As a way to mitigate the effects of sophistry and its contemporary analogue, this chapter will argue that the practical dimension of hermeneutics includes an inherent justificatory demand. Practice, Gadamer says, “is conducting oneself and acting in solidarity;” and solidarity, in turn, “is the decisive condition and basis of all social reason” (RAS, 87). For the same reason that one cannot act howsoever one chooses, i.e. without regard for others, one cannot speak however one wants about subjects that are essentially communal. We will see that Socrates and Gadamer both indicate that a serious, philosophical engagement with the ideas can identify and overcome those forms of consciousness which do not aim at a more comprehensive understanding of things, and are merely empty talk.

Overall, this thesis aims to make an original contribution to Gadamer studies and his views on language and hermeneutical experience by arguing that his understanding of the ontology of the hermeneutical phenomenon has one of its main philosophical origins in Plato’s theory of ideas. This thesis begins, therefore, with the idea that the essential finitude of human

knowledge necessitates that the conception of truth in Gadamer's hermeneutics rests upon the principles of unity and multiplicity in order to be meaningful. From there, we illustrate that Gadamer locates these principles in Plato's late ontology, and that in developing the central concepts of his hermeneutics he remains faithful to the Socratic turning toward the ideas. Plato clarifies for Gadamer how, in recognizing the internal limits of our knowledge, we efface ourselves in light of the unlimited scope of the ideas that constitute our understanding of the world, and necessitate that this understanding is shared and developed with others.

2. Chapter One: The meaning of truth in Gadamer's hermeneutics

2.1: Introduction

This chapter will argue that the object of hermeneutical consciousness maintains a heteronomous existence. In other words, the hermeneutical object is both a coherent, unified whole that exists over and above the plurality of its representations, and at the same time it is nothing other than this multitude of representations.

In making this argument, this chapter offers an overview of the chief conceptualizations of truth that Gadamer employs in his philosophical hermeneutics. These include the Heideggerian definition of truth as unconcealment; truth as an expression of the relationship between a whole and its parts; truth as a moment in the hermeneutical event of experience; and truth as a form of agreement between partners in a dialogue. In what follows, it will be demonstrated that although each of these conceptualizations describes one aspect of a much larger hermeneutical phenomenon, they all reflect a fundamental ambiguity or uncertainty in human thought which for Gadamer is commensurate with the finitude of our historical existence.

We will also outline some of the critical responses to Gadamer's hermeneutics regarding the ontological status of the hermeneutical object. Gadamer's critics tend to prioritize either the autonomy that he attributes to the hermeneutical object or the individual, historical moments in which this object is manifested. Consequently, they determine that Gadamer commits himself to either a monistic or pluralistic definition of truth. In response to these criticisms, we will propose that the true nature of the hermeneutical object is both a unity and a multiplicity, such that Gadamer's hermeneutics encompasses both monistic and pluralistic definitions of truth.

The plan for the current chapter is therefore relatively straightforward. First, we will elaborate the meaning of the four different conceptualizations of truth listed above in order to illustrate their contribution to Gadamer's hermeneutics, namely their identification of the principles of identity and difference that sustain Gadamer's hermeneutical ontology. Second, we will outline some of the criticisms of Gadamer's hermeneutics that focus on certain conceptual difficulties related to these principles. We will see that the dogmatic adherence to either a monistic or pluralistic definition of truth within Gadamer's hermeneutics overlooks a more fundamental aspect of the hermeneutical phenomenon, namely the conceptual unity of these principles.

2.2: Four definitions of truth

Determining the scope and function of hermeneutic understanding is highly problematic. This problem is due primarily to the fact that there is no single definition of truth that captures the essence of this concept in the context of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, let alone across a broad array of fields and disciplines. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Gadamer has been criticized over the lack of cohesiveness regarding his concept of truth. Richard Bernstein calls it "one of the most elusive concepts in [Gadamer's] work," and sees Gadamer as "employing a concept of truth that he never fully makes explicit" (Bernstein 1983, 151). Generally, there is a serious concern with the apparent lack of normativity in Gadamer's concept of truth. His lack of clarity on this point is especially problematic in light of the impact that hermeneutics has on other philosophical fields as well as its claim to universality. E. D. Hirsch Jr., Dieter Freundlieb, and Charles Larmore present versions of this objection from within the

fields of literary criticism, linguistic semantics, and epistemology respectively.⁷ Without such a principle, they argue, it is questionable whether or not Gadamer's elaboration of the conditions that make understanding possible sufficiently account for this phenomenon.

More seriously, Lawrence Hinman locates an ambiguity in Gadamer's thought over the question of the identity between hermeneutics and truth. As Hinman puts it:

The fundamental ambiguity in Gadamer's understanding of hermeneutics is centered around the question of the locus of truth: if truth is identified with the hermeneutical process itself, and if this process is simply the way things *are*, then it becomes extremely difficult to distinguish between truth and nontruth, to say what is *not* truth. If, however, one can say in some significant sense that some interpretations are true in a way in which others are not, then it appears that truth cannot be identified with the hermeneutical process *tout court*, but rather must belong in a special way to some interpretations rather than others.⁸

Put another way, the ambiguity Hinman finds in Gadamer's notion of truth brings into question Gadamer's claim that the process of hermeneutical understanding, interpretation, and application has a universal function. If truth is not identical with the hermeneutical process, that is, if hermeneutical questioning is only one of many possible inroads to truth, it is difficult to see how Gadamer has moved hermeneutics beyond its traditional characterization as a secondary methodology to a first philosophy.⁹

⁷ Hirsch criticizes the fundamental historicity of hermeneutic understanding as lacking any sense of normativity. He argues that without a stable norm to guide textual interpretation "we cannot even in principle make a valid choice between two differing interpretations, and are left with the consequence that a text means nothing in particular at all" (Hirsch 1965, 494). In Hirsch's view, Gadamer's hermeneutics maintains at best a relative meaning of a text, and at worst is utterly nihilistic. Similarly, Freundlieb states that "the fact that the world can be interpreted not only in different but in mutually exclusive ways shows that we have to have criteria for privileging one interpretation over another" (Freundlieb 1987, 113). He argues that Gadamer's "relativistic skepticism" relies upon a transcendental notion of truth which cannot assist in determining the validity of any given interpretation without undermining the very historicity of understanding that this relativity presupposes. Charles Larmore argues that there are "universally correct conditions for 'knowledge' and 'acceptable theory' that is makes sense for us to pursue," and that the epistemological relativism he attributes to Gadamer undermines any such condition (Larmore 1986, 148).

⁸ Hinman 1980, 513. Ultimately Hinman has a positive view of Gadamer's project in *Truth and Method*. He concludes that Gadamer maintains, albeit only implicitly, both identifications of truth depending on the context in which truth is in question.

⁹ This transition is explained in Grondin 1990, 47.

By contrast, commentators who are amenable to Gadamer's hermeneutical theory have at least as many ways to defend his position as his critics have to challenge it. As Robert Dostal points out, insofar as Gadamer identifies truth with disclosure (*Erschlossenheit*) or unconcealment (*Unverborgenheit*)¹⁰ he can be called a Heideggerian. Dostal elaborates, however, that this identification passes over the dialogical dimension of Gadamer's concept of truth, which he argues should not be associated with Heidegger.¹¹ David Carpenter focuses on the self-presentation of being, which he says for Gadamer is "a fundamental truth" (n.b., not *the* fundamental truth) about being. This self-presentation can be understood through Gadamer's ontology of the event of truth, specifically the speculative dialectic of the image (*Bild*) as expressed in Gadamer's appropriation of Neoplatonic emanation and Christian incarnation (Carpenter 1994). In this manner the event of truth attributes a positive ontological value to images in relation to that of which they are images. This is done intentionally in contrast to the Platonic reduction of the εἶδωλον to that which barely has existence. James Risser (1994), Brice R. Wachterhauser (1986), and Kathleen Wright (1986) likewise defend Gadamer's speculative dialectic as elaborating an essential relation between language and truth. Jean Grondin (1994, 2000) and David Vessey (2011) reinforce Gadamer's claim that philosophical hermeneutics is universal in its function, though they disagree on whether Augustinian emanation or Thomistic incarnation is the best model for this universality.

Bringing up these criticisms and defenses of Gadamer's notion of truth serves to illustrate one basic point, namely that no single conception of truth can be identified in Gadamer's work. This point reflects the deeper hermeneutical insight that the essential nature of the "things

¹⁰ Dostal 1994, 47-48, referencing Gadamer's essay "Was ist Wahrheit?" published in the same volume as "What is Truth?" (sc. Gadamer 1994c, 35-36).

¹¹ On the distinction between Heidegger and Gadamer's elaboration of truth as unconcealment see also Warnke 2011.

themselves” (*die Sache*), the phenomenological catchword with which Gadamer aligns himself, cannot be captured in language. If language is truly the medium of hermeneutic experience, according to which Gadamer claims that hermeneutics is universal in scope, then wherever there is a perfect understanding of being there should also be a perfect manifestation of the nature of this being in language. It is a basic point within epistemology that such perfect knowledge is not possible for humans, and so Gadamer develops his hermeneutical project from an acute awareness of humanity’s essential finitude when it comes to our understanding of the nature of being.

It is in light of the inherent finitude of human thought that Gadamer maintains the autonomy of the hermeneutical object over and above its historical representations. It is in this respect that this object functions as the measure of truth and validity in our interpretation of its meaning, and that this interpretation is understood first and foremost as reflecting a “possible truth” (*mögliche Wahrheit*; TM, 396; WM, 398) based in the evident structure of the things themselves. Importantly, the finitude of human thought implies that that any judgment necessarily presupposes as a whole the object of which it is a judgment. For Gadamer it is only with respect to a common, unified subject matter that there can be meaningful discourse. The identity of the hermeneutical object is therefore ultimately what validates interpretations of its content, and consequently excludes invalid interpretations (sc. Wachterhauser 1999, 6).

This does not mean, however, that for Gadamer there is no cohesion or stability in language. In his essay, “Gadamer’s Basic Understanding of Understanding,” Jean Grondin draws out the manifold senses that the concept of understanding (*Verstehen*) has in the context of Gadamer’s hermeneutics. At the same time he makes explicit the fact that all of these different meanings are meant to be folded into one basic concept. To this end, Grondin writes:

The fact that the basic notions [Gadamer] is unfolding often have many very different meanings does not bother him. Quite the contrary, he sees in this plurality of meaning an indication that language, long before thinking, is perhaps up to something essential. So it is with Gadamer's basic notion of understanding, which carries many different meanings, but that all point to one central phenomenon, i.e. the understanding that he characterizes, following Heidegger, as "the original form of the realization of our existence." (Grondin 2002a, 36)

The many different meanings that truth has here all point to one central concept, i.e. whatever one means by using the predication "in and of itself." That language does not and cannot capture the truth about being "in itself" is why there can even be a discussion about what this truth is for Gadamer.

2.2.1: Truth as unconcealment

Heidegger's definition of truth as unconcealment or disclosure remains relevant to Gadamer's work over the course of his philosophical career.¹² Truth has the character of an event of unconcealment when it is revealed in and through language. "The meaning of speech [*die Rede*]," Gadamer writes, "is to put forward the unconcealed, to make manifest. One presents something and in this manner something is known, communicated to the other just as it is known to oneself."¹³ Like Heidegger, Gadamer is interested in determining the depth of the relationship between being and understanding as revealed in language. In particular, they share the need to develop a conception of truth which is operative in understanding prior to the declaration of truth in the natural sciences, and which therefore can manifest the nature of beings on a level which scientific rationalism and methodology presupposes. Although Gadamer will lead the concept of

¹² The first part of *Plato's Dialectical Ethics* elaborates the conditions of *Dasein's* being-in-the-world with others in the context of Socrates' dialogical form. In his 1957 essay "Was ist Wahrheit?" Gadamer writes simply, "*Wahrheit ist Unverborgenheit*" (GW II, 47; Gadamer 1994c, 36). In his essay "Hermeneutics and the Ontological Difference," written in 1989 and published in 1995, Gadamer explains that Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity refers to *Dasein's* attempt to understand whatever is obscure. He emphasizes Heidegger's remark here that life is "foggy" (*diesig*), that the clearings in which truth is revealed are always covered over again (GR, 364). At the end of this essay Gadamer applies the same formulation to his own hermeneutical project, writing that "language itself is a form of life, and like life, it is hazy [*diesig*]; over and over it will surround us with a haze" (GR, 371).

¹³ Gadamer 1994c, 36. In *Plato's Dialectical Ethics* Gadamer describes speech in nearly the same way. There, he writes that speech "has the character of making the entity available by exhibiting it to oneself and to others, and in such a way that the thing thus exhibited is held fast in its discovered state" (PDE, 28).

truth as unconcealment in a different direction than Heidegger, this conceptualization is nonetheless central for conceptualizing the relationship between understanding and being necessary for his hermeneutics.

The definition of truth as unconcealment is significant for Gadamer for a number of reasons.¹⁴ For one, unconcealment is taken to describe fundamentally the experience of truth and falsehood rather than to prove that there is such experience at all. As Gadamer relates, there is an essential unity between truth and language which is a matter of “a fundamental relationship between truth and falsehood” (Gadamer 1994c, 40). That is, because unconcealment is simultaneously an act of concealment, truth cannot be known independently from falsehood, i.e., as that which has been covered over in the act of disclosing truth. Falsehood, then, indicates something more than simply saying what is not of what is, i.e. making an incorrect correspondence between things. The definition of truth as unconcealment is significant furthermore because it develops this experience of truth and falsehood from our inherently finite human perspective rather than assuming the totality of any superhuman perspective.¹⁵ Finally, unconcealment avoids the “dialectical quagmire” of subjectivity and objectivity.¹⁶ The act of disclosure is an essential mode of *Dasein*’s being-in-the-world; and so understanding is the way

¹⁴ As elaborated by Dostal (1994, 49).

¹⁵ In his essay, “The Nature of Things and the Language of Things,” Gadamer considers how the phenomenological “language of things” can provide a ground for what he calls the “infinite correspondence between soul and being” without having to be also a theological ground (PH, 74-75). For an overview of the theological influences on Gadamer’s thought, see Lammi 2008.

¹⁶ Commenting on the “total determination of the object by cognition” in Neo-Kantian idealism and being’s “independence of all human subjectivity” in the phenomenological critique of Neo-Kantianism, Gadamer writes, “The superiority of classical metaphysics seems to me to lie in the fact that from the outset it transcends the dualism of subjectivity and will, on the one hand, and object and being-in-itself, on the other, by conceiving their preexistent correspondence with each other” (PH, 74). In this light, the phenomenological “language of things” as developed by Heidegger is that in which “the primordial correspondence of soul and being is so exhibited that finite consciousness too can know it” (PH, 76).

in which *Dasein*, by uncovering beings, understands itself.¹⁷ The definition of truth as unconcealment is significant for Gadamer in this respect because it reflects the phenomenological presupposition of a prior unity between subject and object, and furthermore attends to a more original meaning of both truth and falsehood than the correspondence between subject and object.

By bringing into question the primacy of the relationship between understanding and being, Heidegger initiates a substantial criticism against the prevailing view that the truth of a judgment is measured by its correspondence to an objective state of affairs. In *Being and Time*, he outlines three theses which he claims characterize the essence of truth in the Western philosophical tradition: one, “that the ‘locus’ of truth is assertion (judgment [*Urteil*]);” two, “that the essence of truth lies in the ‘agreement of the judgment with its object;”” and three, “that Aristotle, the father of logic, not only has assigned truth to the judgment as its primordial locus but has set going the definition of ‘truth’ as ‘agreement’” (BT, 257). Heidegger brings into question the conditions under which this agreement is supposed to be possible. He says that the adequation of our perception of something to that thing itself is demonstrated by the fact that “this Thing *is* the very entity which one has in mind in one’s assertion” (BT, 261; emphasis his). An assertion is meant to demonstrate in this way the “Being-uncovered” (*Entdeckt-sein*) of the thing itself, which is confirmed when the entity reveals itself to be the same thing that is put forward in the assertion (BT, 261). This formulation refers to the “apophantic” character of judgment. For Heidegger, ἀποφανσις refers to a primary and original way of “letting an entity

¹⁷ BT, 263; Heidegger 1997, 11-12. Thus Gadamer: “According to *Being and Time*, understanding is the way in which the historicity of *Dasein* is itself carried out;” “Even in *Being and Time* the real question is not in what way being can be understood but in what way understanding *is* being, for the understanding of being represents the existential distinction of *Dasein*” (PH, 49).

be seen from itself” rather than from a mental “representation” (*Vorstellung*) of it.¹⁸ An assertion is therefore true, Heidegger claims, when it lets the entity “‘be seen’ (*apophansis*) in its uncoveredness,” and not when it posits an agreement between a mental representation and objectified entity (BT, 261). Heidegger’s criticism of the Greek origins of judgment is thus that a correspondence theory reduces truth to an ontic relation between subject and object (Gonzalez 2009, 262), when it should be defined ontologically as a mode of *Dasein*’s being-in-the-world (BT, 261).

Gadamer brings into question the nature of truth in the natural sciences in almost an identical fashion. Confirming Heidegger’s definition of truth as unconcealment, in “What is Truth?” he points to the phenomenological presupposition of an “original connection between true being and true speech” (Gadamer 1994c, 36) which will become central to his hermeneutics. He retraces Heidegger’s steps regarding the development of the relationship between being and truth from this original situation. Truth as unconcealment is found, Gadamer writes, in the apophantic form of assertion or judgment. Like Heidegger, he claims that the truth of the assertion has however become determined by the correspondence between speech and thing, and likewise that it was primarily Aristotle’s logical investigations which established this correspondence as the definition of truth for the Western tradition (Ibid., 36).

This criticism of the correspondence theory of truth is not meant to undermine the validity of the natural sciences in their own right. It is meant to illustrate, rather, that because

¹⁸ BT, 196. In his lectures on Plato’s *Sophist* he distinguishes between ἀπόφανσις and σημαίνειν as modes of linguistic expression. To use the latter mode, Heidegger says, is simply to mean something, by virtue of which language as such becomes meaningful or comprehensible. The former mode is distinct because in addition to having meaning it “[lets] the thing meant show itself in this meaning” (Heidegger 1997, 124). For this reason apophantic judgment more than any other form of speech properly attends to the meaning of truth as unconcealment. Other forms of speech, including σημαίνειν, “become” apophantic, Heidegger says, “only if there is present in it either a disclosing, ἀληθεύειν, or a distorting, ψεύδεσθαι. For not only to disclose but also to distort is to let be seen, even if disclosing is the proper letting be seen” (Heidegger 1997, 124).

scientific rationalism no longer presupposes an original unity between being and language it overlooks the fact that the scientific proposition is grounded in knowledge of the evident or probable nature of things as opposed to their certainty. In this respect, Francisco Gonzalez writes that “The problem, then, with characterizing truth within the perspective of [scientific] logic as ‘correctness’ is not that this characterization is ‘incorrect,’ but rather that it obstructs the more original essence of truth as openness within which correctness alone is possible” (Gonzalez 2009, 261). The definition of truth as unconcealment thereby points out a more primary sense of both truth and falsehood as co-emergent properties of thought. The necessary ground of any scientific proposition, insofar as this ground is understood and articulated in human thought and language, is characterized accordingly in terms of the evident or probable structure of being.

Defining the original meaning of truth as unconcealment nonetheless brings into question what the measure of this truth is. In Gadamer’s view, the primary form of apophantic judgment has the unique capacity to measure itself. He writes, “Judgment is determined, in distinction from all other forms of speech, by wanting only to be true; it measures itself exclusively by whether it reveals a being as it is” (Gadamer 1994c, 36). By taking a “theoretical stance” (*die Lehre*) toward the things themselves (*die Sache*), judgments reflect the content of the original unity between language and being. That is, in making this kind of judgment *Dasein* does not make a claim about only an external state of affairs but also its self-understanding in relation to this state of affairs. This is why falsehood is discovered to have the more original sense of concealment as an essential part of the act of disclosure, and not the antithesis of truth.

What is needed, then, is an articulation of the kind of hermeneutic judgment which has an internal measure of its content. Like Heidegger, Gadamer wants to “reach back behind the knowledge thematized in science” (Ibid., 38) and establish the conditions which make the

correspondence model of truth, and indeed any other model of truth, possible in the first place. For Gadamer, this “reaching back” means dwelling on the mode of being of whatever is perceived. That is, one does not passively undergo the back and forth movement of disclosure and concealment, but rather is actively involved in making sense of whatever presents itself to thought. Thus he writes, “Lingering vision and assimilation is not a simple perception of what is there, but is itself understanding-as. [...] Only if we ‘recognize’ what is represented are we able to ‘read’ a picture; in fact, that is what ultimately makes it a picture. Seeing means articulating” (TM, 79).

This does not mean, however, that the truth of any judgment about being depends only one’s perception of that being, as then every judgment would be equally valid. Defining truth in such relativistic terms would entail, as Gadamer puts it, “an untenable hermeneutic nihilism” (TM, 82). Yet the presupposition of an original unity between language and being also does not permit an objective or absolute standpoint outside of the relation between subject and object with which one could locate a distinction between true and false judgments. Part of *Dasein*’s self-understanding is the awareness of its essential finitude, and so naturally this excludes an outside perspective of its own limitations (TM, 83). The scientific objectification of being makes this kind of distinction possible, even providing protection against it, and without assuming an awareness of the totality of its subject matter. A scientific proposition, however, cannot measure itself the way an apophantic judgment can because it presupposes the separation between subject and object rather than their conceptual unity. Therefore a scientific proposition must be measured according to an external methodology. A proposition obtains truth, in other words, only after its content has been verified. “When verification—regardless of what form—primarily defines truth

(*veritas*),” Gadamer writes, “then the standard with which knowledge is measured is no longer its truth but its certainty” (Gadamer 1994c, 37).

Significantly, in *Truth and Method* Gadamer assigns an ontological priority to what is “probable” or “evident” (*wahrscheinliche, einleuchtend*) over the “truth and certainty of what is proved and known” (TM, 479). “The idea,” he continues, “is always that what is evident has not been proved and is not absolutely certain, but it asserts itself by reason of its own merit within the realm of the possible and probable.” For this reason Gadamer is consistently critical of any attempt to systematize language as an effort to do away with this ambiguity. A conventional system of linguistic signs which admits of no ambiguity in the relation of words to objects is not language in his view. “The whole basis of language and speaking, the very thing which makes it possible,” he writes, “is ambiguity or ‘metaphor’.”¹⁹ The very possibility of a correspondence between thought and being presupposes that being can be spoken about *at all*. That is, prior to the scientific determination of the truth of any proposition is a relationship between truth and “effability” (*Sagbarkeit*) which “cannot be measured in terms of the verifiability of propositions” (Gadamer 1994c, 40). However, the possibility of speaking about things in no way guarantees that one speaks *correctly*. Locating the content of hermeneutic judgment in the ontological disclosure of the probable couches this judgment in *Dasein*’s perceptive activity; yet because what is articulated is merely a possible mode of being, this judgment must be justified beyond the purely subjective scope of one’s own self-understanding.

¹⁹ DD, 111. Similarly, in “What is Truth?” Gadamer takes umbrage with the 20th nominalist movement to produce just this kind of system. Nominalism, he writes, “believes that the whole secret and sole task of all philosophy consists in forming the proposition so exactly that it really is in a position to state what is meant univocally. Philosophy should develop a system of signs that is not dependent on the metaphorical ambiguity of natural language, and also not dependent in general on the linguistic multiplicity of modern cultures out of which flow misleading and erroneous claims, but rather one what attains the univocity and precision of mathematics” (Gadamer 1994c, 39).

This orientation toward the possibility of speaking about being thereby liberates hermeneutical inquiry from the “ontological obstructions” of scientific objectivity (TM, 268). Paradoxically, this liberation occurs by prioritizing the autonomous existence of beings over any subjective consciousness that creates meaning for these things. That is, the hermeneutical encounter with beings is liberating precisely because it allows the things themselves (*die Sache*) to speak for themselves, rather than confining their meaning to the scope of scientific utility or functionality. Gadamer argues that the “language of things” has been vanishing with the growing force of scientific rationality and its fixation on function and utility, i.e. its prioritizing of one’s subjective control over the autonomous nature of the things themselves. Inherent in the concept of a “thing,” Gadamer writes, is that it does not exist merely for our use. Nonetheless, within scientific rationalism the being of the thing in itself “is disregarded by the imperious human will to manipulate, and it is like a language it is vital for us to hear” (PH, 71-72). The definition of truth as unconcealment identifies an essentially reflexive activity one undertakes in “reaching back” behind an established position. It is liberating, then, because it attends to the fundamental uncertainty which constitutes thought, thereby revealing other ontological possibilities that an entity has of being known.

2.2.2: Truth as relation between whole and part

The original unity between language and being unfolds according to the logic of a whole in relation to its parts. Here again Heidegger serves as Gadamer’s guide, namely with respect to his insight into the positive ontological structure of the hermeneutical circle. Heidegger’s point is that every interpretation (*Auslegung*) presupposes an understanding (*Verstehen*) of the nature of what is being interpreted. Understanding is referred to variously as fore-conception (*Vorgriff*), fore-having (*Vorhabe*), or fore-sight (*Vorsicht*; BT, 191). These concepts all indicate some kind

of knowledge that one has in advance of making a judgment, the development of which conceptualizes one's forethought (BT, 191). Interpretation involves working out the content of this fore-knowledge "in terms of the things themselves" (BT, 195). In other words, developing an interpretation grounds it in understanding, which in turn modifies the content of understanding by confirming or denying one's presuppositions about the nature of whatever is being interpreted. The relationship between forethought and judgment is therefore essentially circular. As Heidegger writes, "Any interpretation which is to contribute to understanding, must have already understood what is to be interpreted" (BT, 194).

Gadamer appropriates Heidegger's metaphor of the hermeneutical circle as a model to describe the hermeneutical interpretation of a text in terms of a whole in relation to its parts. Importantly, Jean Grondin points out that in order to understand the ontological positivity of the hermeneutical circle one must properly distinguish between its epistemological and phenomenological orientations. Within the former orientation, in which scientific rationalism situates itself, the circle is inherently vicious. Heidegger explains:

...we may not presuppose what it is our task to provide grounds for. But if interpretation must in any case already operate in that which is understood, and if it must draw its nurture from this, how is it to bring any scientific results to maturity without moving in a circle, especially if, moreover, the understanding which is presupposed still operates within our common information about man and the world? (BT, 194)

The epistemological orientation does not appear to satisfy the demand for an objective, presuppositionless ground for thought. Since Descartes the natural sciences have endeavored to establish exactly this ground, i.e. "where truth is immediately given and interpretation is not required" (Schmidt 2010, 203). The validity of anything that can be called into doubt is rejected and a reliable methodology is developed from whatever remains cognitively secure. In *Truth and Method* Gadamer launches his well-known attack against the Enlightenment "prejudice against

prejudice.” He finds that this principle of Enlightenment thought has extended into the contemporary period, justifying for us the rejection of any bias which influences one’s understanding of what is otherwise taken to be objective reality. This prejudice against prejudice is, of course, its own bias against the value of knowledge that is probable but not certain. Within hermeneutics, then, “it is the proclamation that an interpretation is free from any anticipations that must appear naïve and uncritical” (Grondin 2002a, 47). “An interpretation,” Heidegger writes, “is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented [*eines Vorgegebenen*] to us” (BT, 192). Overcoming this Enlightenment principle opens the path to a more appropriate understanding of humanity’s essential finitude and its necessary, inescapable reliance on prejudices for obtaining knowledge (TM, 277).

The presupposition of an inherent subjective bias in the judgment and interpretation of being does not imply, however, that truth is grounded entirely in subjectivity. Having dismissed the Enlightenment demand for an objective basis for knowledge and an accompanying methodology couched in epistemological certainty, Gadamer describes the kind of position derived solely from a subjective standpoint:

Self-reflection and autobiography [...] are not primary and are therefore not an adequate basis 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 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. (TM, 278)

Gadamer’s revitalization of the positive meaning of prejudice and his movement away from the objectifying methodology of the natural sciences is not intended to prioritize a subjective epistemology over its objective counterpart. Rather, the point is to locate dialectically a common ground for both subject and object. An epistemological orientation favours one side or the other by presupposing the separation between subject and object. Heidegger’s phenomenological

description of the circular structure of understanding provides an effective basis for the mediation between the two following the presupposition of their unity instead.

Heidegger's development of the hermeneutical circle provides Gadamer with the means to ground subjective prejudices in a reality whose structures are not themselves conditioned by human thought, but which become manifestly evident through our shared experience of them. The mediation between subject and object is an essential property of the ontological shift of Gadamer's hermeneutics, guided in part by what he calls the "anticipation of meaning." It is within the framework of this concept that truth is obtained according to the logic of a whole in relation to its parts. Gadamer writes, "The anticipation of meaning in which the whole is envisaged becomes actual understanding when the parts that are determined by the whole themselves also determine this whole" (TM, 291). In traditional hermeneutic theory, interpretation ends with a perfect understanding of its object. This end is achieved when the total coherence of the parts is understood in relation to their unifying whole. By contrast, Heidegger's phenomenological description of the relation between whole and part excludes the possibility of attaining any such perfection. This is because understanding is now essentially rooted in fore-knowledge, the content of which informs the anticipation of meaning and is furthermore constantly being modified in response to the interpretive act (TM, 293). For this reason the anticipation of meaning is not purely an act of subjectivity as it "proceeds from the commonality that binds us to the tradition" (TM, 293). The anticipation of meaning is therefore not an act of objectivity either, as the coherence of the whole is only ever realized through one's subjective participation in it. One's understanding of the hermeneutical object cannot be dissociated from the knowledge of oneself in relation to this object. The two mutually cohere.

A significant implication of this process of mediation is what Gadamer refers to as the “fore-conception of completeness” (TM, 294). As a condition of understanding, completeness refers to the requisite presumption that the object of interpretation is a unified, coherent whole. Its intelligibility is taken to be contingent upon this coherence, and it is only when something such as a text is discovered to be unintelligible that it is approached as an object of criticism instead. We must ask, however, what it means for the text to exist as a unified whole. Gadamer tells us that the reader assumes “an immanent unity of meaning,” but that his understanding of the content of the text is also guided by “the constant transcendent expectations of meaning” based on the reader’s prior relation to this content (TM, 294). The fore-conception of completeness, then, has two aspects which operate simultaneously in thought: one, it presumes that the text will “completely express its meaning”; and two, it presumes that “what it says should be the complete truth” (TM, 294).

The fore-conception of completeness operates in relation to the primary and secondary levels of interpretation of the object of understanding. Gadamer’s concern, of course, is not with developing a methodology with which one can undertake a critical examination of the object of understanding, but rather the conditions which make understanding as such possible. Thus he says that understanding is primarily concerned with the content of the text, and only in a secondary sense with the form which communicates this content (TM, 294). Traditional hermeneutics, then, applies this condition only on a secondary, epistemological level, such that one can attain, at least in theory, a perfect understanding of the intended meaning of the text. On the primary, ontological level, however, the fore-conception of completeness applies not to the text but the subject matter one has in common with the text.

The circular structure of understanding has neither a subjective nor an objective basis, but rather provides a common ground for both subject and object. Both the reader and the text are situated historically within a tradition. Their dialogue is guided by a shared concern over the ontological question of the content of this tradition. Thus neither the reader's fore-understanding of the meaning of the text nor the author's representation of this meaning has a purely subjective basis. Both horizons of meaning emerge within and in response to a tradition of meaning, and both are guided by the "transcendent expectations" of this meaning. The concept of a tradition, however, does not represent a purely objective measure of these expectations because the tradition itself develops along with the plurality of subjective stances taken within it (TM, 293). Of course, in one's dialogue with the text, one engages with the text itself and not the author. The point of distinguishing between the primary and secondary object of interpretation, therefore, is to separate the text as representing the content of a tradition from its representation of the author's opinion of this content.

The fore-conception of completeness, which Gadamer says is a formal condition of *all* understanding, therefore entails an unresolvable tension between the intelligibility and unintelligibility of the text. As indicated above, the intelligibility of the text depends on its existence as a coherent, unified whole, which presumes furthermore that the text contains both a complete expression of its meaning and a complete truth. Despite the distinction between the primary and secondary awareness of the text, practically speaking any text remains limited to whatever the author has written. At best, then, anything that a text may disclose about its subject matter on this primary level of understanding is a partial truth, even if we accept Gadamer's claim that the meaning of a text extends beyond the author's intent. Therefore, while a text could have theoretically a perfect coherence between its parts in relation to its structure as a whole, the

meaning of this whole cannot itself be the totality of what can be said about the subject matter that is common to both the reader and the text and which sustains their relationship on this primary level of understanding. Thus the following dilemma emerges: the textual representation of primary, shared content can express a complete truth but cannot completely express the meaning of this truth; while the textual representation of a secondary, authorial view of this content can completely express the author's meaning but cannot express a complete truth.

It is clear, however, that for Gadamer this tension is not only intentional but also necessary. This tension bears a resemblance to Meno's paradox: it is unnecessary to ask a question when one already knows the answer, but if one does not know the answer asking the question in the first place is impossible.²⁰ Socrates' solution to this problem is to suggest that one has prior, undisclosed knowledge of the thing in question which becomes revealed through the process of recollection. In this way, he can say meaningfully that one is always in a state of being both knowledgeable and ignorant. Gadamer remarks that the most fundamental precondition of hermeneutics is fore-knowledge "which comes from being concerned with the same subject" (TM, 294). A text is both intelligible and unintelligible, then, because it can speak to the reader about something familiar, i.e. their common subject matter, but in an unfamiliar way, i.e. from the perspective of a different point in history or tradition. He writes:

Hermeneutic work is based on a polarity of familiarity and strangeness; but this polarity is not to be regarded psychologically, with Schleiermacher, as the range that covers the mystery of individuality, but truly hermeneutically—i.e. in regard to what has been said: the language in which the text addresses us, the story that it tells us. Here too there is a tension. It is in the play between the traditionary text's strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition. The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between. (TM, 295)

²⁰ Sc. IG, 56-57: "Seeking and learning presuppose that one knows what one does not know, and to learn that, one must be refuted. Knowing what one does not know is not simply ignorance. It always implies a prior knowledge which guides all one's seeking and questioning. Cognition is always recognition."

The hermeneutical mediation between whole and part reflects the fact that the truth as mediated through language is essentially incomplete because it is always expressed from a particular point of view. This perspectivism, however, always presupposes that the common subject matter one has in common with the text is itself a unity of these perspectives, i.e. that the subject matter itself is a complete truth. Like Socrates, the reader is always in a position of both knowing and not knowing the subject matter of his dialogue with the text.

Our access to the things themselves is therefore mediated in and through our interaction with other horizons of understanding about these things. We do not have a direct, unmediated access to these things, at least not in any sense that can be captured in language. In Gadamer's view, for this reason the act of reading a text naturally carries with it a sort of unspoken trust that the author is writing from a more informed position. That is, whatever is transmitted through a tradition is not ambiguous but in accordance with reason. If the text is discovered not to be a coherent, unified whole on a secondary level, this incoherence does not undermine the intelligibility of the subject matter itself. It means only that one cannot understand what the author is trying to say in a conversation about the same thing. With respect to the intelligibility of the subject matter itself, Gadamer's point is just that the condition of completeness is never meant to be satisfied. "To be historically [*geschichtlichsein*]," he writes, "means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete" (TM, 301; WM, 307). Human knowledge is fundamentally partial and limited. The completeness of the object of hermeneutical understanding is neither attained in our understanding of it, but nor is this completeness refuted because of the inherent deficiency of our reflection upon it. Thus the ontological positivity of the hermeneutical circle, developed in this way according to the logic of a whole in relation to its parts, is characterized by

its lack of a demand for certainty with respect to one's knowledge of the whole in order to obtain truth about this whole. What it demands instead is plausibility.

2.2.3: Truth as an event of experience

Gadamer's concept of experience (*Erfahrung*) reflects the fact that the process of coming to an understanding is just that: a process. The event of experience is intimately tied to the dialectical mediation between the unity of a concept and the plurality of judgments about this concept. Experience is fundamentally "open" in that it always leads to new experience, "not only in the general sense that errors are corrected, but that experience is essentially dependent on constant confirmation."²¹ Gadamer finds that this openness can develop either positively or negatively as the consequence of either an epistemological or ontological orientation toward the thing being experienced. In the previous section these orientations were distinguished in order to establish the ontological virtue of the hermeneutical circle against its epistemological viciousness. A similar distinction will be helpful here in order to establish the fundamental dialogical character of genuine, ontological experience against the monological character of experience within the framework of scientific rationality.

The positive conceptualization of experience describes broadly the development of the universality of a concept according to which similar experiences can be categorized. While the essential singularity of experience is maintained, it becomes an experience *of something* only when it is determined by an objectified content, i.e. a scientific law that is taken to maintain its universality independently of any particular observation of it. This characterization of experience has developed, in Gadamer's view, as a result of Aristotle's logical induction according to which

²¹ TM, 346. This characterization of experience is sensitive to the two different meanings of falsehood discussed earlier, one having to do with making an error, the other with concealing a previously disclosed truth.

“the true universality of the concept and the possibility of science comes about” (TM, 347). This kind of scientific reasoning can be productive insofar as it provides a kind of technical control over things. The repeated experience of the performance of some object allows one to reliably predict in advance certain outcomes through an understanding of the reason or cause of the nature of that object:

Command of a *technē* is characterized, in its execution, by anticipatory disposition over the thing to be produced, in the form of understanding and (in explicative speech) explaining the thing to be produced in terms of its reason or causes. This disposition over the things has the character of universality and necessity insofar as the reason or cause [...] is universal and gives necessary reasons applying to every possible case of the performance in question. (PDE, 27)

The mathematical certainty of scientific knowledge and the “methodical spirit of research” are obviously indispensable to human development and the continued development of our knowledge of the universe. Accordingly, Gadamer does not diminish the significance of scientific knowledge or the worth of its methodology *per se*, despite claims to the contrary by some commentators. He claims openly that there is nothing that necessarily prevents the human sciences from developing new insights into their subject matter through some form of methodology, only that they tend not to do this (Gadamer 1994b, 26). The application of method is still necessary, however, wherever the goal is to produce unbiased and independently verifiable conclusions, especially when one has at least some obligation to satisfy public reason.

In *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, Gadamer develops an idealized ground for a shared understanding based in Aristotelian scientific reasoning. The aim of scientific inquiry in this context is to establish a mode of discourse which makes an entity understandable in terms of its substantive content, i.e. “to exhibit it, in light of what makes it the way it is, as necessarily being that way” (PDE, 34). Ideally this mode of discourse will obtain something like scientific or

methodological certainty but within the framework of a dialogue.²² The problem with scientific inquiry—and this is where Gadamer *is* critical of methodology—is that as an event of truth this inquiry can develop monologically. As Gadamer put it, “Aristotelian science is characterized by its lack of need for any explicit agreement on the part of a partner: it is a showing, based on necessity, which is not concerned with the actual agreement of others” (PDE, 18). This mode of reasoning and giving proof does not require consent or agreement by virtue of the logical framework in which it operates.²³

The positive conceptualization of experience ignores its essential processual element and the fact that, as a process, experience is essentially rooted in a prior negativity. The key difference between these kinds of experience, Gadamer says, is that a positive experience conforms to one’s expectation whereas a negative experience indicates something new (TM, 347). By having one’s understanding of an entity reasonably contested or contradicted one acquires a more comprehensive knowledge of this entity. For Gadamer, then, it is only in its primarily negative form that one can have “genuine” experience.

²² In “Hermeneutics Tracking the Trace,” for example, Gadamer writes that a dialogue “comes to life precisely from the unforeseen ideas that may give the conversation a whole new direction. A conversation is not a discourse that is well programmed in advance. And yet one does seek to give the conversation a direction” (GR, 392). The idea that a dialogue has directionality refers to the prior ambiguity that belongs to language. Words can have multiple meanings, and so different and even unpredictable meanings can emerge over the course of a conversation. There is the possibility, then, that the direction of a dialogue will not be the correct one. Thus in a “real” or “living” conversation, “the right understanding is immediately confirmed and misunderstandings are corrected. In a conversation one does not have to weigh every word on a scale of gold and carefully choose one’s words so as to exclude all possible alternative meanings or misunderstandings” (GR, 393). In Plato’s *Dialectical Ethics*, Gadamer’s development of an ideal ground for a shared understanding has something like this latter form of conversation in mind, i.e. one where the ambiguity in language does not hinder an agreement because the terms are highly contextualized.

²³ Furthermore, since hermeneutical experience is essentially an experience with another person, the predictability of scientific knowledge undermines the moral dimension of interpretation. On this mode of interaction Gadamer writes, “We understand the other person in the same way that we understand any other typical even in our experiential field—i.e., he is predictable. His behavior is as much a means to our end as any other means. From the moral point of view this orientation toward the Thou is purely self-regarding and contradicts the moral definition of man” (TM, 352). In chapter five we will elaborate Gadamer’s criticism of the growing emphasis he sees on this kind of technical control in social institutions.

The negative conceptualization of experience attends to the hermeneutic insight that there is no pre-scientific definition of a universal genus which does not contain some degree of ambiguity or indeterminacy:

If one wants to describe the dialectical experience of thought, one may not just presuppose this systematic doctrine of classificatory concept formation. Instead one must display how the very procedure of concept definition itself contains something arbitrary and uncertain, for the genus under which a thing is to be subsumed obviously lacks singleness of meaning.²⁴

The self-certainty of scientific inquiry has to do with the fact that scientific reasoning also makes a claim to “the necessity of what the reason grounds” (PDE, 35). This necessity, however, is based on “evidentness” (*Einsichtigkeit*) rather than certainty.²⁵ We saw earlier that precisely what distinguishes the hermeneutical and scientific orientations toward truth is that the former begins with what is merely evident in fore-knowledge, whereas the latter rejects any determination of truth which does not develop from an objective certainty. Likewise, Gadamer claims here that the ideal kind of scientific inquiry that enables a shared understanding does not just request the participation of another person, but in fact presupposes it. It is precisely because the necessary ground of an entity’s being is merely evident that it can be brought into question, thereby requiring a response. Thus while the substantive content of genuine experience may develop according to the scientific logic of Aristotelian ἀπόδειξις, its form is purely dialogical and therefore as an event of truth it does not, and cannot, occur in an isolated monologue.²⁶

²⁴ DD, 109-110. Gadamer takes this insight from Plato’s *Sophist*, where none of the definitions of the sophist is able to capture precisely what his nature is without calling into question that such a nature in fact exists.

²⁵ Thus the conditions for the possibility of a shared understanding that Gadamer develops in *Plato’s Dialectical Ethics* are an early indication of the priority of the ontological commitment to truth over its epistemological counterpart that he maintains in later works.

²⁶ Gadamer says that his intention in *Plato’s Dialectic Ethics* is to develop a substantive basis on which the link between Platonic dialogue and Aristotelian apodeictic can be made intelligible. Plato’s *Philebus* moves from the ontological idea of the good to the good of human, ethical life, making this dialogue an appropriate basis for interpreting Aristotle’s development of a moral science (PDE, 2). Therefore the fact of the historical development of the former into the latter is not in dispute for him. Rather, Gadamer’s relevant interest is why Plato’s dialectic, having as its foundation Socrates’ conversational form, is the genesis of Aristotle’s science. His concern with a

The essential negativity involved in the experience of truth reflects a mode of self-understanding which involves coming to terms with one's essential finitude. "The truly experienced person," Gadamer writes, "is one who has taken this to heart, who knows that he is master neither of time nor the future. The experienced man knows that all foresight is limited and all plans uncertain" (TM, 351). This experience which develops one's self-understanding is therefore "radically undogmatic." It is characterized, in fact, as entailing a "loss of self":

Just as the relation between the speaker and what is spoken points to a dynamic process that does not have a firm basis in either member of the relation, so the relation between the understanding and what is understood has a priority over its relational terms. (PH, 50-51)

In coming to a shared understanding both the self and the other must be brought out of themselves, so to speak, and oriented toward the broader logic of the state of affairs which constitutes the scope and direction of the conversation itself. What is "lost" in undergoing a genuine experience are the contingent factors which otherwise withhold one from really seeing the substantive content of the subject matter being talked about. Within the framework of tradition, it is the substantive content of hermeneutic questioning that gets transmitted historically, taking precedence over any contingent viewpoint about this content. This is why in Gadamer's view the "true historical object is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other, a relationship that constitutes both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding" (TM, 299).

The loss of self that one experiences with respect to the substantive, historical content of hermeneutic discourse is the backdrop to Gadamer's concept of the historically effected consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsien*). Importantly, Robert Dostal points out that

unitary reading of Plato and Aristotle remains constant over the course of his career. He develops a version of this unity in his 1968 essay, "*Amicus Plato Magis Amica Veritas*," which informs much of the content of his 1978 book, *Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles*.

one of the main features of Gadamer's hermeneutics that distinguishes it from Heidegger's phenomenology is the length of time that it takes to obtain truth. For Heidegger, the transformation of *Dasein* from inauthenticity to authenticity happens suddenly in a single moment (*Augenblick*). For Gadamer, by contrast, the discovery of truth is drawn out over the course of a conversation (Dostal 1994, 56-57). To be aware of this hermeneutical situation is to know that there is no position outside of it and therefore that there is no truly objective knowledge of it (TM, 301). The experience of truth is the experience of one's essential finitude; and by entailing an openness to further experiences, this definition of truth remains rooted ontologically in the evidentness of what is being experienced prior to any epistemological certainty.

2.2.4: Truth as agreement

In its ordinary usage, "agreement" refers to a kind of truth that is obtained as the result or conclusion of a conversation. For Gadamer, however, there is a form of agreement that does not refer to the conclusion of a dialogue, but is rather a condition for a dialogue to take place. The intention here is to elaborate upon the significance of this meaning of agreement as a condition that a dialogical model of truth and meaning presupposes in order for a conversation to remain productive, namely. Developing the nature of this condition will serve to orient the definition of truth as agreement within the overall direction of this thesis project.

The "first condition" of hermeneutics is the "address" or "provocation" (*Anstoss*) that the text issues to its reader. Understanding begins, Gadamer says, with being addressed.²⁷ Understanding therefore continues by addressing something in return. Previously we saw that the

²⁷ TM, 298. Of course, the idea that understanding as such has a beginning, and therefore an end, should be interpreted loosely here.

intelligibility of a text can be developed through either an epistemological or ontological orientation toward its meaning, that is, with respect to either the meaning of the opinion it presents, or the meaning of its substantive content. In the case of the latter, which we recall is the real mode of inquiry of Gadamer's hermeneutics, the text remains situated between intelligibility and unintelligibility as the reader shares in a prior engagement with its subject matter but maintains a state of unfamiliarity with the manner in which the text presents its own view of this subject. The space wherein these perspectives meet is described by Gadamer's concept of the fusion of horizons:

In fact the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing occurs in encountering the past and in understanding the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves. (TM, 305)

Insofar as a legitimate prejudice toward meaning is what enables understanding, an illegitimate prejudice is the cause of misunderstanding. Understanding begins, then, by having one's prejudice "provoked" by way of the address. In this way, one becomes aware of one's prejudice toward meaning and can reflect upon its validity.

As the concept of the fusion of horizons dictates, however, this address or provocation cannot occur in isolation. In other words, Gadamer precludes the possibility that someone could engage in a non-dialogical reflection upon meaning within the framework of hermeneutics. Without the kind of counterbalance to the self that the other provides, it is difficult, and perhaps impossible, to determine if one has effectively undertaken an appropriate reflection.²⁸

²⁸ In *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, Gadamer does consider how one might be able to engage in a dialogue with oneself. The obvious difficulty, as he points out, concerns separating substantive and unsubstantive motives in one's own thought and speech, as it is presupposed that both can contribute to the development of one's view. Moreover, the

Maintaining a primary involvement with the text regarding a common subject is therefore a matter of establishing a productive relationship with it based on mutual reciprocity. This is just what is meant by defining truth as agreement. This definition does not refer to an agreement on what the content of one's thought means for oneself, but what one means with respect to the other. Gadamer reiterates that this agreement does not describe the terms of a logical correspondence between subject and object. This agreement is always linguistic, and so it is not a conversation between subject and object but rather between an "I" and a "Thou." The Thou in any conversation cannot be considered an object because in its conversational relationship to the I it is itself also a subject (sc. TM, 352).

The fact that a text as a Thou can disrupt this agreement does not preclude the interpreter from doing the same. So although a provocation must be initiated by something "that has already asserted itself in its own separate validity"²⁹ such as the authoritative text, this provocation is not limited exclusively to having an effect on the reader. The reader can also provoke the text:

It appears, therefore, that the primary factor is a kind of agreement between the two [interlocutors], a deliberate attitude of the one as well as the other. [This agreement] is not so much the subjective attitude of the two men confronting each other as it is the formation of the movement as such, which, as in an unconscious teleology, subordinates the attitude of the individuals to itself.³⁰

way to keep these things separate is just to keep oneself open to the possibility of being contradicted by another person, and even engaging with a potential contradiction (PDE, 42). Thus even when it is considered as an isolated activity hermeneutics is still modeled on a dialogical form. Since Gadamer here is developing an idealized mode of discourse, the possibility that someone might simply perpetuate a false prejudice does not come up here whereas it does elsewhere. In *Truth and Method*, for example, Gadamer states that the reader "cannot separate in advance the productive prejudices that enable understanding from the prejudices that hinder it and lead to misunderstandings" (TM, 295). This separation occurs throughout the process of coming to a shared understanding, but where someone is supplying for themselves the content of another person's point of view it becomes questionable how successful they might be in making such a distinction.

²⁹ TM, 298. We recall that for Gadamer there can be an implicit trust in a text that is recognized as authoritative.

³⁰ PH, 54. This brief description hardly does justice to the extent to which the metaphor of play is relevant to Gadamer's hermeneutical project. The primary experience of truth in hermeneutics develops from the experience of the work of art, which of course is prefigured in Heidegger's phenomenology. The concept of play is Gadamer's inroad to the nature of this experience in its ontological orientation (e.g. TM, 102 ff.). Hinman (1980, 518-522) provides a useful overview of the scope of this concept and its bearing on other important aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutics.

In being provoked “we are confronted not only with ourselves—as we already know ourselves, but with something else as well: it is legitimate that we experience a provocation from them that leads us beyond ourselves” (Gadamer 1994b, 29). In other words, by being provoked and by undertaking appropriate self-reflection the reader experiences the kind of loss of self that was characterized earlier. Thus in order for any historical document to be relevant to the present it must lose itself as well. That is, on a primary level its content must be interpreted free from the contingencies of its historical origin.

Defining truth as an agreement means, therefore, that over the course of a conversation one does not engage merely with the opinion of the other, i.e. the author of the text one is interpreting. In Gadamer’s view, “the understanding of tradition does not take the traditionary text as an expression of another person’s life, but as meaning that is detached from the person who means it, from an I or a Thou” (TM, 352). The concern with the opinion of an author is an historical or psychological pursuit, which Gadamer explicitly defines as secondary to the hermeneutic involvement with the substantive content of what is being talked about.

Essential to any dialogue, then, is the openness of the interlocutors. One of the claims that Gadamer makes throughout *Truth and Method* and many other essays is that the self must be open to the alterity of the other that the text or its analogue presents. This openness is a fundamental condition for understanding to be possible in the first place, as it is only by being open that one can be provoked by the text. It follows that the experience of the other which properly attends to the hermeneutical situation of the interlocutors accounts for both the subject and objective dimensions of both speakers. What it means to be open, then, is not merely listening to what the other has to say in a conversation, but hearing what the other is saying as it is relevant to one’s own historical situation. Where temporal distance exists between the self and

the other in a conversation, the appropriate experience of the other therefore attends to the historical situation of the other but in a way that finds this situation relevant to the present.³¹ As Gadamer puts it, “I must allow tradition’s claim to validity, not in the sense of simply acknowledging the past in its otherness, but in such a way that it has something to say to me” (TM, 355). In turn, the demand for reciprocity means that the other must remain open in the same way and allows itself to be addressed in this same respect.

Defining truth as agreement pivots on the meaning of this condition of openness. If it is satisfied, the interlocutors will be in a position to conclude their discussion, where the most secure conclusion is the synthesis between two contradictory claims through a process of “cognitive disclosing and appropriating.”³² What the condition of openness really indicates, however, is that in a dialogue one must be open to the possibility that what the other has to say is potentially true. Thus there is a more fundamental sense of the truth as agreement than that of a conclusion of a dialogue and the synthesis of differing judgments. What the condition of openness really indicates is the need for a tacit agreement on the part of the interlocutors that they will engage with each other over a shared question of the substantial meaning of the matter at hand. The possibility of coming to a shared understanding depends on having this agreement in the first place.

³¹ Gadamer describes two ways in which one can fail to do this properly. Focusing on only the subjective dimension of the text develops only the historical consciousness of the other. That is, a purely subjective approach to the other restricts the meaning of what the other has to say to just its historical contingencies, finding in it “not the instantiation of a general law but something historically unique” (TM, 354). Focusing only on its objective content is equivalent, Gadamer says, to a “naïve faith in method and in the objectivity that can be attained through it” (TM, 352). In this reverse case, everything subjective is excluded and the text is determined purely as an historical object according to a misguided methodology. In either case, the fundamental historical situation of the text is undermined, and therefore its effect on the tradition in which the reader finds himself is interrupted.

³² PDE, 41. Thus, as he writes here: “So the inherent tendency of the intention of coming to an understanding is to want to do this precisely with the person whose prior opinion contradicts one’s thesis most sharply. The more radical the contradiction is, the more secure the thesis that is confirmed by an ultimate agreement.”

For this reason Gadamer differentiates between the “substantive intention” of what is said in a dialogue and the “contingent motives” of either interlocutor (PDE, 41-42). The crucial difference lies in being able to dissociate oneself from the contingent factors which have contributed to the development of a particular point of view, and therefore do not attend to the necessary state of affairs of the shared subject matter. The interlocutors, for instance, could enter into a dialogue about a shared subject matter, assert that what the other is saying could be true, and yet fail to reach a shared understanding. They could, in other words, agree to disagree due to the inability to dissociate their contingent motives for engaging with the other from the substantive content of their judgments about the matter at hand.³³ When interpreting a text, then, what is important is that its content is dissociated from the historical and psychological contingencies of the author when writing it. It is only in its detachment from the author, Gadamer says, that the text can be understood “in its full ideality, in which alone it has validity” (TM, 396). This does not mean that the text is not viewed as part of an historical tradition, only that its meaning is not confined to the specific historical circumstances surrounding its genesis. The fact that a text can be dissociated in this way and interpreted substantively is precisely why the written word, rather than the spoken word, is the paradigmatic object of hermeneutics, as the spoken word is always laden psychologically with these contingent factors.³⁴ Ideally, then, the

³³ For this reason, basing one’s understand on the “inner condition” of the other in a conversation is considered a degenerate mode of dialogue. In this case, although one may understand the motivation the other has for holding a contradictory points of view, one does not understand the rationale of the content of the contradiction itself. Gadamer writes, “For a person who thinks that he understands another person who contradicts him in some way and that he understands him without agreeing with him has by that very means protected himself from the other person’s contradictions. That is, in understanding oneself—an understanding that essentially always involves contrasting oneself with others in this way—one rigidifies oneself in ways that make one, precisely, unreachable by the other person. Genuine being with one another can hardly be based on an understanding that pushes the other person away like this but must be based on a way of being with him that refrains from claiming this kind of understanding of the other person and of oneself” (PDE, 37-38).

³⁴ TM, 394. The irony here, as Gadamer points out, is that because the written text does not literally have a voice it is actually more susceptible to misunderstanding, intentional or not. The spoken word, by contrast, always has a certain tone or inflection, for example, which constrains its possibilities of meaning (e.g. obvious sarcasm should not be taken literally) but also reduces the chance that it will be misinterpreted.

reader and the text are mutually provocative with respect to the substantive content and substantive intention of their judgments about their shared subject matter.

The definition of truth as an agreement expresses perhaps most clearly the insight that at a fundamental level truth is the disclosure of possibility.³⁵ One is made to view the other in a dialogue as an “anonymous bearer of a possible substantive contradiction,” which means in turn that one sees one’s own assertion only in its substantive content as well (PDE, 42). Thus when interpreting a text, the reader “experiences what is addressed to him and what he understands in all its validity. What he understands is always more than an unfamiliar opinion: *it is always possible truth [mögliche Wahrheit]*” (TM, 396; WM, 398; emphasis mine). The interpreter must maintain a self-reflexive attitude such that his judgments reflect the substantive content of what has been said and not the just contingencies on which that judgment is otherwise based. As Gadamer puts it, “A person who is trying to understand is exposed to distraction from fore-meanings that are not borne out by the things themselves. Working out appropriate projections, anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed ‘by the things’ themselves, is the constant task of understanding” (TM, 270). In this way the self is brought to a “higher determination” (PH, 54) of being where greater possibilities of meaning, new provocations (*Anstösse*), become open to him.

2.3: Problems

The various elements that contribute to the concept of truth operative in Gadamer’s hermeneutics center on the idea that at a fundamental level our understanding of being is expressed in the form of judgments about possible modes of existence of that being. This thesis

³⁵ Heidegger also characterizes the interpretation of fore-knowledge as an act of working out ontological possibilities (BT, 188-189).

develops naturally from the hypothesis that understanding develops in the first place prior to any methodology.³⁶ That is, the linguistic disclosure of ontological possibilities is based on their evident nature as understood through one's intuitive awareness of their necessary ground. Where judgments about beings are shown dialectically to be in some way incomplete, and in a sense they always are, one is forced to reflect back upon a universal concept presupposed in one's fore-knowledge, thereby changing the scope and meaning of this concept. Put simply, one is made aware of possible differences in the essential nature of things based on differences in the language used to talk about these things.³⁷ New potential meanings become available to thought and dialogical activity continues over a mutual concern for coming to a shared and therefore more comprehensive understanding of things.

Central to Gadamer's hermeneutical project is therefore the idea that understanding is fundamentally dialogical and so always requires openness to what the other is saying. Because a hermeneutical dialogue is always open, interpretation is always the act of re-interpreting things in a way that is novel and not simply repetitive (TM, 400-401). We understand differently, Gadamer says, if we understand at all (TM, 296). The dialectical function of hermeneutics elaborates the conditions which make it possible for these differences to be considered mutually and eventually move toward a shared understanding about the meaning of being. Hermeneutical dialogue is then a discussion of the different ways that beings may be said to appear to thought.

³⁶ E. D. Hirsch Jr. writes: "The act of understanding is at first a genial (or a mistaken) guess, and there are no methods for making guesses, no rules for generating insights. The methodical activity of interpretation commences when we begin to test and criticize our guesses" (Hirsch 1969, 203). As we will see, however, Hirsch argues that because understanding has a pre-methodological ground, meaning can be validly determined only in light of an objective principle.

³⁷ Thus Gadamer: "I think we must say that generally we [discover a difference in usage] in the experience of being pulled up short by the text. Either it does not yield any meaning at all or its meaning is not compatible with what we had expected. This is what brings us up short and alerts us to a possible difference in usage. Someone who speaks the same language as I do uses the words in the sense familiar to me—this is a general presupposition that can be questioned only in particular cases. The same thing is true in the case of a foreign language: we all think we have a standard knowledge of it and assume this standard usage when we are reading a text" (TM, 270).

“All that is asked,” Gadamer writes, “is that we remain open to the meaning of the other person or text” (TM, 271). Moreover, although the fore-conception of the completeness of meaning is a necessary precondition for establishing a productive, dialogical encounter with the text, the fact that neither the text, nor the reader, can fully satisfy this condition means that interpretation is always, in principle, an “infinite process” (TM, 298).

Above we discussed how Gadamer distinguishes between primary and secondary modes of interpreting the hermeneutical object. The secondary mode is guided by an epistemological concern, namely to uncover the meaning of this object within its particular, historical context. Within literary criticism, for example, this means that the goal of interpretation is to convey the author’s intended meaning. The primary mode is guided by an ontological concern, i.e. to discover the meaning of the hermeneutical object beyond any particular set of historical circumstances. Openness within a dialogical context is necessary here because the meaning of this object cannot be contained within any one horizon of meaning. This is why Gadamer claims, for instance, that the meaning of a text always extends beyond the intention of its author (TM, 296). On this view, the substantive content of the text is not reducible to what the text, or anyone else for that matter, says about it. This content is really the subject matter that establishes the ground of the reader’s dialogical encounter with the text.

Gadamer’s thesis that truth is grounded in the evident structure of the things themselves brings into question what the measure of this truth is. Above we elaborated Gadamer’s identification of truth with Heideggerian unconcealment. In this sense falsehood is not the antithesis of truth, but rather what is covered over or concealed in the act of revealing some aspect of being. This meaning of truth accords with Gadamer’s description of understanding (*Verstehen*) as an event (*Geschehen*) in which the hermeneutical object “must be understood at

every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way” (TM, 307-308). In this way, truth can be understood as the possible ways in which the things themselves become manifested in any particular situation.

Critics of Gadamer’s hermeneutics argue that Gadamer commits himself to either a monistic or pluralistic definition of truth. On the one hand, the dialogical framework of hermeneutics recognizes that the object of hermeneutical consciousness must possess non-subjective criteria that can validate or invalidate judgments about its meaning. On the other hand, the radical relativity of hermeneutical consciousness suggests that a judgment about this object can remain true with respect to a particular set of historical circumstances, regardless of whether or not this judgment has purchase in other contexts. The following dilemma arises: if truth is essentially monistic, it is only at the expense of interpretive pluralism; but if truth is essentially pluralistic, it is only at the expense of a non-relative ground on which a public agreement about meaning can be established.

In what follows we will see that this dilemma is the result of a dogmatic adherence to either of two principles regarding the existential status of beings. The question at hand is what makes it possible to make an ontological judgment about the “things themselves,” and so it matters how one understands the existence of these things relative to human thought. Depending on where they land, commentators have produced versions of either a monistic or pluralistic theory of interpretation and meaning, the implications of which are drawn out below. The middle path through this dilemma will advance the claim that the things themselves maintain both a unitary and multiple existence. This third approach will be developed in subsequent chapters, principally by studying the effect that Gadamer’s understanding of Plato’s dialectic of the One and Many has had on the development of his philosophical hermeneutics.

2.3.1: Criticisms

As a literary critic, E. D. Hirsch Jr. does not object to Gadamer's thesis that interpretations of a text are inherently novel (Hirsch 1965, 488). What Hirsch finds objectionable is rather the ontological commitment that he argues is present in Gadamer's account of how understanding operates prior to any method, i.e. without a standard of methodological certainty. By grounding the meaning of a text in its substantive content, and by presupposing the independent existence of content apart from both the author and reader, Hirsch claims that the subject matter of their discourse "takes on the autonomous being of language itself" (Ibid., 492). Following Gadamer's distinction between the speech of the author, the language of the text, and the meaning of each, Hirsch writes:

If the language of a text is not speech but rather language speaking its own meaning, then whatever that language says to us is its meaning. It means whatever we take it to mean. Reduced to its intelligible significance the doctrine of the autonomy of a written text is the doctrine of the indeterminacy of textual meaning. (Ibid.)

In Hirsch's view, this means that with respect to its meaning as a coherent, unified whole understood on a primary level, the text contains an "inexhaustible array of possibilities," a hypostatization which he claims reduces the meaning of the text to utter indeterminacy (Ibid.).

Hirsch's criticism has a very Heracleitean character. If human understanding is a dialectical activity which mediates primarily between potential meanings of beings, and if these possibilities are what become manifested in language in the first place, it would seem that the conditions which make understanding possible do not include any kind of measure according to which true and false judgments of a text can be differentiated. Taken to its logical extreme, this position renders language utterly indeterminate to the point that, as Plato argues, meaningful discourse becomes impossible (*Theaet.* 182c-183a).

To his credit, Hirsch softens his criticism of Gadamer's position in later commentaries. He comes to recognize that a text can be authored, for example, with an intention oriented toward the future whose meaning therefore cannot be reduced to just the historical genesis of the text (Hirsch 1984, 205-206). Notwithstanding, in his view the available avenues for interpreting a text, even one whose meaning is in part intentionally indeterminate, must still adhere to a measure external to the consciousness of the reader. Hirsch thus remains committed to his earlier position, namely that the meaning of a text is ultimately only what the author intends it to mean, even if this intention is to allow for speculation about other potential meanings (Ibid., 209-210). This view extends from his thesis that "there is no magic land of meanings outside human consciousness" (Hirsch 1969, 4). All interpretations of the text other than what the author intends therefore indicate differences, Hirsch argues, in the *significance* that it can have for a plurality of readers, whereas the *meaning* of the text remains identical to the singular position of the author alone.

Arguably Gadamer's concept of tradition, carrying with it the notion of the authoritative or classical text, shows that he is not unaware of the need for some kind of normativity in understanding. We saw earlier, for example, that he identifies the authoritative text as the theoretical starting point of hermeneutical dialogue. The virtue of his concept of tradition is that it establishes broadly a measure of the validity of interpretation within human consciousness, i.e. the historically effected consciousness. What is traditional in Gadamer's view is simply what is communicated in the act of handing something down (*Überlieferung*) whether through speech or writing (TM, 391; WM, 393). Without any fore-knowledge of the meaning of the text the reader has no basis on which to begin his interpretation, which in turn makes the text vulnerable to

misinterpretation (TM, 271). It is thus tradition that supplies the reader with a prejudice toward meaning, without which both the reader and the text are left in a kind of interpretive limbo.

A key issue for Gadamer is that individuals develop the ability to determine what counts as a legitimate prejudice, as it is obvious that prejudices can be misleading. The hermeneutically trained consciousness is sensitive to the fact there is no neutral standpoint with respect to the substantive content under consideration. For this reason Gadamer criticises the Enlightenment for advocating the abandoning of all prejudices in favour of unbiased reasoning and methodological certainty. Any merit that an authority figure may enjoy is of no consequence on the Enlightenment view, as the precondition for the validity of any judgment is its methodological justification and not, as Gadamer says, “the fact that it may actually be correct” (TM, 273).

By contrast, Gadamer argues that the fact that an authority figure is a source of prejudice does not preclude it from also being a source of truth (TM, 280). In his view, when we submit to an authority we do not do so simply because it is an authority. Rather, there is always a moment of rational reflection by which one acknowledges the deeper insight that an authority figure has into the nature of things where the superiority of its reason is evident. Authority “rests on acknowledgement and hence on an act of reason itself which, aware of its own limitations, trusts to the better insight of others.”³⁸ The authority figure is one whose perspective is no less limited than our own but nonetheless has gathered crucial insight into the structures of reality, of the “things themselves,” such that this figure’s voice rings true in many times and places. In this way

³⁸ TM, 281. To be sure, Gadamer does not say that the provocation involved in hermeneutical dialogue always comes from the authoritative text, just that it most easily is initiated in this way. Holly Wilson writes, for example, that Gadamer “is arguing that tradition in fact does give us a starting point for reflection, not that it ought to. He is not advocating the superior authority of tradition; he is only claiming that the authority of tradition is based on an act of reason, an act of acknowledgment” (Wilson 1996, 147). In any case, since the text is the paradigmatic hermeneutical object it is most pragmatic to use the text as the theoretical starting point to interpretation.

an authority becomes part of a tradition by virtue of an agreement between it and the present historical situation, allowing it to constitute in part the prejudices of the contemporary reader.

Still, it is one thing to argue that understanding always takes place within and in response to an historical situation, and another to argue that understanding must always cohere with an established position. Some critics claim that Gadamer commits himself to a version of the latter thesis. His insistence on the authority of tradition, they assert, maintains an uncomfortable conservatism in thought.³⁹ Contrary to the charge that hermeneutics entails total indeterminacy in meaning, deferring to the authority of tradition and classical texts as an arbiter for distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate interpretations arguably constrains thought within the boundaries of an established social or political institution. This confinement makes it difficult to see how the historically effected consciousness allows for novel, but reasonable, interpretations, especially if it does not allow one to bring into question the reasons for accepting the nature of the institution itself.

In light of this criticism, it would seem that the deference to traditional texts can be maintained in conjunction with the hermeneutical principle of openness to other possibilities of interpretation only within a relativistic framework. In other words, where there is a difference or even a contradiction in opinion, we may simply have to agree to disagree.⁴⁰ The obvious problem with a relative framework is that without accounting for some kind of non-relative measure

³⁹ Michael Gibbons, for example, while he is ultimately supportive of the openness and productivity he finds inherent in Gadamer's theory of interpretation, argues that understanding inescapably contains elements of conservatism as even the most radical interpretation is still a response to some preexisting historical situation (Gibbons 1985, 790-791). More strongly, Wachterhauser argues that, lacking a measure beyond the concept of tradition, Gadamer's theory of interpretation "will always create a presumption in favour of the *status quo*. [...] In the absence of some kind of criteria of what counts as a rational legitimation for such institutions, the presumption will always be in favour of the well-tried" (Wachterhauser 1988, 246).

⁴⁰ While Wachterhauser does not think that Gadamer has in mind the relativizing of thought as a consequence of the historically effected consciousness, he is skeptical here of Gadamer's ability to defend himself against this charge (Ibid., 247-248).

Gadamer's theory of interpretation remains no less indeterminate than before. An epistemological pluralism entails an "uncritical inclusiveness" which, taken to its logical extreme, renders thought no less nihilistic than Hirsch's evaluation of it (Taylor 1978, 45). The issue is simply that without a non-relative measure there is no way to determine the degree to which competing interpretations truthfully reflect the meaning of the subject matter, or when an interpretation is outright false.⁴¹

Recalling Dostal's thesis, viz. that hermeneutical truth is revealed over the course of a conversation, a more congenial approach to Gadamer's theory of meaning would be to suggest that the dialogical model of hermeneutics implies only that the development of thought beyond any traditional institution simply takes time. In this way, the act of interpretation can remain responsive to the merit of authority without excluding the possibility of novel interpretations of meaning. We must also remember that for Gadamer things are judged primarily according to their "evidentness," and only in a secondary sense is this manifestation available to be measured with epistemological certainty. Therefore, to demand a principle by which a plurality of judgments can be measured against each other on the basis of their evidentness rather than their certainty is misleading. Gadamer's hermeneutics develops the ontological claim that the possibility for dialogical reflection upon judgments of the meaning of being presupposes not only a tacit agreement about what the subject matter is, but also about the possibility that what the other says about this subject is true.

⁴¹ In "Notre rapport à la pensée grecque: Gadamer ou Schleiermacher?" Yvon Lafrance distinguishes between an "appropriating" and "disappropriating" approach to the interpretation of texts. The former maintains the autonomy of the text such that its meaning and truth extend beyond any authorial intention, whereas the latter maintains that the truth of a text is what the author means. What characterizes a disappropriating stance is that it submits the text to normative measures in order to determine what the author really thinks in terms of the language of his own historical period. An appropriating stance, by contrast, involves the participation in the "absolute and transcendent spirit" of truth that the text presents (Lafrance 2002, 44-53). Lafrance argues that Gadamer confuses a distinction between philosophy and hermeneutics, and in doing so incorrectly subordinates "methodological hermeneutics" (i.e. as per Schleiermacher) to his own "ontological hermeneutics" (Ibid., 62-63). François Renaud makes a similar criticism in his essay, "L'appropriation de la philosophie grecque chez Hans-Georg Gadamer" (Renaud 2002).

It is by virtue of the primary status of the plausible or probable that Gadamer's hermeneutics is able to mediate effectively between the monistic and pluralistic definitions of meaning and avoid reducing meaning either to a static adherence to tradition or a meaningless relativity couched in the subjective act of interpretation. The initial appearance of truth to thought is intrinsically tied to the essential finitude of human consciousness. In this respect, Grondin says that for Gadamer truth "is always that which seems to us to be such, if we mean by this what successfully asserts itself as being within *our horizon*" (Grondin 1990, 51; emphasis his). The inherently finite perspective we have of these things means that interpretations are, in their most fundamental sense, potential truths and therefore relative to the context in which they become evident. However, the relativity of this notion of truth does not exclude us, Grondin argues, from distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate prejudices, between those that "allow the meaning of a text to be brought out" and those that "make it less intelligible" (Ibid., 53). This distinction is only possible if interpretations are grounded in a being whose essential nature is not itself reducible to any set of circumstances in which it becomes manifest.

Therefore, there is inescapably a minimal condition of normativity inherent in the act of interpretation. Interpretation cannot proceed in any way whatsoever, but precisely because it is a response to the provocation of the text it must have a minimal level of coherence with the nature of what is being talked about. That is, one must maintain a legitimate prejudice toward meaning in order to really understand the meaning of the text. Softening his earlier view regarding the problem of the normative function of tradition, Wachterhauser argues in favour of the idea that the essence of what is being talked about has the scope of its meaning conditioned by the historical and social context of the discussion, but that this essence is not defined absolutely by this context:

In this sense, “tradition” determines things such as which questions are most important, which have priority for a particular research community at a particular time, and it sets at least *prima facie* boundaries of what conceptual tools are acceptable in attempting to answer these questions. In short, a normative tradition not only determines the questions in some sense, but also it plays a substantive role in determining what counts as a good answer to these questions. Such traditions are normative in that they guide communities of inquiry toward an epistemic ideal, an ideal that is historically conditioned. (Wachterhauser 2002, 58)

The meaning one extracts from a text is at least partially contingent upon the circumstances under which one is reading the text. This contingency broadens substantially when taking into account the essential dialectical dimension of the hermeneutic theory of understanding. That is, the meaning of a text relative to the reader does not depend upon the particular circumstances of just the reader, but also the particularity of the other with whom the reader exists in a relational setting. Still, the demand for a measure does not require any kind of commitment to an absolute principle of truth and meaning. It requires only that one recognize, as Grondin points out, “that some claims to knowledge and interpretations are more reliable than others” (Grondin 1990, 53).

In this light, Robert Shusterman suggests that interpretation is partially guided by a kind of shared social reality. He argues correctly that a monistic definition of meaning is inherently short-sighted because it fails to take into account the practical dimension of interpretation. While recognizing the need for a normative principle in order to obtain meaning, Shusterman illustrates that Hirsch’s monistic stance nonetheless fails to appreciate the essential productivity involved in interpretation. He writes, “We must be careful not to confuse the seemingly incontrovertible assertion that all linguistic or textual meaning is intentional with the very challengeable assertion that the meaning of a text is identical with the author's intention or intended meaning.”⁴²

Properly attending to the practical nature of interpretation supports a pluralistic existence of the text which attends to the historical or social contingencies of both the author and the reader. As

⁴² Shusterman 1988, 399. Gibbons makes the same point in his essay (Gibbons 1985, 786-787).

Shusterman puts it, “We should expect, for example, different responses of understanding to figure in the ordinary, the literary, and the psychoanalytic understandings of an utterance” (Ibid., 405). More importantly, this pluralism does not exclude the singular existence of the text itself as what is common to each of these orientations so long as there is an agreement about the “pragmatic identity” of the object of interpretation (Ibid., 408). Indeed, we have seen that an agreement about the nature of the object of interpretation is a necessary condition for any meaningful, hermeneutical dialogue.

Paul Armstrong confronts this issue more directly, arguing that the text is paradoxically both relative to and autonomous of particular interpretations. He characterizes the text as having a “heteronomous” existence. “A heteronomous conception of the text,” he writes, “acknowledges the paradox that interpretation is neither a total imposition of meaning nor a purely passive reception of it. Understanding both fixes a text's meaning and lets it emerge” (Armstrong 1986, 321). He recognizes that the monistic attempt to find a “structure of determination,” i.e. intrinsic properties of a text which can verify an interpretation, is itself an interpretive endeavor. Armstrong argues that this structure is only determined when one’s presupposition about what counts as an intrinsic property is confirmed through one’s interpretation of the text. Therefore, it is entirely possible that a radically opposed presupposition will entail a contradictory, yet no less valid, interpretation (Ibid., 325). Still, insofar as these opposed interpretations refer to the same text, it is undeniable that there are properties of the work whose truth remains indisputable. Despite the variance between competing interpretations, then, in his view any given interpretation can at least be measured by its coherence with these properties (Ibid., 327).

In order to preserve the principles of identity and difference that belong to the hermeneutical object, Gadamer develops a concept of truth that does not prioritize one over the

other. Rather, he situates the unitary and multiple existences of the text or its analogue in a dialectical relationship. The salient feature of Armstrong's approach for understanding the nature of this relationship is that establishing the heteronomous existence of the text moves beyond the epistemological question of its content to the ontological question of its existence. When Gadamer says that "being that can be understood is language" (TM, 470), he is not trying to reduce being to language.⁴³ This formulation clearly implies that not all being is understood, at least not in a way that can be communicated. Moreover, his claim that understanding is always understanding differently is not meant to suggest that the beings we understand enjoy a relative existence commensurate with the manifold judgments about their natures. Rather, the essential temporality of the event of understanding refers to the fact that the universal, ontological structures of reality are constantly becoming manifested in new contexts (TM, 307-308). Grondin is therefore correct to claim that differences between interpretations of the same content is primarily a consequence of the plurality of aspects that this content can sustain, not the diversity among the interpreters (Grondin 2006, 480).

The dogmatic adherence to either a monistic or pluralistic definition of truth entails are equally insufficient for elaborating the ontological structure of Gadamer's hermeneutics. The former remains disinterested in the situational character of understanding and its value-laden contingencies, whereas the latter takes no notice of the essential properties which an array of interpretations has in common.⁴⁴ As Mark Taylor points out, neither side of this dilemma

⁴³ Cf. Vattimo 2000.

⁴⁴ Gary Madison, for example, wants to defend Gadamer's position against charges of conservatism by conceptualizing a tradition of metaphysics and a tradition of human finitude. He argues that Gadamer prioritizes a tradition of finitude in order to emancipate human thought from the prevailing metaphysical tradition and its demand for secure, cognitive foundations (Madison 1989, 172). Wilson illustrates correctly, however, that this argument only creates a false dichotomy. While Gadamer's thought is not without certain emancipatory elements, in her view Madison's claim that Gadamer liberates the tradition of human finitude from its metaphysical foundations entails the complete relativizing of human knowledge. This relativity in turn demands just the kind of cognitive security from

appropriately attends to “the dialectical relationship between unity and plurality in which identity and difference come to be through each other” (Taylor 1978, 45). Therefore, neither a monistic nor a pluralistic theory of meaning by itself properly establishes the necessary conditions for a productive theory of understanding and interpretation. Despite his earlier criticism

Wachterhauser describes Gadamer’s hermeneutic theory in this way:

For Gadamer, the “things themselves” are primarily real essences, or intelligible structures discoverable in history and language and not constructed through history and language. Thus, such essences have an independence from a *particular* time and place which enables them to inhere in many times and places, perhaps even across all times and places. (Wachterhauser 1994, 149-150; emphasis his)

Following Armstrong’s suggestion, the middle path through this dilemma therefore proposes that the hermeneutical object maintains a heteronomous existence. That is, the text or its analogue is a unity that exists over and above its representations in various historical contexts, and at the same time it is nothing other than the plurality of these representations. It is thus due to the natural limitations of human thought and language that the unity of the hermeneutical object has for us a multitude of partial representations which jointly contribute to our overall understanding of its essential nature.

2.4: Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to introduce two important and related theses that Gadamer develops within his philosophical hermeneutics: first, that within hermeneutics truth is primarily a reflection of the evident or probable structure of the things themselves that manifests itself prior to the certainty obtained through method; and second, that this conceptualization of

which Madison sees that the tradition of human finitude has liberated itself (Wilson 1996, 149). A vicious circle ensues.

truth does not prioritize either the unity of the thing itself or the multiplicity of interpretations of its content, but rather identifies and upholds both unity and multiplicity as fundamental properties within understanding and therefore situates them in a dialectical relationship.

We elaborated a number of different ways in which hermeneutical reflection is said to obtain truth. In doing so, we illustrated that although the concept of truth within Gadamer's hermeneutics is highly complex and avoids any concrete definition, its various characterizations all have to do with the idea that interpretation uncovers primarily the evident structure of the things themselves. We saw that Gadamer contrasts these conceptualizations of truth with the notion of certainty that scientific methodology endeavors to obtain. He maintains Heidegger's definition of truth as unconcealment in order to reflect the phenomenological presupposition of the unity of subject and object prior to any theory of their correspondence. As well, Gadamer adopts Heidegger's description of the hermeneutical circle of understanding in order to develop the reciprocal relationship between fore-knowledge and interpretation. Similarly, Gadamer emphasizes the essential negativity of genuine hermeneutical experience, i.e. the fact that experience is productive by revealing other possibilities of meaning that are not necessarily contained within the scope of any methodological approach. As well, the idea that truth is obtained as a matter of agreement presupposes a condition of openness toward the hermeneutical other in a dialogical setting. The text or its analogue addresses or provokes the reader in a way that alerts him to an alternative meaning of their shared subject matter, but their difference in understanding can only be effectively mediated if the reader is genuinely prepared to consider that what the other says is at least potentially true.

Subsequently, we gave a brief overview of some critical examinations of Gadamer's hermeneutics. We saw that commentators tend to argue that Gadamer either reduces

understanding and interpretation to a relativistic framework, or restricts the novelty and productivity of interpretation to authoritative accounts that have been passed down through tradition. We illustrated that either approach to Gadamer's hermeneutical theory prioritizes one principle, unity or multiplicity, over the other. Consequently, they conclude that truth within Gadamer's hermeneutics is either essentially monistic at the expense of interpretive pluralism or essentially pluralistic at the expense of any normative framework that allows for meaningful public discourse. In order to mediate this dilemma, we have argued that for Gadamer the things themselves are, on the one hand, independent or autonomous of any limited, historical perspective but, on the other hand, made intelligible through the collective awareness of the multitude of contexts in which they become manifested.

This suggestion for how to mediate this dilemma supports our claim, that in his inquiry into the fundamental conditions for the possibility of human understanding, Gadamer incorporates the principles of unity and multiplicity into a broader, hermeneutical framework. What emerges from this approach to Gadamer's hermeneutical ontology is an initial conceptualization of the hermeneutical dialogue as first and foremost the space within which the potential validity among different modes of understanding and interpretation can be discussed with respect to the common content that they presuppose. Gadamer therefore develops a hermeneutical ontology of both identity and difference in order to explain how it is possible that the selfsame hermeneutical object can sustain a plurality of interpretations of its content from a variety of cultural and historical perspectives.

3. Chapter Two: Plato's ontology of ideas

3.1: Introduction

This chapter argues that the principles of identity and difference that sustain Gadamer's hermeneutical ontology are grounded in part in Plato's ontology of ideas.

The previous chapter demonstrated that the hermeneutical object maintains both a unitary and multiple existence. The text or its analogue retains a selfsame identity, but at the same time it can be applied within the manifold contexts that emerge throughout the history of the interpretation of its content. Due to the inherent finitude of human thought, however, any interpretation of the text is necessarily partial, thereby necessitating a constant dialectical movement between the diversity of judgments about the text and its presupposed identity as a whole and complete object (TM, 294).

In his work on Plato, Gadamer specifically highlights the significance that the principles of the One and the Many have for Plato's epistemology and ontology. The dialectical relationship between the One and the Many, he writes, "establishes the finite limits of human discourse and insight—and our fruitful situation halfway between single and multiple meaning, clarity and ambiguity" (DD, 119-120). The unity or identity that belongs to the idea provides the common ground for the collection of judgments that constitute our shared understanding of that idea. At the same time, however, the nature of idea itself can never be fully expressed; it is a complete whole, whereas human judgment is incomplete and finite. Hence the principle of the Many establishes the impossibility of any complete or systematic understanding of the ideas, which in turn reveals that dialectic is an "unending and infinite" process directed toward understanding the ideas, or the things themselves (DD, 152). This characterization of dialectic is not meant to imply, however, that the ideas can appear to human thought in any way whatsoever,

but only that our understanding of the ideas as a whole is necessarily partial and therefore incomplete.

Our focus in this chapter will be Gadamer's interpretation of two key developments that take place principally within the *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, and *Sophist*. For Gadamer, the key philosophical developments of these dialogues are Plato's discovery of the capacity for ideas to participate with each other, and his elaboration of the mathematical structure of the λόγος in order to clarify the logical conditions of this relational capacity. Each of these dialogues is highly complex, and there simply is not enough space in this dissertation to develop a reading of any one of them in its entirety, let alone all three. Yet it is due to their complexity that these dialogues nonetheless demand a close reading of the areas that most clearly present the features that Gadamer highlights. The upshot of this approach is that focusing on the details of each dialogue that Gadamer finds are most significant will allow us to justify the plausibility of Gadamer's interpretation of them, and at the same time establish one of the fundamental grounds on which Gadamer's own hermeneutical ontology can be revealed in greater detail.⁴⁵

We will begin in this chapter by elaborating Gadamer's interpretation of the *Parmenides* with respect to Plato's theory of participation. Gadamer reads the *Parmenides* as an expression of Plato's rejection of Eleatic atomism. He suggests that Plato wants to show that although insight into the nature of things inescapably involves language, words themselves do not contain the truth about this nature (Grondin 2003, 131-132). In "Dialectic and Sophism in Plato's *Seventh Letter*," he argues that for Plato words do not have an unambiguous meaning or referent; if the proper function of a word as a sign is to point away from itself and toward the idea it

⁴⁵ Wachterhauser's study of the relation between Gadamer's hermeneutics and Gadamer's study of Plato, while highly important for my own research, presumes the plausibility of Gadamer's reading of Plato without trying to justify this reading (sc. Wachterhauser 1999, 4).

signifies, something else could be presented other than what is intended. Gadamer suggests, then, that a purely logical and artificial system of coordinated signs would accomplish what Plato thinks any natural language cannot do. Rather than trying to develop a theory of linguistic nominalism, however, Plato opposes the λόγος as the combination of ideas to the “fruitless undertaking of defining things atomistically” (DD, 109). The reformulation of the participation thesis in terms of a relationship among the ideas thereby “militates against the positive conception of a precise and unequivocal pyramid of ideas,” and so the inherent indeterminacy of the Many reflects the simple but inescapable fact that within the finitude of human knowledge “there exists no clear, unambiguous structure of Being” (DD, 110). In this way Gadamer understands Parmenides’ criticisms of the theory of participation as Plato’s way of initiating the reader into the deeper philosophical insights that the dialectic of the One and the Many elaborates in other dialogues.⁴⁶

Next we will elaborate the logical structure of the *arithmos* presented in the *Theaetetus*. Gadamer claims that the relationship between the One and the Many has its truest representation in Plato’s work in the final section of the *Theaetetus* (DD, 133). There, Socrates and Theaetetus discover an apparent asymmetry between knowledge of simple entities and knowledge of the complex structures that they form. They represent this asymmetry with letters that form a syllable. Gadamer argues that Plato’s concept of number (ἀριθμός) is paradigmatic for resolving this asymmetry, i.e. the claim that simple or elemental entities do not admit any rational explanation (λόγος) and therefore cannot be known. By showing that one can give an account of elements, however, Socrates and Theaetetus are not upholding a version of Eleatic atomism.

⁴⁶ This intention is suggested by Parmenides’ admission that, despite the inherent difficulties in this historically early formulation of the theory of ideas, denying their existence outright ruins the very possibility of philosophical discourse (*Parm.* 135c). Jean-Baptiste Gourinat offers a similar interpretation of the focus of this dialogue (Gourinat 2001, 234-235).

Rather, they show that knowledge of elemental entities consists in an awareness of their potential relatedness in order to form complex structures. Thus the *arithmos* structure of the λόγος refers to the fact that in order to give a proper account of the nature of something one must appropriately manifest the essential relationship between that thing's unitary and multiple existences. To repeat Gadamer's formulation above, the λόγος manifests things "in their manifoldness, uniformly" (PDE, 65). Gadamer's reading of the *Theaetetus* therefore elaborates his understanding of the *Parmenides*, i.e. as illustrating Plato's reformulation of the participation thesis to reflect the relational capacity among the ideas.

To conclude, we will clarify the shift that Gadamer locates in the *Sophist* from the mathematical question of the *arithmos* structure to the ontological question of the participation of the ideas with each other. Gadamer argues that here too Plato's concept of number is paradigmatic for elaborating the dialectical relationship between the unity and multiplicity of the ideas (GW VII, 340). One of the significant developments in this dialogue is the definition of being (οὐσία) as the capacity that things have to exist in common with others (δύναμις κοινωνίας; *Soph.* 247e, 251c ff.). Following this definition, the true purpose of dialectic is revealed as the ability to appropriately manifest the nature of beings in terms of the possible and impossible relations among the ideas, without which philosophy would not exist (*Soph.* 259e-260a). In Gadamer's view, the manner in which these relations are expressed in language is decisive for Plato. He suggests that for Plato the correctness (*Richtigkeit*) of speech becomes a secondary, epistemological study that presupposes the relational structure among the ideas. By contrast, expressing the nature of an idea in terms of its possible (δύναμις, *möglich*) relationship with other ideas allows Plato to establish dialectic as directed primarily toward the ontological question of the participation of ideas with each other (GW VII, 363-364).

The outline of this chapter is therefore as follows: first, we will elaborate Gadamer's understanding of Plato participation thesis and its reformulation through the *Parmenides* in terms of the dialectical relationship of the One and the Many; second, we will develop logical conditions of this relationship that Gadamer locates in the *Theaetetus* in the *arithmos* structure of the λόγος; and finally, we will develop the ontological framework for this relationship that establishes the relational capacity among the ideas and their presence in sensible reality.

3.2: The Platonic question of Gadamer's hermeneutical ontology

Gadamer subscribes to the view that the *Parmenides* initiates Plato's reformulation of the problem of participation (μέθεξις). Originally, Plato presents the relationship between the One and Many as the problem of the participation of sensible particulars in a stable, unifying εἶδος. Having found it impossible to apprehend true being (τῶν ὄντων τὴν ἀλήθειαν) directly, Socrates says that he embarked on his "second voyage," seeking refuge in language (εἰς τοὺς λόγους καταφυγόντα) through which true being can be apprehended and thus communicated (*Phaed.* 99e). Socrates' method of hypothesizing the εἶδος, which he says in the *Phaedo* has guided his mode of questioning over the course of his philosophical career, is his attempt to ground particular assertions in their necessary reason or cause (αἰτία). Thus the cause of largeness in something, for example, is not its perceived magnitude relative to something smaller, but the fact that it participates in the idea of largeness. The λόγος, then, is an assertion which gives this reason or cause, thereby manifesting the nature of an idea in relation to what participates in it.

Historically, Plato located truth and meaning in stable, unchanging ideas in order to combat the threat that sophistry posed to the Athenian πόλις. By disrupting the connection

between being and language, the sophists were able to change the meaning of words indiscriminately. They could argue that the just life is in fact unjust, that courageous actions are cowardly, etc. By situating the measure of truth in an entity which exists beyond its appearances in the sensible world, Plato introduced a kind of necessity in how things are talked about. If it turns out that a statement and its opposite can be reasonably predicated of an idea—for example, that courage is (at one time) standing one's ground and (at another time) retreating (*Lach.* 190e ff.)—one is made to recognize that the εἶδος encompasses both of these things within itself.

Positing a realm of ideas in which sensible things are said to participate brings into question the possibility of this participation. In Book I of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle claims that Plato adopted the Pythagorean theory of ideal numbers as the basis for his own theory of ideas. The Pythagoreans held that physical reality is an imitation of numerical ratios. Whereas other Presocratic philosophers posited certain binary oppositions as the cause of beings, the Pythagoreans found that these binaries presupposed a prior relationship between mathematical entities. According to Aristotle, they argued that these binary oppositions are expressed more fundamentally by the principles of the One and the Many (*Met.* I.5). Together, these principles generate beings as harmonies which can be represented by certain ratios. According to Gadamer, Plato shows that the Pythagoreans only identified a material cause of being using these principles, and that the ideas account for formal causation in the sensible, material world (DD, 31-32). For Aristotle, the distinction between formal and material causation is a positive aspect of Plato's thought, but he does not think that this distinction sufficiently overcomes the problem of the separation between ideas and appearances. In Aristotle's view, this is because efficient causation is unaccounted for, leaving the ideas as causes of generation, motion, and knowledge

unexplained (*Met.* I.9). Consequently, he considers Plato to have developed a “two-world” ontology, i.e. separate realms in which ideas and appearances exist.⁴⁷

Over the course of his own philosophical career Gadamer maintains that this understanding of Plato’s ontology is incorrect. He soundly rejects the attribution of a two-world ontology to Plato and the argument that the later dialogues illustrate his dissatisfaction with the theory of ideas. In Gadamer’s view, the “problem” of the participation of the Many in the One was never something that Plato thought needed to be solved, but is rather a natural and necessary consequence of the awareness of the finitude of perceptive knowledge:

The Parmenides dialogue irrefutably teaches that the doctrine of the two worlds is not Plato. Rather, it is necessary to presuppose that the phenomena participate in the "forms." But as they do, there is no problem for Plato. It rather defines the idea of the phenomena participating in it. Plato was not a Platonist who taught two worlds. (GW VII, 331)

Gadamer maintains that the principles of unity and multiplicity remain at the center of Plato’s thought. He argues that because Plato upholds the dialectical unity between the One and the Many as an essential presupposition for human knowledge he therefore maintains the ontological presupposition of the unity of ideas and appearances prior to any separation of them in thought and language.

The second feature of Plato’s late ontology that Gadamer highlights is its mathematical background. Gadamer argues that Plato elaborates mathematically the ontological conditions that

⁴⁷ E.g. *Met.* 1086a32-34: “As for those who speak of the ideas, we can observe at the same time their way of thinking and the difficulties which befall them. For they not only treat the ideas as universal substances [καθόλου τε ὡς οὐσίᾳς], but also as separable and particular [ὡς χωριστάς καὶ τῶν καθ’ ἑκάστων]” (Tredennick’s translation). Aristotle’s criticism is that Plato tries to account for individual things, i.e. sensible entities, “by positing more individuals of the same type,” i.e. individual and countable (Halper 2009, 183). Gadamer suggests that Aristotle’s articulation of the One and indeterminate Two as the first principles in Plato’s philosophy develop this structure. Gadamer’s unitary reading of Plato and Aristotle’s theory of the good that he develops in “*Amicus Plato Magis Amica Veritas*” and *Idea of the Good* illustrates this point (sc. IG, 31-32, 88, 120). He claims that, despite Aristotle’s criticisms, Plato and Aristotle are answering the same question from different starting points, namely the universal good and singular goods respectively. By identifying true being and reality with the ideas, Plato proceeds in a top-down fashion from the ideas themselves through mathematics into the realm of appearances. Aristotle, by contrast, asserts that individual things (tode ti) constitute the most primary reality. In doing so, he proceeds bottom-up from these entities through the categories into universal genera (IG, 15-16).

establish the relational structure of the ideas, namely through what Gadamer terms the “arithmos” structure of the λόγος. In his view, the *arithmos* reveals Plato’s insight into the principles of the One and the Many. In particular, he finds that Plato develops the *arithmos* structure in order to demonstrate that the unity of an idea implies its essential multiplicity and vice versa. In his view, Plato creates a conscious shift from Pythagorean materialism to eidetic participation,⁴⁸ which reorients the ontological question of what a particular entity is (τί ἔστι) to what the essence of a particular idea implies. As Plato situates mathematics as a prerequisite for dialectic, consequently, dialectical knowledge is revealed to be knowledge of the essential reciprocity between the unity of an idea and the multiplicity of ideas whose interrelations this idea implies.

For Gadamer, then, the *arithmos* structure that uncovers the logical conditions for the participation of the ideas with each other is thus an intended consequence of Plato’s reformulation of the original participation thesis. Plato’s focus on the *arithmos* structure of the λόγος is therefore intrinsically related to his reformulation of the participation thesis. Gadamer finds that Plato’s approach to the problem of participation in the later dialogues is not aimed directly at the ontological claim that sensible particulars can participate in intelligent ideas. Rather, Gadamer argues that by developing the dialectical relationship between the One and the Many, Plato is able to elaborate on logical grounds the possibility that a multitude of ideas have to exist in a substantive relation to each other.

⁴⁸ Aristotle comments that the influence of the Pythagorean school on Plato is revealed in part by his terminology. The Pythagoreans saw physical reality as an imitation (μίμησις) of mathematical proportions. Participation (μέθεξις), Aristotle claims, is just another word used to describe this relation (*Met.* 987b10-14). Gadamer argues that Plato is introducing a different logical relationship with the term μέθεξις by singling it out among a variety of similar terms. The difference, broadly speaking, is that imitation refers to the nature of what is being imitated, whereas participation refers to the nature of something as coexisting with something else (Gadamer 1986, 10-11).

3.3: *Parmenides*

3.3.1: The initial orientation toward the dialectic of the One and Many

The philosophical question of the *Parmenides* is whether being is one or many. The reader is told that Parmenides and his student, Zeno, were visiting Athens, and that Zeno had delivered a lecture on this subject. Having attended his lecture, Socrates takes the opportunity to ask Zeno about his initial hypothesis. “What do you mean, Zeno,” he asks. “That if beings [τά ὄντα] are many [πολλά], they must be both like and unlike, which is impossible [ἰδύνατον]? For unlike cannot be like, nor can like be unlike?” (*Parm.* 127e). Zeno confirms this account, which they accept as a “sure sign” (τεκμήριον)⁴⁹ that being is not many. After Zeno approves Socrates’ account of his hypothesis, Socrates faults him for repeating Parmenides’ argument in different words. Instead of asserting that the All is one (ἐν [...] εἶναι τὸ πᾶν), Zeno merely states that it is not many (οὐ πολλά, *Parm.* 128a-b). Zeno replies that the subtlety of his treatise has gone unnoticed by Socrates. It is not the case, he claims, that he is making the same argument as Parmenides and deceiving the public into thinking it is novel. Rather, he says that he is responding to the critics of Parmenides who claim that the one is in fact many. Elaborating the logical difficulties in asserting that being is many, Zeno says, supports his claim that being is not many.

There are two ways to interpret Zeno’s response to Socrates’ criticism which demonstrate that Zeno’s thesis is self-refuting. First, if we take seriously Socrates’ claim that Zeno is merely imitating Parmenides, then Zeno’s treatise is both like and unlike Parmenides’ in the same way that an image is both like and unlike the original which it copies. Thus if Zeno presents the same theory as Parmenides, insofar as one can distinguish between the content of their respective texts

⁴⁹ This word can also mean “proof,” but as we will see Zeno does not claim that his arguments are definitive.

their theories also differ. Second, if we take seriously Zeno's rebuttal, i.e. that he is not imitating his teacher and therefore that his own treatise really is novel compared to Parmenides', it follows that both "one" and "not many" are different but equally possible predications of being.⁵⁰

The irony of the dialogue's opening remarks is that the conditional form of Zeno's hypothesis about the nature of being does not necessarily exclude the possibility that the opposite hypothesis could be true. In fact, Zeno never claims that the hypothesis that being is many is necessarily refuted, only that it suffers from more logical absurdities (ὥς ἔτι γελοιότερα πάσχοι, *Parm.* 128d) than Parmenides' own. It is interesting, then, that the series of deductions which occupy the second part of the dialogue are likewise presented as conditionals (e.g. εἰ ἔν ἔστιν; εἰ ἔν μὴ ἔστιν). They do not leave the reader in a position to have to choose between one conclusion and the other, but rather suggest that being as such is both a unity and a multiplicity. To be sure, the final two deductions propose, on the one hand, that if the one does not exist the many (τᾶλλα) must exist (*Parm.* 163b-165e), and, on the other, that the many cannot exist if the one does not exist as well (*Parm.* 165e-166b). The dialogue thus concludes with the assertion that it is impossible (ἀδύνατον) to conceive of the many without the one and vice versa (*Parm.* 166b).

Following their initial exchange, Socrates accepts Zeno's explanation about the novelty of his hypothesis and does not question Zeno further about its implications. Instead, Socrates turns to the question of the nature of the abstract entities and the contradiction that the hypothesis that being is many entails. "Tell me," Socrates asks, "do you not consider that there is an idea of likeness in itself [αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ εἰδός τι ὁμοιότητος], and another of unlikeness, its

⁵⁰ Catherine Zuckert notes further that Zeno's account of the genesis of his treatise contradicts itself. Zeno claims that he wrote this treatise in his youth but it was stolen, and so he had to reproduce it. As Zuckert explains, "He could not have read the same arguments from a book that was stolen unless he had a copy, that is, a copy of the same that was nevertheless different from the original" (Zuckert 1998, 884).

opposite; and that you and I and other things which we call ‘many’ participate [μεταλαμβάνειν] in these two things?” (*Parm.* 128e-129a). His aim is, of course, to distinguish between the physical manifestations of ideas and the intelligible structures that these manifestations presuppose. It is easy to show, Socrates explains, that a particular, sensible entity is like with respect to itself and unlike with respect to others, and can possess other opposed attributes by virtue of participating in the idea of each. Yet to demonstrate that, in their abstracted form, ideas can be combined with and separated from (συγκεράννυσθαι καὶ διακρίνεσθαι) other ideas would be amazing (θαυμαστώως).⁵¹

Gadamer remarks that even in just this introductory section it becomes evident that for Plato the true subject of knowledge is the One (τὸ ἓν) and the Many (τὸ πολλά, τᾶλλα) and not an atomistic conceptualization of an individual entity (GW VII, 343). What this dialogue demonstrates in his view is precisely the fact that an idea cannot be known in isolation from other ideas. Socrates’ inability to deal with Parmenides’ objections to the participation thesis is therefore due to the fact that, at such an early stage in his philosophical career, he does not yet understand that any insight into the unity of an idea implies a web of relations among other ideas, and that the meaning of being as articulated in language “displays itself in its unity and multiplicity” (DD, 119-120). In his rebuttal to Socrates, Zeno appears to use the terms “like” and “unlike” in an absolute sense, and not a relative sense, in order to suit the “purpose of his

⁵¹ *Parm.* 129e. It should be pointed out, perhaps, that by bringing up the possibility of the combination or separation of ideas Socrates is not referencing the interrelational model of knowledge that we find in the late dialogues. To be sure, the thesis that ideas have the capacity to combine with other ideas is described through the logic of the *arithmos* model, but in a way that maintains the selfsame unity of each individual idea. Here, Socrates’ argument is very similar to what he says about the ideas in the *Phaedo*, i.e. that in the presence of its opposite an idea will either “withdraw” or “perish” (*Phaed.* 103d). That is, the physical thing manifesting the idea undergoes a qualitative change, such as when a fire goes out in the presence of cold or ice melts in the presence of heat, but the ideas of hot and cold obviously persist. Here, then, Socrates is saying nothing more than that pointing out such a qualitative change in material things according to the “manner and degree” of their participation (*Parm.* 129a) is nothing special, but to show that the ideas themselves undergo such change would seem impossible.

arguments” (ὁ βούλονταί σου οἱ λόγοι, *Parm.* 127e), i.e. his assertion that there is a contradiction in saying that being is many. However, anyone who can distinguish between the relative respects in which something is like and unlike something else could easily refute this claim. Socrates’ hypothesizing of the εἶδος in the *Phaedo*, for example, deals with this problem quite easily, but this dialogue presents Socrates at his oldest and most philosophically mature. By comparison, the *Parmenides* depicts Socrates in his youngest and most philosophically vulnerable position in Plato’s dialogues.⁵² So, while Socrates does make the above appeal to a distinction between absolute and relative terms in the *Parmenides*, the reader should not be surprised that he still experiences difficulty in maintaining this position.

Following Socrates’ initial proposal of his participation thesis, that the multitude of sensible bodies participates in one unifying idea, Parmenides undertakes a series of objections that develop this thesis to its logical extremes. The central claim that guides these objections is that, given the ontological separation between appearances and ideas, the latter exist only in relation to themselves (καθ’ αὐτό) whereas the former only exist in relation to other things (πρός τι). However, under a strict Parmenidean ontology there is only one mode of being, namely being καθ’ αὐτό, rendering the participation of appearances in ideas impossible.

In his commentary on the *Parmenides*, Samuel Scolnicov thus interprets Parmenides’ objections as following either a homogeneous or heterogeneous ontology extending from the Parmenidean thesis that being only exists in relation to itself. Within a single-world,

⁵² Zuckert argues that, regardless of the order in which the dialogues may have been written, with the *Parmenides* Plato intends the reader to witness Socrates as a philosopher for the first time. Thus we ought to see Socrates “as a representative of a certain kind of philosophy which is not only clearly distinguished from other kinds of philosophy in the dialogues but is also shown to have developed over time and is subjected, as in the *Parmenides*, to criticism” (Zuckert 1998, 878). Of course, accepting that Plato almost certainly refined his thought over the course of his life does not demand a commitment to the development thesis *in toto*. Similarly, Tejera suggests that if one takes seriously the dramatic effect of the debate over the participation thesis in *Parmenides*, as well as the dramatic ordering of the dialogues, one finds that the theory of ideas and the participation thesis are not concepts that Socrates merely introduces from time to time for the sake of trying to explain some notion (Tejera 1998, 214).

homogeneous ontology, which sustains the bulk of the objections, appearances are considered the same ontological type as the ideas. For this reason, Scolnicov argues that Socrates' analogy to the day as being one over many, for example, is rightly ignored by Parmenides because this analogy asserts two different categories of being within a homogeneous ontology. Parmenides thus reinterprets the analogy spatially as a sail that covers many things in order to reassert the homogeneous identity between ideas and appearances (*Parm.* 131a-c; Scolnicov 2003, 57-58).

Parmenides' final objection, which he says is the "greatest difficulty" that Socrates' participation thesis faces, draws out the central implication of a two-world, heterogeneous ontology, namely that there must be an ontological separation between the ideas and their appearances. Socrates and Parmenides agree that each idea must maintain an absolute existence. It follows from this hypothesis that the ideas can only relate to other ideas, and sensible things to other sensible things (*Parm.* 133d-e). Parmenides then asserts an identity between the mode of knowing and the mode of the thing known. Knowledge of absolute being must therefore belong to the realm of absolute beings, whereas knowledge of sensible particulars must belong to the realm of sensation (*Parm.* 134a). Human knowledge therefore has no access to the ideas, and the gods no access to human things.⁵³ The upshot of this dilemma is that Parmenides himself is forced to admit that some version of the participation thesis is necessary in order to account in the first place for knowledge and language. However, without being able to account for how particular things participate in ideas, that is, without being able to mediate dialectically between the unity and multiple existences of being, Socrates' participation thesis remains caught in an unresolved *aporia*.

⁵³ *Parm.* 134c-d. For a sustained analysis of this point, see Lewis 1979 and Scolnicov 2003.

This problem is directly relevant to Gadamer's hermeneutical interests. We saw in the previous chapter that the things themselves are supposed to be able to inhere in different historical contexts without losing their selfsame identity. In its function as the universal medium of hermeneutical experience, language manifests the things themselves in order that we may understand them on this basis. Gadamer insists, however, that by "coming into language" the things themselves do not acquire a second being. Rather, this linguistic manifestation is a partial reflection of the thing itself and therefore is part of that thing. In other words, although we can create a logical distinction between the things themselves and their appearance in language, considered ontologically "this is a distinction that is really not a distinction at all."⁵⁴

Gadamer establishes this point as well through his description of the experience of the work of art. The work of art presents aspects of itself (*selbstdarstellung*; RB, 23; AS, 38-39) according to its own possibilities of being (*Seinsmöglichkeiten*; TM, 117; WM, 123), and as participants within this activity of self-presentation we manifest the meaning of the work of art within the contingent circumstances of our historical situation. Our participation does not "double" the work of art by reproducing it in a new context; the work of art is not a "being-in-itself that is different from its reproduction or the contingency of its appearance" (TM, 470). The true nature of the work of art is its presentation of its own essential structure (TM, 115, 459), but this structure depends upon our participation in it in order to achieve any meaning (TM, 116).

⁵⁴ TM, 470. In one of his criticisms of Plato's theory of ideas, Aristotle argues that if each sensible entity is one thing, there must be an idea for each sensible entity which is said to be the cause of that entity (*Met.* 990b4-8). In this way, Aristotle claims that Plato "doubles" the number of entities unnecessarily.

3.3.2: Reorienting the argument

Suggestions for what one ought to infer from Parmenides' objections are many and varied.⁵⁵ Gadamer asserts that the intended purpose of Parmenides' objections is to demonstrate that the participation thesis is impossible to sustain if it presupposes separate ontological realms for ideas and appearances. However, because he does not think that Plato is actually promoting a two-world ontology, Gadamer does not conclude that Plato thereby rejects his theory of participation on these grounds. In *Idea of the Good*, Gadamer writes:

The complete separation of a world of the Ideas from the world of appearances would be a crass absurdity. If Parmenides, in the dialogue of the same name, pushes us in the direction of that complete separation, he does so, it seems to me, precisely in order to reduce such an understanding of the *chōrismos* to absurdity. (IG, 16)

And more strongly:

That the ideas are ideas *of* appearances and that they do not constitute a world existing for itself are expressed negatively by Plato in this, the harshest aporia of the *Parmenides* (133b). Aristotle himself says explicitly that there is a basic reason for postulating the ideas: in view of the ever shifting tides of appearances, everything hinges on knowledge of their ideas if there is to be any knowledge at all (*Metaphysics* 987a32 ff.). Surely the entire doctrine of the ideas rests upon an obvious assumption: one cannot take the *chōrismos* to mean that the connection presupposed [between the ideas and appearances] is now to be severed. (IG, 16-17; emphasis his; translator's insertion)

Thus when Plato does refer to the separation between sensible and intelligible reality, he is not referring to an absolute separation but merely indicating the relative difference in the modes of being between ideas and appearances.⁵⁶ This is made apparent through the series of deductions in the second part of the dialogue. Taken together, these deductions demonstrate “the way in which

⁵⁵ Constance Meinwald provides a brief overview of the North American reception of this dialogue and its broader implications for Plato's thought from the 1950s onward (Meinwald 1992, 389-391). Vlastos situates his work within the tradition of interpretation on this issue going back to the 1920s and 1930s (Vlastos 1954, 319 n. 1). In the German tradition, Gadamer attributes the developmentalist thesis that emerges from this dialogue to Julius Stenzel and his 1917 work, *Studien zur Entwicklung der platonischen Dialektik von Sokrates zu Aristoteles* (DD, 129).

⁵⁶ Wachterhauser 1999, 82. Scolnicov makes a similar point in his commentary. He suggests that for Plato, participation does not refer to logical subsumption, predication, or instantiation. Rather, Plato uses this term in order to indicate an ontological difference in the mode of being between sensible and intelligible things: sensible bodies “do not instantiate the form, in the same sense that a picture does not instantiate its original. It *represents* it in another medium” (Scolnicov 2003, 19; emphasis his).

the One necessarily transforms into the Many [*Parm.* 137c ff.] and the Many into the One [*Parm.* 160b ff.]” (DD, 136). The ontological gap between the ideas and their appearances is closed but without creating an absolute identity between the two that would make any logical distinction between the One and the Many impossible.

Gadamer argues the *Parmenides* is meant instead to establish the negative insight that the ideas cannot be defined atomistically, but only in relation to other ideas, i.e. in terms of their participation with each other (DD, 110, 137-138). If the ideas are “ideas of appearances,” the separation between ideas and appearances implies their prior unity, i.e. within a single ontological framework. Thus by showing that the One necessarily transforms into the Many and the Many into the One, what the *Parmenides* reveals in Gadamer’s view is that the unity of an idea is co-present not simply with the multiplicity of sensible phenomena, but also with a multiplicity of ideas (DD, 137). As Wachterhauser shows, it is therefore no more reasonable to talk about a separation among the ideas themselves: “the Ideas are no more ‘separate’ from each other than the parts of any whole are ‘separate’ from it” (Wachterhauser 1999, 84). What we can do, however, is create logical distinctions between these parts in order to make assertions about them while still recognizing that they remain ontologically inseparable (Ibid.).

Of course, the principles of unity and multiplicity are not unique to the *Parmenides* or Plato’s later ontology. Often the reader sees the interlocutors in a Platonic dialogue struggle to define the εἶδος common to many particular manifestations of it, and to discover if the apprehension of this common essence is possible through the dialectical mediation of these particularities. The same difficulty emerges even when only ideas are being considered. The question of the *Protagoras*, for example, is whether the nature of virtue is such that it contains particular virtues in itself homogeneously, or if the various virtues are distinct parts of the whole

of virtue. For Gadamer, however, what makes the *Parmenides* unique is that it establishes Plato's initial insight into the logical structure of the *arithmos* model that becomes relevant for the other Eleatic dialogues. The *Parmenides* demonstrates that the One cannot be defined independently from the Many, nor the Many from the One, without landing in an *aporia*.⁵⁷

For Gadamer, then, Plato elaborates the logical conditions for the possibility of the participation of ideas with each other through the *arithmos* structure of the λόγος. The dialectical relation between the One and the Many that this structure develops, and which Plato uncovers in the *Parmenides*, therefore reveals the true ground (*eigentliche Grundlage*) of Plato's theory of ideas (DD, 119; GW VI, 112). As Scolnicov explains, in the series of deductions *Parmenides* makes no explicit mention of either sensible things or ideas. Rather, both ideas and appearances are considered "ones" in this part of the dialogue (Scolnicov 2003, 27). The reason for this, he argues, is not that Plato is dissatisfied with his theory of the forms, but rather that Plato wants to inquire into the possibility of participation on a higher level of generality. Thus the general question being addressed is the relationship between the One and the Many, namely how it is possible for something that is a unity to participate in other things without ceasing to be what it is (Ibid, 26). The ontological question of the participation of sensible things in intelligible ideas is thus reformulated as the logical question of the participation of the multitude of ideas, or "ones," in each other.

⁵⁷ Fuyarchuk 2010, 65. For this reason, Roecklein is incorrect to characterize Socratic elenchus as the effort to single out an idea "as an isolated, indivisible object" apart from its manifold appearances, such that one can give a working definition of the idea free of imperfections or contradictions (Roecklein 2011, 86; 109). We know from the *Theaetetus* that an indivisible entity of itself admits no definition or explanation (λόγος, *Theaet.* 203a ff.). While Roecklein correctly identifies the significance of Socrates' method of hypothesis in this regard, he overlooks the fact that the hypothesis is oriented toward mediating between the one idea and its many appearances, making the hypothesis much more than "[just] the claim that the forms exist separately" (Roecklein 2011, 110).

It is evident that the objections Parmenides levies against the participation thesis are things that a more philosophically mature Socrates would not be as willing to accept. The third man argument, for example, exploits a fairly simple semantic ambiguity between predications of an idea and predications of what manifests that idea.⁵⁸ In her commentary, Constance Meinwald argues that for Plato the principle of self-predication, “the Form of *F* is *F*,” can be expressed either as an idea relates to itself (πρός ἑαυτό) or as it relates to another entity external to itself (πρός τὰ ἄλλα).⁵⁹ The latter mode of predication permits the regress, as it maintains that the property of greatness, for example, that is attributed to the idea of greatness has a distinct referent that is not this same idea of greatness. This legitimizes the demand for an account of the relationship between the two entities in question. The former mode avoids the regress as it makes no claim that “the Large itself is large in the same way that the original group of large things is” (Meinwald 1992, 386), or that the εἶδος of man, for example, must be “an additional member of the group that displays the feature common to men” (Ibid, 387). This approach makes the correct relative distinction between the modes of being of ideas and appearances. In doing so it removes

⁵⁸ In this objection, Parmenides presupposes that the essential nature of each idea is nothing other than the multiplicity of things under it. If there are many things which appear to be great, he says, it must be by virtue of their participation in the same idea of greatness. In this way, the idea can be appropriately characterized as an undivided unity, i.e. without being subject to any qualitative change. Parmenides states next, however, that the set of things which are called great must include both the multitude of great things and the one idea they have in common. For this reason, he argues that there must be something according to which everything in this set appears great, namely, another idea of greatness (*Parm.* 132a). This creates another set of great things, necessitating still another idea of greatness such that “each idea is no longer one, but infinite in number” (*Parm.* 132b). An infinite regress of forms of greatness follows because, as Zuckert points out, the first instance of the form of greatness is identified as an entity within the set of great things (Zuckert 1998, 887-888). In order to make this argument Parmenides exploits the following semantic distinction. Greatness is predicated of both the idea of greatness and the many things that appear to be great, allowing him to claim that there is a set of great things that includes both the many particulars and their common εἶδος, thereby permitting the regress.

⁵⁹ Pelletier and Zalta identify four logical propositions that jointly construct the regress model: One over Many (OM); Self-Predication (SP); Non-Identity (NI); and Uniqueness (U). Briefly, the idea of greatness, for example, is one thing by which greatness is observed in many particular things; the idea of greatness is the great itself; whatever participates in the idea of greatness is not identical to that idea; and the idea of greatness is the same as itself and different from all other ideas. Pelletier and Zalta neatly summarize Parmenides’ argument as follows: “For by (OM), there is a Form of *F* in which both *a* and *b* participate. Furthermore, by (NI), the Form of *F* is distinct from *a* and *b*. By (SP), the Form of *F* is itself an *F*-thing. So, by (OM), there is a Form of *F* in which the Form of *F*, *a*, and *b* all participate. But, by (NI), this second Form of *F* must be distinct from the first; by (SP) it is itself an *F*-thing. Thus, (OM) yields a third Form, and so on” (Pelletier & Zalta 2000, 168-169).

the demand to posit a second idea in addition to the first, a third in addition to the second, and so on, due to a semantic confusion. To account for why Socrates does not notice their difference, Meinwald suggests that outside the *Parmenides* Plato maintains the distinction between these two kinds of self-predication, and that he intentionally collapses it within the *Parmenides* as a didactic exercise.

Disambiguating these modes of predication begins to reorient the logic of participation toward the possibility that ideas have to participate in each other, and away from the participation of sensible entities in their ideal forms.⁶⁰ Thus to state that the idea of justice is virtuous, for example, or that the soul is life, is to make a πρὸς ἑαυτοῦ predication. Meinwald, however, situates her analysis of the self-predication of the forms within a genus-species schema (Meinwald 1992, 382-383), and so her approach still encounters a certain conceptual difficulty. Specifically, the principle of non-identity remains problematic in conjunction with the principle of self-predication. If a property is predicated of a particular entity due to its participation in the idea of that property, and if this same property is predicated of the idea itself, then the idea must participate in itself. According to the principle of non-identity, however, whatever participates in an idea cannot be identical to that idea. This initiates another regress and continues to undermine the participation thesis.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Scolnicov approaches the series of deductions in the latter part of the *Parmenides* in this respect. He distinguishes between the deductions which consider entities that exist only in relation to themselves, those which consider entities that exist in relation to themselves and to others, and those which consider entities that exist only in relation to others (Scolnicov 2003, 27 ff.).

⁶¹ Solutions to this difficulty vary, but generally focus on prioritizing the principle of uniqueness. Gregory Vlastos, for example, finds that the principle of non-identity is inconsistent with the principle of self-predication. He argues that Plato wants to maintain the principle of self-predication broadly, and for this reason the principle of non-identity should be reformulated to refer only to the non-identity of particular entities to ideas (Vlastos 1954, 325-328). Similar discussions related to the third man argument at this point in Platonic scholarship can be found in Vlastos 1955 and 1969; Sellars 1955; Geach 1956; and Booth 1958. As part of their approach to the problem of non-identity, Pelletier and Zalta disambiguate between two notions of participations corresponding to the two modes of predication Meinwald establishes (Pelletier & Zalta 2000, 173). The upshot of this disambiguation is that, on the one hand, it closes off the possibility of a regress following any πρὸς ἑαυτοῦ participation. They show logically that

In Gadamer's view, the reoriented participation thesis describes not one, but two different levels of interaction between the One and the Many. On its surface this thesis indicates simply that a set of particular entities have one idea in common by virtue of their participation in that idea, and which can therefore be predicated of any of entity within this set. On a deeper level, the participation thesis describes the relationship "of the number 'common' to the different units in a sum" (DD, 132). Meinwald's *πρός ἑαυτο* predication points to this deeper relation, but Gadamer illustrates that this relation cannot be adequately expressed within a genus-species schema:

Now that which a certain number of sum or things may be said to have in common, that in which their unity consists, is quite distinct from that which unifies the members of a genus. For there are remarkable attributes which may be predicated of the sums of things but precisely not of the units, the things themselves of which the sum number is made up. (DD, 132)

Anyone can see, of course, that the thing which unifies a genus may also be predicated of each of the exemplars of that genus and to that extent the one is many. Plato emphasizes again and again that when rightly understood, *this* unity and multiplicity [...] does not lead to any fruitless entanglement in pseudocontradictions. But can this argument be advanced in support of the unity of an insight, that is, the unity of that which is said and meant in the logos? One suspects that the latter is more comparable to that other form of being in common: that it has the structure of the sum number of things which precisely as that thing which all of them together have in common cannot be attributed to any of them individually. And indeed the sum of what has been counted is not at all something which could be predicated of each of the things counted.⁶²

On the first level of interaction, then, the One, as the unity of the Many, is nothing other than the plurality of things that have the One in common, as with a genus in relation to its species. On the deeper level of interaction, however, the essential nature of the One is something that exists in

πρός ἑαυτο participation is necessarily attributed to each idea, thereby falsifying the claim that self-participation entails non-identity and the regress. On the other hand, if it is possible that an idea can also be predicated *πρός τὰ ἄλλα*, this disambiguation renders harmless what a *πρός τὰ ἄλλα* participation might entail by asserting the essential uniqueness of each form involved in this predication (Pelletier & Zalta 2000, 174).

⁶² DD, 133. Similarly, in "Mathematik und Dialektik bei Plato" Gadamer writes, "The fact that the 'number' does not have a being-for-itself besides what is counted, and yet is something else than the combination of its summands, likewise means something for the relation of the idea to what 'takes part' [*teilhaben*] in it: The number has 'its' monads, which are not 'things'; they themselves are an 'eidos'—just as the genus has 'its' kinds. Now the specification of the genus cannot be parallelized, because the summands of the number has no specific difference" (GW VII, 291-292).

itself prior to the division among its species or “units” and so, unlike a genus, cannot be predicated of what participates in it.

Gadamer refers to the *arithmos* model in order to develop the logical conditions for the participation of the Many in the One on both levels of interaction that he identifies. He shows how this model reveals key ontological presuppositions of dialectical insight into the relations that exist among ideas, and by extension the conditions for the meaningful communication of these relations. While Gadamer finds that the structure of this model is developed principally in Plato’s Eleatic dialogues, its presence is implied elsewhere. The hypothesizing of the εἶδος in the *Phaedo*, for example, demonstrates the essential relatedness of the soul with life and never death, of two with even and never odd, or warmth with fire and never ice (DD, 138). This method of hypothesis overcomes the epistemological difficulties inherent in perception. The same object can be seen, for example, as both larger than one thing and smaller than another. Claiming that this object is both large and small entails a perceptual contradiction, but the intellectual capacity to distinguish between this object’s being-large and its being-small easily moves past this dilemma. For Gadamer, the *arithmos* model attends to the deeper, ontological insight that the eidetic identity of these properties, which constitute the essential nature of the object under consideration, makes them “actually inseparable from each other and belong together” (DD, 136).

The *Parmenides* sufficiently demonstrates in Gadamer’s view that the One and the Many co-inhere (PDE, 96). The unitary and multiple existences of being are both immediately present (παρουσία) or “there” (*da*; GW VII, 292), and equally primordial (*ursprünglich*; GW VII, 343). However, it is necessary to recognize a relative difference between the One and the Many, just as Gadamer says that one can recognize this difference between ideas and appearances regarding

their modes of existence. As above, the nature of the One as a “sum” is something whose essence cannot be captured by the Many and which cannot be predicated of any of the things that it unifies. Obversely, the principle of the Many refers to an indefinite plurality, and not a determinate number: “What is proved dialectically in the *Parmenides* is not that the one is the many of the things that come into being—which would mean that the undefinable manifold of what comes to be had been comprehended and ‘pinned down’ *as such*” (PDE, 97; emphasis his). Thus the set of interrelated things that constitutes the unity of an εἶδος cannot be known with certainty. This necessitates the constant, reciprocal movement from the One to the Many and the Many to the One, while recognizing that there is no real ontological separation between them.

The *arithmos* model uses the concept of number as a paradigm in order to explain the logical terms of the relationship between the One and the Many. In ancient Greek mathematics, a number (ἀριθμός) is specifically a countable number. That is, numbers exist in a series and each subsequent number is arrived at through the addition of the unit, the “one,” to the previous number. As Gadamer puts it, “The numbers are units of ones. The principle of being one is generative in them. They all follow the principle of $n + 1$. That they do so is obviously the sole meaning of the being of the number one” (IG, 144). The smallest ἀριθμός, then, is actually two. One is not a number, but rather the principle of unity that numbers have.⁶³ As a sum, then, each number is the unity of the ones that are counted to reach that number. Five is nothing other than the five ones which, unified, constitute the number five. But while together these units are five, each unit by itself only one. Furthermore, in addition to being a specific number, each sum can be, for example, odd or even. These attributes are properties of sums and so can be predicated “of the unity of a number of things but not, in contrast, of the units which constitute that number”

⁶³ In other words, each number is a unity of many, such that it is ontologically determined by both unity and multiplicity. Logically, then, ‘one’ cannot be a number because it would not be the collection of many, but only one.

(DD, 132). Thus while the sum is nothing other than its parts, the nature of the sum is something wholly other than its parts and cannot be identified exclusively with them.⁶⁴

For Gadamer, the structure of the *arithmos* explains why Socrates is correctly dissatisfied with attempts to define an εἶδος that only list things that have this εἶδος in common, and why being able to discern the participation of particular entities in a stable, unchanging idea does not constitute legitimate insight or knowledge of either those particulars or that idea. Rather, “Someone understands what cognition, knowing, insight, is only when he also understands how it can be that one and one are two and how ‘the two’ is one” (DD, 135). Number is therefore the paradigm for the dialectical relationship between the One and Many. Number is defined mathematically as both a unity and a multiplicity: as the sum of its parts each number is nothing other than the plurality of its parts; but as an indivisible unity, each number is also a whole greater than its parts.⁶⁵ We will see later that in this way the *arithmos* model illustrates the sense in which the nature of being (οὐσίᾳ) is articulated in language in terms of the relationship among ideas as units.

The discussion between Parmenides and Socrates prioritizes either the unitary or the multiple existence of being, making the final *aporia* of the dialogue not just intractable but inevitable. As Gadamer points out, the substantial proof of this dialogue, i.e. that “the one is [not] the many of the things that come into being,” takes place “entirely *within* the eidē” (PDE, 97; emphasis his). After the various formulations of the participation thesis have been overturned, Parmenides tells Socrates that he needs further training in philosophy so that when

⁶⁴ Socrates’ shift toward hypothesizing the εἶδος is initiated, after all, once he encounters the difficulty in determining the cause of two ones becoming two by their addition, or two becoming one by its division (*Phaed.* 96e-97b).

⁶⁵ Consider Def. 1 and 2 of Euclid’s *Elements* VII: “A unit is that by virtue of which each of the things that exist is called one” (μονάς ἐστίν, καθ’ ἣν ἕκαστον τῶν ὄντων ἐν λέγεται); “A number is a multitude composed of units” (ἀριθμὸς δὲ τὸ ἐκ μονάδων συγκείμενον πλῆθος).

he is finally ready to define the nature of the ideas he does not appear to be engaging merely in “idle talk” (ἄδολεσχία; *Parm.* 135d). Specifically, Parmenides advocates studying what entails from a hypothesis and its opposite, that is, what happens if one hypothesizes that an idea exists and that it does not exist (*Parm.* 136a-c). The positive intention of these dialectical exercises, Gadamer claims, is to show that the εἶδη, “as things in regard to which there is unity, do not need to be absolutely one but can embrace a multiplicity of things in regard to which there is unity” (PDE, 97). However, without attending to the reciprocity between the One and the Many, and how the unity of each idea implies a multiplicity of interrelated ideas, the nature of being remains out of reach.

What becomes apparent through these discussions of the relation of ideas to each other is that the ontological preconditions for the potential relatedness among the ideas also elaborate the preconditions for thought and language. Despite his objections to the participation thesis, Parmenides has to admit that some version of it is necessary in order to account for language, and by extension philosophical thought. To deny the existence of ideas, he tells Socrates, is to deny any stable existence that is otherwise attributed to things, the absence of which will “utterly destroy the ability to have a discourse” (διαλέγεσθαι δύναμιν παντάπασι διαφθερεῖ; *Parm.* 135c). A similar discussion about the fate of language and philosophy occurs in the *Sophist*. There, language and philosophy are characterized as manifesting not the nature of the ideas as such, but specifically their ability to relate to each other: “The separation of each thing from all is the most complete destruction of all discourse. For it is through the interweaving of ideas with one another that language [λόγος] happens for us.”⁶⁶

⁶⁶ ΤΕΛΕΩΤΑΤΗ ΠΑΝΤΩΝ ΛΟΓΩΝ ΕΣΤΙΝ ΑΦΑΝΙΣΙΣ ΤΟ ΔΙΑΛΥΕΙΝ ΕΚΑΣΤΟΝ ΑΠΟ ΠΑΝΤΩΝ: ΔΙΑ ΓΑΡ ΤΗΝ ΑΛΛΗΛΩΝ ΤΩΝ ΕΙΔΩΝ ΣΥΜΠΛΟΚΗΝ Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ ΓΕΓΟΝΕΝ ΗΜΙΝ (*Soph.* 259e). Fowler translates this last clause containing λόγος as “our

Having illustrated the deeper level of engagement between the One and the Many that the participation thesis implies and which the *arithmos* model describes, Gadamer asks, “Does not the unity of discourse also have a certain determinate property not found in any of its component parts (letters, syllables, words) and is this not exactly the point?” (DD, 132). As well, in his elaboration of the *arithmos* model, Gadamer claims that “Every logos has this formal structure, however puzzling that structure may be” (DD, 147). Language, in other words, is an expression of the One and the Many. It allows us to communicate complex thoughts in such a way that each “part” of speech becomes meaningful through its relation to other parts, but without assuming that any particular assertion is the final word about the subject matter.

This notion that an idea or concept is not fully expressible in language illustrates why it is misleading to attribute a doctrine to Plato. Collobert points out that the depictions of the soul in the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic*, for example, are similar, but due in part to their different contexts they highlight different features of the nature of the soul (Collobert 2012, 95-96). Regarding his use of images, the philosopher “shapes his image so as to point to the specific features of the original he intends to illuminate” (Ibid., 96). Similarly, Charles Kahn argues that Plato’s use of “perspectivism” allows him to develop many different theories about a single, unified concept but without having to commit himself to any given viewpoint. He writes:

So the limits of language are to be dealt with not by mystic silence but by multiple speech. For Plato there is only one reality but many points of view, only one philosophy but no uniquely privileged formulation. Hence the dialogue form, with its diversity of interlocutors and occasions [...] is ideally suited to express this multiplicity of viewpoints and partial formulations.” (Kahn 2012, 159)

Kahn distinguishes between an interpretation of the literary themes and images of a given dialogue and the philosophical interpretation of the underlying unity between dialogues. He

power of discourse,” which overlooks slightly the emphasis on the λόγος itself, and its emergence through the fitting combination of ideas.

claims that a difference in the former does not imply a development in the latter, e.g. the claim that Plato abandons his theory of ideas in his later dialogues. Thus Kahn argues that Plato's approach to recollection and noetic insight, for example, are "not only compatible but complementary," and that the absence of the former from the conversation in the *Republic*, for instance, should not be explained on philosophical but only literary grounds (Ibid., 160-161).

What Gadamer asserts about Plato's dialogues, that "the unity of discourse also [has] a certain determinate property not found in any of its component parts," is equally true about the conditions for understanding that he describes in his hermeneutics, particularly with respect to the dialogical framework that he develops in order to elaborate these conditions.⁶⁷ What underscores the hermeneutical conception of a dialogue is the fact that the interlocutors participate in a concept or idea that they understand extends beyond the limits of their finite perspectives:

Just as the relation between the speaker and what is spoken points to a dynamic process that does not have a firm basis in either member of the relation, so the relation between the understanding and what is understood has a priority over its relational terms. (PH, 50-51)

The inherent finitude of human experience necessitates that hermeneutical consciousness is always open to the experience of the other (TM, 355). Indeed, with respect to an awareness of its effective history, hermeneutical consciousness is "so radically finite that our whole being, effected in the totality of our destiny, inevitably transcends its knowledge of itself" (TM, xxxi). Therefore, just as the One, as a whole, is nothing other than the multitude of parts that it unifies, a dialogue is nothing other than the unity of horizons that constitute it; and just as the One, as a sum, is greater than the indefinite Many that fall under it, so too does the hermeneutical object transcend the contingency of our historical perspectives and the plurality of judgments about its

⁶⁷ For a further elaboration of the relation between the finitude of understanding in Gadamer's hermeneutics and its basis in the Platonic λόγος, see Wachterhauser 1999, 107-114.

meaning. We saw above, however, that there is no two-world ontology in Gadamer's hermeneutics any more than there is for Plato. The distinction between the ideas and appearances in Plato's ontology, just as the distinction between the things themselves and our experience of them, is no real distinction at all.

3.4: *Theaetetus*

In contrast to the *Parmenides*, the *Theaetetus* is set near the end of Socrates' life. The dialogue concludes when Socrates says he must go to the Royal Stoa in order to respond to the charges that Meletus has brought against him. The *Theaetetus* begins when Eucleides and Terpsion, having met with a mature Theaetetus upon his return to Athens following a military campaign, are reminded of the meeting between Socrates and Theaetetus during the latter's youth. Apparently, Socrates was so impressed by Theaetetus that he predicted that the young man would become a prominent intellectual figure in Athens. In the dialogue proper, Theaetetus is introduced to Socrates by his teacher, Theodorus, who praises not just his student's desire and ability to learn but also his civic behavior in general. Historical accounts confirm that Theaetetus was in fact a skilled mathematician, and in the text Eucleides reports that Theaetetus was met with praise for his conduct in the battle from which he is returning, albeit fatally injured.

The philosophical question of the *Theaetetus* is to provide an account (λόγος) of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). The dialogue ends, of course, without providing a sufficient account of knowledge. Gadamer argues, however, that the discussion reveals negatively what an account of the ideas really is (GW VII, 294). In his view, it is precisely because Theaetetus is a mathematician that he is able to illustrate genuine insight into the nature of the ideas through the

dialectical relationship between the One and the Many. Specifically, Gadamer finds that the final section of the *Theaetetus* that treats the definition of knowledge as true opinion with an account (ἀληθὴς δόξα μετὰ λόγου; *Theaet.* 202c) contains the truest representation of the One and Many in Plato's dialogues. The apparent asymmetry in knowledge between the letters of the alphabet and the syllables they can form demonstrates, albeit negatively, what the λόγος is, namely an account of a unified concept which is expressed through nothing other than its constituent parts but whose essence is not reducible to these parts (DD, 132-133). Thus as a mathematician, Theaetetus appears to understand that being can have unitary and multiple meanings, but he lacks the appropriate dialectical insight to understand how being is simultaneously one and many, ending the conversation in an unresolved aporia (GW VII, 311-312).

Our reading of the *Theaetetus* will focus on two parts of the conversation between Theaetetus and Socrates that carry forward the *arithmos* structure of the λόγος. First, we will elaborate the geometrical demonstration that Theaetetus presents near the outset of the dialogue. In this demonstration, Theaetetus explains how he and a fellow student were able to arrive at a definition (λόγος) of irrational square roots (δυνάμεις) following their observation that the number of roots appears to be infinite. Following the demonstration, Socrates says, “Imitating your answer about δυνάμεις, just as you embraced them, being many, in a single idea, in the same way try to address the many forms of knowledge in a single λόγος.”⁶⁸ Although all three attempts to define knowledge are ultimately unsatisfactory, the λόγος that Theaetetus produces in this demonstration is highly significant. As Socrates' reaction suggests, it implicitly reflects the reciprocal relationship between the principles of unity and multiplicity that is necessary in

⁶⁸ πειρῶ μιμούμενος τὴν περὶ τῶν δυνάμενων ἀποκρισιν, ὥσπερ ταύτας πολλὰς οὐσας ἐνὶ εἴδει περιέλαβες, οὕτω καὶ τὰς πολλὰς ἐπιστήμας ἐνὶ λόγῳ προσειπεῖν (*Theaet.* 148d).

order for the λόγος itself to be considered knowledge. Second, we will elaborate the significance of the dilemma that Gadamer highlights for Plato's epistemology and ontology. Importantly, this dilemma reveals negatively three implications of Theaetetus' earlier demonstration, which Plato presents in contrast to a prevailing theory of knowledge: one, that the parts or elements (τὰ στοιχεῖα) of knowledge are apprehensible despite having no rational explanation (ἄλογον); two, that this apprehension consists in a prior understanding of the potential relations among these parts; and three, that in order to qualify as knowledge, the explanation (λόγος) of such a relation must appropriately manifest the principles of unity and multiplicity.

3.4.1: The geometrical paradigm

Theaetetus' definition of square roots is one of the few instances in Plato's dialogues where somebody actually produces the kind of definition that Socrates asks for. Specifically, it is after Socrates defines clay as the mixture of earth and water that Theaetetus understands what Socrates means when he asks for a statement of what knowledge itself is, and not an enumeration of kinds of knowledge. Significantly, Socrates' definition of clay reflects the two levels of interaction between the One and the Many that Gadamer relates. As Rosemary Desjardins explains, clay is characterized as a whole entity that is constituted by nothing other than the mutual interaction of its parts. At the same time, clay has a property that cannot be attributed to either earth or water individually, and so clay emerges as a genuinely unique entity. That is, in one sense clay is a whole constituted by its parts, and in another sense it is a whole that *cannot* be reduced to its parts (Desjardins 1990, 126-127). As we will see, Theaetetus' geometrical demonstration also reflects these two levels of interaction between unity and multiplicity.

Following Socrates' definition of clay, Theaetetus explains how he was able to define the nature of a δύνάμις that is common to all δυνάμεις. He says that Theodorus was drawing (γράφειν) square figures whose areas are “not commensurate in length with the [unit of] the foot” in order to demonstrate something about δυνάμεις (*Theaet.* 147d4-6). Noticing that the number of δυνάμεις appears to be infinite (ἄπειρος), they decided to identify what is common to all of them.

First, they divided all numbers into two groups: in the first group are numbers which can be formed (γίγνεσθαι) by multiplying equal factors (ἴσος ἰσάκις; *Theaet.* 147e6); and in the second group are the remaining numbers, i.e. those which cannot be formed by multiplying equal factors but only “greater” and “lesser” factors (*Theaet.* 148a1-2). The numbers in the first group were represented as equilateral squares figures (ἰσοπλευρος; *Theaet.* 147e7); and the numbers in the second group, being formed with unequal factors, were represented as oblong rectangles (προμήκης; *Theaet.* 148a4). They then referred to the lines (γραμμί) which constitute the square figures as “lengths” (μήκος), and those which constitute oblong figures as “surds” (δυνάμεις; *Theaet.* 148a7-b1). Concluding the demonstration, Theaetetus says that what they determined is that surds are incommensurate with lengths with respect to their length, but they are commensurate with respect to the square figures they can form (*Theaet.* 148b1-3).

It is important at this point to indicate a distinction between ancient Greek geometry and arithmetic. In geometry, a number is “drawn” (γράφειν) as a line segment proportional in length to the specific number being represented. By contrast, in arithmetic numbers are represented instead as a collection of units. Thus while geometry characterizes number as a continuous magnitude, arithmetic characterizes number as a non-continuous magnitude. Desjardins points out that a geometrical conception of number has two distinct advantages in this respect. First, the

geometer has the unique ability to apprehend and deal with a class of elements which are, by definition, irrational (ἄλογον). Second, the geometer is able to deal with dimensionality, whereas arithmetic can attend only to increase and decrease through the addition and subtraction of units.⁶⁹ In other words, the elements of arithmetic become greater or lesser by adding to or subtracting from their sum, while the elements of geometry become greater or lesser by “adding” or “subtracting” dimensions. An arithmetical number can increase or decrease, whereas a geometrical segment can become a square, and a square can become a cube.⁷⁰

In his demonstration, then, Theaetetus does not use arithmetic but geometry. The numbers in the second group cannot be produced by multiplying equal factors. In other words, the square roots of these numbers, δυνάμεις, are irrational (ἄλογος),⁷¹ which is why they are incommensurate with lengths—the two kinds of line do not have a common measure, viz. the geometrical “unit” of length (ποδιαίος; *Theaet.* 147d5-6). Furthermore, he does not add together lengths or surds, as this would only increase the line arithmetically. Rather, he multiplies them (ἰσάκις) in order to produce squares. As we will see, although Gadamer approaches the *arithmos* model using an arithmetical conception of number, i.e. the one as a collection of many units, he elaborates the relation between units on geometrical terms, i.e. in terms of their multiplicative capacity to combine into more complex entities.

It is also important, then, to recognize the difference between a mathematical orientation to philosophy and a philosophical orientation to mathematics. Theaetetus is a mathematician, but

⁶⁹ Desjardins 1990, 78-79. For a further elaboration of the historical background of Theaetetus’ demonstration, and the distinction between geometry and arithmetic in ancient Greece, see Desjardins 1990, 228-229 n. 4.

⁷⁰ *Theaet.* 148b1-2. Similarly, in the *Timaeus* the four elements (fire, air, water, earth) are identified with increasingly complex geometrical figures composed of plane figures, which are in turn composed of triangles (*Tim.* 53c ff.).

⁷¹ Burnyeat shows that the Pythagoreans had already discovered the irrationality of certain square roots by the time Plato wrote the *Theaetetus* (Burnyeat 1978, 503).

his focus in this dialogue is decidedly philosophical. He does not bring up the geometrical demonstration as a mathematical proof about irrational square roots, but rather as a philosophical exercise about the possibility of not just apprehending an entity that is inherently irrational, and thus ineffable, but also communicating the nature of this entity on rational terms. As we will see, Theaetetus demonstrates that there is discernable knowledge of these entities, but, in light of what the *Parmenides* has shown, their nature cannot be defined atomistically. That is, a rational explanation of these entities must identify how they are mutually related within a unifying idea.

The One is not just a principle of unity, but also of limit. In the *Philebus*, Socrates explains that the marriage between a limit (πέρας) and what is unlimited (ἄπειρον) produces the class of “mixed” beings, which he defines as having a definite measure and number. He says that the relative extremes that constitute the class of the unlimited are made commensurate and harmonious by imposing a number, a “so-many,” on them.⁷² Music, for example, emerges from

⁷² τὴν τοῦ ἴσου καὶ διπλασίου, καὶ ὁπόση παύει πρὸς ἄλληλα τάναντία διαφόρως ἔχοντα, σύμμετρα δὲ καὶ σύμφωνα ἐνθεῖσα ἀριθμὸν ἀπεργάζεται (*Phil.* 25d-e). As Gadamer explains, the concepts of limit and unlimited are defined through their mutual exclusivity. He writes, “The generic unity of the apeiron is constituted by the fact that, in this way, the peras, as the how-many (*poson*), is excluded from it. The generic character of the peras results from this too, by virtue of its opposite role. [...] Indefiniteness and measure exclude one another; that is, where a definite measure is seen in an entity, it is no longer something undefined” (PDE, 131-132). Gadamer’s identification here of being as a “so-many” appears to be an extension of Heidegger’s interpretation of being as presence, or “*being-made-present-for-use*, that is, *produced*” (Gonzalez 2009, 87). Gadamer writes that beings “are defined through enumeration and measurement and thus are understood, in their being, as producible. Entities really *are* insofar as they are understood in their being, as indefinite things that are defined by something that gives definiteness” (PDE, 133; emphasis his). In his view, the ability to measure and produce beings in this way provides a kind of technical control over them. Unlike Heidegger, however, Gadamer acknowledges that Plato’s orientation toward the categories of limit and unlimited is ontological and not merely ontical (PDE, 133; Gonzalez 2009, 78 n. 13). Gadamer’s emphasis on the paradigmatic function of number puts even more distance between himself and Heidegger in this respect. In the analogy between knowledge of the ideas and the generation of numbers, Gadamer asserts that both are essentially incomplete and therefore depend on the principles of the One and the Many. He writes, “For Plato the decisive point to be made clear in the doctrine of the generation of numbers is that they can be continued indefinitely. Although each number is definite, counting goes on indefinitely ‘into infinity,’ and that fact implies the equal involvement in counting of both the dyas and the hen” (DD, 151). In counting, human thought at best “is capable of uncovering only limited ordered sequences as it goes through the ideas one by one and must then relinquish these sequences again to a whole without internal differentiation (cf. *Philebus*: εἶναι εἰς τὸ ἄπειρον)” (DD, 151). Gadamer does not reject the notion that for Plato each being is a collection of units, but he does not conclude that Plato’s goal is to systematize knowledge, i.e. by apprehending the sum total of the aspects that constitute the nature of an entity. Being, as a sum, remains something above and beyond the unity of these aspects, and so the question of which collection of units constitutes its essence as a whole remains open.

the imposition of a limit upon the unlimited continuum of high and low pitch, establishing the class of musical notes each of which has a definite pitch (*Phil.* 26a). The primary, geometrical elements are the one-dimensional line segments whose combination produces two-dimensional figures of a certain area. Each line segment, then, is derived from the application of a “limiting quantity” (*perainousa posotes*; Heath 1921, 69), i.e. the “foot,” to the unlimited continuum of magnitude. We recall that one is not itself a number, and so just as the arithmetic unit is not itself counted among the ones that each number unifies, the geometrical unit is not a factor of any two-dimensional figure. Rather, the foot is the limit of the geometrical magnitude of a line segment which determines each line as the length of “so many” feet, by virtue of which it can enjoy commensurability and harmony with other line segments.

The significance of Theaetetus’ definition of the *δυνάμεις* for a theory of knowledge is that he is able to give a rational explanation of an entity whose nature is essentially inexplicable. The *δυνάμεις* as such are incommensurable with the geometrical foot. They are irrational numbers and therefore impossible to determine as being a definite number of so-many feet. This does not mean that the *δυνάμεις* are themselves unlimited or measureless, as if they were not also members of the class of mixed beings. They are more appropriately characterized as boundless, in the sense that the number of feet that constitutes each *δύναμις* does not have the same kind of determinate unity that belongs to the lengths of square figures. A rational explanation, however, presupposes precisely the kind of limitation or boundary that the *δυνάμεις* lack. Thus limitation is determination in a very literal sense for Plato. Socrates characterizes thought (*διάνοια*) as a *λόγος* that the soul “runs through in every detail by itself,” the final determination of which (*ὀρίζειν*) is presented as an opinion (*Theaet.* 189e-190a). In the *Sophist*, the Eleatic Stranger’s definition of being as nothing other than potency is literally a

“limiting limit” to being (ὅρον ὀρίζειν τὰ ὄντα; *Soph.* 247e). In the *Philebus*, everything that exists is said to emerge from unity and multiplicity, and maintains a natural union of limit and unlimited (*Phil.* 16c).

By representing number as the area of a square figure rather than the magnitude of a line segment, Theaetetus demonstrates that despite their inherent irrationality the geometrical elements are apprehensible in terms of their potential to form complex entities. The δυνάμεις, we recall, are incommensurate with the lengths of equilateral squares and commensurate with respect to the square figures they can form. In this way Theaetetus illustrates that there is knowledge of the primary elements of geometry, but that this knowledge is only explicable in terms of the relational capacity that these elements possess. In other words, as parts of a complex entity the δυνάμεις have a boundary imposed on them. Thus they admit a rational explanation in terms of their relational capacity with respect to the area that unifies them; but in itself each δύναμις remains inexplicable as each lacks the necessary boundary that an explanation requires. As Desjardins puts it, Theaetetus shows that “what appears in linear dimension as incommensurable or irrational may, when raised to the second dimension, be rendered rational” (Desjardins 1990, 79). The elements are thus knowable with respect to their power to form complex entities, and without necessarily being explicable prior to forming any such complex entity.⁷³

⁷³ This notion of “power” is the fifth of six properties that Desjardins argues elements must have in order to function properly as elements, finding that these properties are at least implicit in a number of Plato’s later dialogues (Desjardins 1990, 72-75). As she puts it, “insofar as something is an *element*, I must be said to have—even to *be*—a “power” to become something other than it is in isolation. Thus, the original motion-elements of the physical world are identified in terms of “power” (*dynamis*: *Theaet.* 156a6); earth, air, fire, and water, as elements combined to form the cosmos, are similarly regarded as “powers” (*Tim.* 32c8); in the context of perception, the subjective elements (i.e., the senses) are to be understood as “powers” (e.g., *Theaet.* 184e8; 185c3, e7; cf. *Rep.* VII, 532a3; VI, 507c7-8); but so too are the objective elements (i.e., those streamings of sensibility such as visibility, audibility, etc.: e.g., *Rep.* VI, 507c7-8; 507e6-508a1; 509b2-3)” (Desjardins 1990, 74).

The geometrical demonstration, then, elaborates the mathematical structure of the *arithmos* model in philosophical terms. In addition to the possibility of apprehending irrational entities, Theaetetus illustrates that this apprehension can be articulated in rational terms, i.e. with respect to the potential relatedness between these entities; and furthermore, that in order to qualify as knowledge, this rational explanation must attend to the reciprocity between the relatedness of these entities and the compound structure which defines their relation and unifies them. We can compare Socrates' definition of clay as the mixture of earth and water with the two-dimensional figure that lengths or δυνάμεις produce. Both clay and the square figure are produced by nothing other than the combination of their respective, constituent elements; and yet each compound entity exhibits a property that cannot be attributed to its elements on their own. The plasticity of clay cannot be manifested by either earth or water. Similarly, one-dimensional line segments do not share the ability of a square to enclose a two-dimensional area. Thus the square figure, like clay, emerges as a genuinely unique entity whose essential nature cannot be reduced to its parts.

3.4.2: The linguistic paradigm

Gadamer locates the paradigmatic representation of the One and the Many in the dilemma that Socrates and Theaetetus encounter near the end of the *Theaetetus*. Gadamer writes that “the true relationship of the One and the Many, which gives the logos its structure, is made evident in the analogy of the meaninglessness of the syllable and the dilemma with which it confronts us” (DD, 133). This dilemma emerges within the context of Theaetetus' third and final definition of knowledge, namely that knowledge is true opinion coupled with a rational account (ἀληθὴς δοξά μετὰ λόγου). Under this definition, in order to know something one must be able to give a rational explanation of it; any opinion that is not accompanied by this explanation is

“outside knowledge” (ἐκτός ἐπιστήμης), and anything that does not admit of an explanation at all (μὴ ἔστι λόγος) is unknowable (οὐκ ἐπιστητό; *Theaet.* 201c-d). According to a theory Socrates heard at one time, primary elements (στοιχεῖα) have no λόγος and are therefore unknowable, whereas the complex entities (συλλαβαί) that the elements form admit a rational explanation and are therefore objects of knowledge (*Theaet.* 201e-202c). Accepting this theory for the sake of their argument, Socrates and Theaetetus create an analogy to language, namely with respect to the ability of letters to form syllables and words. The dilemma that Gadamer is referring to, then, is that on this definition of knowledge the nature of the syllable must be explained either through its constituent letters, which are indivisible, or as a unique entity whose meaning is not reducible to its parts and which is therefore also indivisible. In either case, it becomes impossible to provide a rational explanation of any simple or complex entity, threatening one’s capacity to know anything (*Theaet.* 205d-e).

Commentators tend to agree that the theory that Socrates is relating, the so-called “dream of a dream,” is a reference to a position that Antisthenes, a contemporary of Plato and fellow student of Socrates, had developed.⁷⁴ The historical record of his position comes to us primarily through Aristotle and Diogenes Laertius. Diogenes writes that Antisthenes defined λόγος as “that which manifests [δηλῶν] what something is or was” (*Lives* VI.3). Aristotle says that, for Antisthenes, “nothing can be described [λέγεσθαι] except by a proper account [οἰκείος λόγος],

⁷⁴ On the likelihood that Antisthenes is the intended source of the dream theory, see Burnyeat 1990, 164-168; Cornford 1935, 143-44; Desjardins 1990, 8; and Sayre 1948, 242-43. McDowell suggests that there is a literary precedent within Plato’s own writings, namely the *Euthydemus* and *Cratylus*, that would justify viewing this theory as his own invention, regardless of whether or not he intends to show any agreement with it. All the same, he agrees that the author of the theory could just as easily be Antisthenes (McDowell 1973, 234-37). Burnyeat suggests another approach, namely that Socrates “is not restating Antisthenes but making creative use of some Antisthenean materials ... [appropriating] other people’s ideas for his own thinking and [formulating] the theory for himself” (Burnyeat 1990, 166). For a detailed account of this last view, see Burnyeat 1970.

one predicate to one subject” (*Met.* 1024b30-35). Aristotle explains further that in the view of Antisthenes and his followers:

...it is not possible to define [ὀρίσασθαι] what something is [τί ἐστίν] (for the definition [ὅρος] is a lengthy λόγος), but it is possible to explain and teach what something is like [ποῖος]; not what silver is, for example, but that it is like tin. Thus there can be a definition [ὅρος] and account [λόγος] of one substance [οὐσία], i.e. the composite, whether this is perceptible or intelligible, but not its primary constituents, if the defining account [λόγος ὀριστικός] indicates something predicated of something [τὶ κατὰ τινός]. (*Met.* 1043b24-32)

Antisthenes’ position is more or less the result of the marriage between nominalism and sophistical refutation. He denies categorically that contradictions in discourse are possible (μὴ εἶναι ἀντιλέγειν; *Met.* 1024b34-35), and so the only possible formulation of the nature of an entity, its “proper account,” must be entirely unique and apply only to that entity. In this way, knowledge of being is reduced to nothing other than tautological statements of identity, ostensibly because any “proper account” of something’s essence would be far too extensive to serve any real practical purpose.

Curiously, however, it would seem that Antisthenes wants to maintain that a definition of something in terms of its constituent parts is possible, and that otherwise one can give an explanation of its likeness to other things.⁷⁵ Aristotle’s distinction between definition and predication helps to understand this curiosity. As he explains, the account of something’s essential nature (οὐσία) is clearly singular and cannot be elaborated solely in terms of its

⁷⁵ Grube argues that the only point that can be attributed to Antisthenes here is the claim that definition of something is impossible. In his view, the rest of this account, i.e. statements of quality, definitions of composite substance, etc., must be attributed to Aristotle as they contradict Antisthenes’ central thesis, i.e. that definition is impossible except by a proper account (Grube 1950, 22-23). A statement of likeness, Grube explains, presupposes something in common between whatever is being compared, and furthermore is a form of predication which Antisthenes does not distinguish from definition. Antisthenes, however, also claimed that virtue could be taught (*Lives* VI.11). Kalouche argues that Antisthenes’ theory of language overlaps with his focus on the specificity and particularity of ethical decisions (Kalouche 1999, 23). It is possible, then, that Antisthenes thought that the particularity of substances could be taught alongside the particularity of virtuous actions, or conversely that the ability to teach virtue develops from the possibility of teaching the nature of substances according to their likenesses. Thus the logical inconsistency that Grube identifies might be misplaced, lending support to the claim that Aristotle is reporting Antisthenes’ own view.

constituent parts; however, there can be as many predications of this essence as it has qualities.

Just prior to elaborating the view of Antisthenes and his followers, Aristotle says:

It appears, then, upon inquiry into the matter, that a syllable is not derived from the phonetic elements plus combination, nor is a house bricks plus combination. And this is true; for the combination or mixture is not derived from the things of which it is a combination or mixture. [...] Nor, indeed, is man "animal" plus "two-footed"; there must be something which exists besides these, if they are matter; but it is neither an element nor derived from an element, but the substance; and those who offer the definition given above are omitting this and describing the matter. If, then, this something else is the cause of a man's being, and this is his substance, they will not be stating his actual substance. (*Met.* 1043b5-15, Tredennick's translation)

In his remarks on Antisthenes' position, Aristotle says that the claim that something can be defined only by its proper account, and that any other account is false, is "simple-minded." Thus by overlooking the difference between defining and predicating statements (Grube 1950, 20; Burnyeat 1990, 164-169), Antisthenes maintains that there can be an account of something in terms of its constituent parts and that just this is its "proper account." What something is over and above these parts cannot be explained for the same reason that the nature of the primary elements cannot be explained: any indivisible substance is inexplicable beyond a statement of absolute identity, rendering both primary elements and undivided compounds indefinable.

This account accords with Socrates' description of Antisthenes' theory. According to this theory, primary elements do not admit any λόγος because, taken in isolation, each one can only be named (αὐτὸ γὰρ καθ' αὐτὸ ἕκαστον ὀνομάσαι μόνον εἴη; *Theaet.* 201e), but also that the appropriate account (οἰκεῖος αὐτοῦ λόγος) of an entity must consider it apart from all others (ἄνευ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων; *Theaet.* 202a). Socrates corroborates the view that this definition of knowledge implies that there is an asymmetry between elements and compounds with respect to their accountability. He and Theaetetus then draw out the obvious consequence of this view,

namely the dilemma that Gadamer highlights, that there must be an analogous asymmetry between the knowability of elemental and compound entities.

It becomes evident fairly quickly that Plato does not want the reader to take Antisthenes' theory seriously. After recounting it, Socrates indicates his suspicion with the claim that the primary elements are unknowable (*Theaet.* 202d). Then, having led the theory into the above dilemma, he claims that it seems to be based on a false premise. As children, he says, we naturally learn complex things by learning their elements first. One learns spelling and grammar, for instance, by learning the individual letters; similarly, one learns music by learning the individual notes (*Theaet.* 206a-b). He suggests to Theaetetus, then, that “the class of elements provides a much clearer manifestation of knowledge than the compounds and is better suited for obtaining a mastery of each subject.”⁷⁶ The claim that only compound entities admit knowledge and the elements are unknowable is even considered a joke (παίξειν) in light of what common experience dictates. The question at hand in the dialogue, however, concerns primarily the veracity of the definition of knowledge as true opinion with a λόγος. Socrates and Theaetetus therefore leave behind the previous theory about the knowability and accountability of simple and complex entities as they continue to investigate the content of this definition.

While it is clear that Socrates is rejecting the claim that the primary elements are unknowable, it is not made explicit if he is also rejecting the claim that there cannot be a rational explanation of an element. He says to Theaetetus, “We should not accept it if someone should say that a syllable is knowable and expressible [ῥητόν], but a letter is not” (*Theaet.* 205e). Although he demonstrates that there is symmetry between knowledge of elements and compounds, it remains unclear if he also thinks that there is symmetry between accounts of these

⁷⁶ πολὺ τὸ τῶν στοιχείων γένος ἑναργεστέραν τε τὴν γνώσιν ἔχειν φήσομεν καὶ κυριωτέραν τῆς συλλαβῆς πρὸς τὸ λαβεῖν τελέως ἕκαστον μάθημα (*Theaet.* 206b).

entities or if the elements still admit a name only. In the geometrical demonstration, the definition of the δυνάμεις defines a class of element, and not any particular δύναμις distinct from the others. As we saw, the δυνάμεις are incommensurable with the geometrical unit and so lack a defining boundary that an explanation requires. The letters of the alphabet suffer from the same boundlessness. As Theaetetus explains, most letters are mere noises, such as the hissing sound of the letter S; some letters, such as B, do not even have a noise (*Theaet.* 203b). The most substantial letters in this respect are the vowels (φωνήεντα), which have a “voice” (φωνή), but this is hardly sufficient for admitting a λόγος.⁷⁷ Nowhere here does Socrates claim that the knowability of the primary elements also suggests, guarantees, or necessitates as well their description or their accountability in a rational explanation, i.e. *prior* to their formation of a complex entity.

In the *Cratylus*, the function of a name is characterized as what distinguishes the nature of the thing named (διακριτικὸν τῆς οὐσίας; *Crat.* 388c). Commentators disagree on what exactly is meant to be distinguished in this way. Gail Fine claims that Plato is committed to the view that knowledge is description-dependent, i.e. “all knowledge requires a *logos* or account” (Fine 1979, 366). As she puts it, “a sentence of the form ‘*a* knows *x*’ can always be transformed into a sentence of the form ‘*a* knows what *x* is’; and the latter, in turn, is readily transformed into ‘*a* knows that *x* is *F*’ (Ibid, 367). Similarly, Timothy Baxter argues that the function of a name is to describe the thing named (Baxter 1992, 39-40). However, coupled with the condition that knowledge is based on knowledge (Fine 1979, 367), which is certainly a reasonable assumption

⁷⁷ While it may be questionable as to what meaning a syllable can express beyond the voicing of mere letters, at the very least the formation of a syllable establishes some kind of limit to the noise that letters make, just as the formation of an oblong figure limits the δυνάμεις.

to make, this approach to the function of naming entails a regress.⁷⁸ A description of a name obviously involves using other names, knowledge of which requires further descriptions, and so on either in a circle or *ad infinitum*.

Fine argues that Plato can maintain both of these theses (knowledge is description-dependent; knowledge is based on knowledge) through what she calls Plato's "interrelation" model of knowledge. Socrates, she says, rejects the claim that elements are inexplicable and therefore unknowable by showing that "accounts of elements consist in locating them within a systematic framework, interconnecting and interrelating them" (Fine 1979, 386). Fine suggests, however, that for Plato an account of a compound entity can be given by relating it to other compound entities, rather than its constituent parts:

...an interrelation account is necessary for knowledge of compounds as well. It is not just a special sort of account available for recalcitrant elements, but fundamental to knowledge of any sort of entity, elementary or compound. Knowledge always requires the ability to interrelate—not merely to list—the parts of a thing (if it has parts) to one another, and to relate one entity, elementary or compound, to others within the same systematic framework" (Fine 1979, 386).

It is certainly true that Plato wants to show that there are accounts of the relations among elements, and that these accounts demonstrate knowledge. The geometrical demonstration illustrates, however, that in order to count as knowledge such an account must explain the nature of a compound entity in terms of its parts and simultaneously the parts in terms of a compound. Whereas Fine's approach does not identify the necessary reciprocity that Socrates and Theaetetus identify between parts and the whole, the geometrical demonstration shows that in order to count as knowledge a λόγος must identify an appropriate relation between elemental entities and the

⁷⁸ One explanation of what λόγος is in the *Theaetetus* is that it entails not just listing the constituent parts of something, but giving them in the correct order, e.g. spelling someone's name. This account, however, fails to provide a necessary link between knowledge of the thing itself and the essential relation among its constituent parts. Someone could know who Theaetetus is without being able to spell his name, or conversely have no idea who Theaetetus is but still correctly spell his name (*Theaet.* 208a-b).

compound entity that they form in one and the same dialectical process. The *arithmos* model expresses the same thing with respect to the One and the Many.

Furthermore, Fine's elaboration of the interrelation model does not avoid a circular regress and therefore remains problematic. Her approach correctly identifies the fact that entities cannot be defined in isolation and that an account of primary elements is possible in terms of their relational capacity. This kind of account at least avoids a regress *ad infinitum*. However, Fine argues that Plato applies the interrelation model only to finite sets of elements, such that accounts inevitably circle back on themselves.⁷⁹ She does not, however, consider the application of this model to a set of elements that is infinite in number. The geometrical demonstration, however, is precisely about the possibility of having knowledge of a class whose members are infinite (ἄπειρος) in number.

Importantly, the principle of the Many does not refer to a definite number but an indefinite multitude. In Gadamer's view, one of the key features of the paradigm of number for Plato is that the indeterminacy of the Many means that the series of numbers, each of which is constituted by the One and the Many, is also indefinite. As a model for our knowledge of the ideas, this feature reflects the fact that dialectical insight into the relations among the ideas is also unending and infinite (DD, 151-152). In his commentary on Plato's *Cratylus*, Gonzalez argues that for Socrates the function of a name can be identified with its form, "just as the form of a shuttle, as opposed to its matter, is defined in terms of its function" (Gonzalez 1998, 66). Here, the function of a name is principally to refer to or distinguish "one specific stable nature"

⁷⁹ Fine 1979, 396. She refers to music and medicine as examples of disciplines the content of which is finite in scope. In this respect Armstrong asks, "what criterion can be given to show that a circle of true beliefs is 'sufficiently comprehensive'?" (Armstrong 1973, 156), which Fine admits is a difficult question to answer (Fine 1979, 397 n. 32).

which it manifests, but does not describe or explain, through its use.⁸⁰ The *arithmos* model reflects this insight, namely that the number, as a sum, has features that do not belong to its parts and thus transcends these parts. An explanation that elaborates the nature of the idea in terms of the relatedness among its constituent parts does so with the awareness that in and of itself the idea transcends these relations. Yet because the dialectical movement between the essential unity and multiplicity of the ideas is reciprocal it does not suffer from an infinite regress, even though it is unending. Rather, as Gadamer illustrates, the manifold respects in which the manifestation of an idea can acquire meaning reflect a “productive ambiguity” that leads to greater insight into the nature of that idea.⁸¹

The analogy between Theaetetus’ geometrical demonstration and the linguistic model allows us to identify a key implication of Gadamer’s assertion, i.e. that the relationship between letters and syllables captures the true relationship between the One and the Many. The implicit solution to the dilemma concerning the possibility of knowing letters and syllables is an extension of the logic of the geometrical demonstration and the *arithmos* model. The relationship between letters and syllables or words is directly analogous to the relationship between one-dimensional line segments and two-dimensional square figures. In light of Theaetetus’ geometrical demonstration, then, it becomes straightforward to assert that that syllables and words have properties that cannot be attributed to their constituent parts, i.e. their capacity to mean something. It is also understood that complex linguistic objects such as syllables and words

⁸⁰ For this reason Gonzalez disagrees with Baxter’s interpretation of this part of the dialogue, viz. above that the function of a name is to describe that to which it refers (Ibid., 303 n. 10).

⁸¹ In Gadamer’s view, the series of deductions in the second part of the *Parmenides* illustrate precisely this point, i.e. that the “multiplicity of respects in which something may be interpreted in language [...] was not a burdensome ambiguity to be eliminated but an entirety of interrelated aspects of meaning which articulate a field of knowing” (DD, 111). The whole basis of language for Plato is this ambiguity, Gadamer says, which is why the attempt to create an “unequivocal, precise coordination of the sign world with the world of facts” can only result in aporia. We recall that for Gadamer, then, the purpose of the *Parmenides* is in part to demonstrate the untenability of Eleatic atomism. Similarly, Gonzalez refutes the argument that in the *Cratylus* there is evidence that Plato wants to develop this kind of one-to-one coordination between language and reality (Gonzalez 1998, 77-80; *Crat.* 424e-425b).

are constituted by nothing other than the letters of the alphabet according to the inherent capacity that letters have to combine with one another. Thus the “clearer manifestation of knowledge” that the class of elements enjoys consists in the fact that the apprehension of this capacity permits prior insight into the potential that the elements have to exist in common with each other.⁸² Examining this claim in light of the discussion of being and non-being in the *Sophist* will orient the *arithmos* model toward the ontological question of the meaning of being.

3.5: *Sophist*

In the background to Plato’s *Sophist* are the arguments presented in the *Parmenides* and *Theaetetus*. The *Sophist*, of course, picks up where the *Theaetetus* left off. Moreover, in discussing the definition of knowledge as perception (αἴσθησις) in conjunction with the thesis that being is in perpetual motion, Socrates refers to the Eleatic thesis that being is motionless (*Theaet.* 180d-181b). He shows respect for Parmenides by refusing to engage with the Eleatic school until there is sufficient time to discuss their position fairly (*Theaet.* 183e-184b). Then, in the *Sophist*, a member of Parmenides’ own school continues the discussion in Socrates’ place.

In light of this background, Gadamer argues that in this group of dialogues Plato is developing a form of dialectic that incorporates both Socrates’ dialogical mode of inquiry into the good and the “Eleatic-Platonic” mode of inquiry into being (GW VII, 338). In his view, by

⁸² In his *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle argues that in order to avoid either a circular or an infinite regress with respect to the knowability of primary elements there must be some kind of non-discursive insight into the nature of these things (*Post. An.* 1.3; cf. Fine 1979, 369). Aristotle is referring here to the originary premises governing any scientific demonstration, but his argument has a significant bearing on the distinction in the *Theaetetus* between elemental and complex entities. When Socrates is relating Antisthenes’ theory of knowledge, for example, he explains that according to this theory the acquisition of the λόγος makes it possible to attain “perfection in knowledge” (τελείως πρὸς ἐπιστήμην; *Theaet.* 202c). By comparison, we saw that in making his claim about the greater knowability of elements Socrates says that this property also makes the elements “better suited for obtaining a mastery [τελέως] of each subject.” In light of Socrates’ criticism of Antisthenes, the implication here is that, when it comes to learning a subject or skill, knowledge of the Many has a certain priority over knowledge of the One.

demonstrating that the Eleatic One implies the Many, Plato illustrates that the dialectical ascent toward the unity of an idea or concept necessitates the ability to navigate the relational structure of the ideas that becomes presented in the λόγος (GW VII, 339). In his commentary on the *Sophist*, Gadamer therefore redoubles his claim that Plato's concept of number is paradigmatic for understanding his approach to the theory of ideas in these later dialogues (GW VII, 340). He picks up his thesis that "the *Parmenides* is an irrefutable document for the fact that Plato considers that the problem of the individual's participation in the idea is irrelevant" (GW VII, 344). As we saw in our previous discussion, it follows from this thesis that for Plato knowledge does not consist in defining the ideas in isolation, but rather in terms of their relation to other ideas. We recall as well that for Gadamer, Plato does not think that there is an absolute ontological separation (χωρισμός) between ideas and appearances, and that he only refers to this separation in order to indicate a relative difference between their modes of being (sc. Wachterhauser 1999, 82). Thus dialectic emerges as the "actual bearer of the philosophical procedure" precisely because it is concerned with the εἶδος and uncovering eidetic relations on an ontological basis (GW VII, 345).

Gadamer claims that what the χωρισμός really means for Plato is "the separation of knowledge from the contingency of uncertain experiences" (GW VII, 345). In chapter one we demonstrated that the difference meanings of truth that Gadamer develops in his hermeneutics all reinforce his thesis that genuine experience obtains truth at a level prior to scientific or methodological certainty, and that assertions about the meaning of being extend from the evident or probable nature of the things themselves. In the preceding sections of the current chapter, we saw furthermore how the principle of the Many in the *arithmos* structure of the λόγος implies that "for us there exists no clear, unambiguous structure of Being" (DD, 110), and that dialectical

knowledge is essentially unending and infinite (DD, 152). Thus in light of his claim that human knowledge, whose object here is the relations among ideas, is grounded in a fundamental ambiguity, the logical distinction between ideal and sensible reality reveals for Gadamer the difference between inexact or untested experience, and experience that has been tested and reasonably justified (Wachterhauser 1999, 83). Gadamer distinguishes this form of knowledge from that of modern empirical science, for which knowledge means superiority (*Herrschaftswissen*) and control (*beherrschen*) over an area of experience (GW VII, 346). By contrast, the form of knowledge that is relevant to his and Plato's interests "is a moral understanding [*Ordnungswissen*] that knows that there is disorder and uncontrollable contingency in the event of experience [*Geschehen*], so that all so-called knowledge is set by a different limit than experience" (GW VII, 346).

In Gadamer's view, the philosophical question of the *Sophist* is therefore not merely who the sophist is. The question is whether or not there is truly any difference between the sophist and the philosopher. In other dialogues, the *Gorgias* in particular, we see Socrates characterize rhetoric as an art of persuasion utilized by the sophists. Yet if the form of knowledge that is at the heart of Platonic dialectic is grounded in a principle of uncertainty or ambiguity, it is reasonable to question how the philosophical art of dialectic differs substantially from the sophistical art of persuasion, if it differs at all. Gadamer suggests, therefore, that the point of the *Sophist* is to locate this difference and defend philosophical dialectic as a genuine art that can reveal the εἶδος through its eidetic relationships (GW VII, 347-348). He finds that the distinction between the philosopher and the sophist is found ultimately in the difference between their decisions and attitudes toward life (*Lebensentscheidungen, Lebenshaltungen*; GW VII, 348). The

difference, in other words, does not depend on their form of argumentation or persuasion, but rather the intention behind their argument (GW VII, 365).

Elaborating the nature of this difference and its conceptual significance for a contemporary hermeneutical approach to philosophy will be set aside for now in order to be taken up in a later chapter. Our primary concern at this time is not with the distinction between true and false speech presented in the *Sophist*. Our goal here is rather to uncover the ground on which this distinction is first made possible, namely the ontological conditions under which discourse as such emerges. The preceding sections on the *Theaetetus* elaborated two models of the dialectical relation between the One and the Many, in which it was illustrated that giving an account of something presupposes a prior apprehension of the potential relations among the multitude of elements. The *Sophist* reorients this mathematical approach within an ontological framework. Being (οὐσίᾱ) is identified as the capacity (δύναμις) to exist in common with others (ὥς δυνατὰ ἐπικοινωνεῖν ἀλλήλοις, *Soph.* 247e, 251d), with the qualification that not every relation among entities is possible (*Soph.* 252a-253a). Furthermore, the “greatest kinds” (μέγιστα γενή) are revealed as the transcendental “elements” that make dialectical knowledge and discourse possible through identification and differentiation among the ideas themselves (*Soph.* 253d-e, 256ff.; GW VII, 363). Finally, the function of language is revealed as what manifests the web of relations among ideas (*Soph.* 259e). However, since nothing necessarily precludes one from asserting an impossible relation between ideas, truth and falsehood, and so dialectic and eristic, emerge as equally fundamental possibilities that belong to language as such (sc. *Soph.* 264a-b).

Of particular interest, then, are the examples of true and false λόγοι that the Stranger presents to Theaetetus following their proof of the existence of non-being and their

demonstration of the relational structure of being. In his commentary, Gadamer examines the difference between the epistemological and ontological justifications of true and false speech. Importantly, he identifies an essential temporal dimension of language according to which transcendental ideas are manifested within a specific, temporal context (GW VII, 363 ff.). We will see in subsequent chapters that Gadamer develops key features of his hermeneutics through his understanding of the Platonic λόγος as fundamentally temporal.

3.5.1: Being as δύναμις and the possibility of language

In order to pin down what the sophist is, Theaetetus and the Eleatic Stranger must prove that non-being exists. After six attempts to define the sophist Theaetetus and the Stranger conclude that he can at least be called a disputer (ἀντιλογικός; *Soph.* 232b), whose art allows him to argue anything about anything (*Soph.* 232e). They determine that such an art presupposes either that the sophist has knowledge of everything or that he knows how to imitate knowledge. As the first option is obviously impossible, Theaetetus and the Stranger agree that the sophist is an “imitator of beings” (μιμητὴς ὧν τῶν ὄντων; *Soph.* 235a). Imitators are characterized in this context as those who abandon truth and present something that has the appearance of truth (*Soph.* 236a-b). The sophist uses language as his medium, and so Theaetetus and the Stranger conclude here that he speaks about beings but without actually disclosing any truth about them.⁸³ The Stranger recognizes, however, that the possibility of false speech (ψεῦδος λέγειν), which is the necessary condition for the very existence of the sophist, presupposes that non-being exists (*Soph.* 237a).

After elaborating certain conceptual difficulties surrounding the question of non-being, the discussion turns to the question of being. Initially, Theaetetus and the Stranger consider

⁸³ τὸ γὰρ φαίνεσθαι τοῦτο καὶ τὸ δοκεῖν, εἶναι δὲ μή, καὶ λέγειν μὲν ἅττα, ἀληθῆ δὲ μη (*Soph.* 236e).

earlier theories about what being is, namely that it is one or that it is many (*Soph.* 242c-d). As Gadamer relates, the point of going over these theories is to establish the initial insight that being must be a “third” thing in addition to unity and multiplicity (GW VII, 356; *Soph.* 243e). Theaetetus and the Stranger find that those who maintain a pluralistic definition of being overlook the concept of unity that their view necessarily presupposes (*Soph.* 243e), and similarly those who maintain a unitary definition of being overlook the manifold nature of being itself that their position implies (*Soph.* 244d-245a). This leaves the monists and pluralists mired in conceptual problems, as it is evident that their theories of being suffer from “countless other problems, each one involving infinite difficulties [μυρία ἀπεράντους ἀπορίας ἕκαστον]” (*Soph.* 245d; Fowler’s translation). Rather than taking up these difficulties, the Stranger directs the conversation away from the monists and pluralists toward the materialists and idealists.

In order to determine what is common to both the materialist and idealist positions, the Stranger proposes that there is such a thing as a mortal animal (θνητὸν ζῶον), which is to say, an ensouled body (σῶμα ἔμψυχον; *Soph.* 246e). Against the materialists, it is objected that the soul must exist even though it cannot be seen and touched, precisely because certain properties such as justice and wisdom are capable (δύνατον) of becoming present or absent in the soul. Following this objection the Stranger suggests that being can be defined (ὅρον ὀρίζειν τὰ ὄντα) as nothing other than the capacity (δύναμις) to act (ποιεῖν) or be acted upon (παθεῖν; *Soph.* 247e). The “friends of the forms” initially reject this definition, as they contend that activity and passivity are properties of generation (γένεσις) and so have nothing to do with being (*Soph.* 248c). However, in order to maintain that knowledge, life, and soul are beings, they must also

accept that motion and things in motion must exist (ὥς ὄντα; *Soph.* 249b). That being must consist of both rest and motion appears to have “grasped being in a reasonable account.”⁸⁴

This shift from a mathematical to an ontological framework recalls the earlier discussion of the logical distinction between ideas and appearances and the presupposition of their prior, ontological unity. We recall how in Gadamer’s view the problems that this unity faces cause Plato to reformulate the participation thesis in logical terms, i.e. the participation of the Many in the One. This problem is intensified here, as the two principles that are predicated of being are entirely mutually exclusive. Rest and motion are “most directly opposed to each other,” but “both and each” equally exist (*Soph.* 250a). For this reason being cannot be identified as either only rest or only motion without denying the existence of the opposite. Being therefore emerges as a third thing besides (παρά) rest and motion insofar as it encompasses both of them and they both participate (κοινωνία) in being (*Soph.* 250b). Thus according to its own nature (κατὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ φύσιν), being cannot be the combination (ξυναμφότερον) of rest and motion, as they remain mutually exclusive. On the one hand, then, rest and motion are “internal” to being, i.e. they participate in being and so exist; but on the other hand, being is neither rest nor motion and so “external” (ἐκτός) to them (*Soph.* 250c-d).

Here, Gadamer claims that Plato’s goal is to achieve a genuine reconciliation between the materialists and idealists (GW VII, 357). The Stranger explains that the above dilemma produces two theses: one, that “nothing has any power [δύναμις] to combine [κοινωνίας] with anything else”; and two, that “all things have the power [δύναμις] to combine [ἐπικοινωνίας] with one another” (*Soph.* 251d-252d). The first thesis implies that rest and motion do not exist because

⁸⁴ ἐπεικῶς ἤδη φαινόμεθα περιειληφέναι τῷ λόγῳ τὸ ὄν (*Soph.* 249d). The Greek verb περιειληφέναι can refer to the act of collecting a number of particular things, which is significant in light of the arithmetical determination of an entity as being so-many (ποσόν), whose manifold aspects are “counted up” in an account of their essential unity.

they have no contact with being, while the second implies that rest is in motion and motion is at rest. The definition of being as δύναμις is thus reformulated as the capacity that things have to exist in common with each other, with the qualification that not every combination or mixture is possible. Rest and motion can combine with being, allowing one to say that each is and both are. Rest and motion cannot combine with each other, preventing one from saying either that motion is (at) rest or that rest is (in) motion. The implication that the Stranger and Theaetetus soon discover is that being, rest, and motion must also participate in sameness and difference, and that sameness (ταυτόν) and otherness (ἕτερον) must be listed with the rest as distinct, universal genera. Identifying being and sameness would collapse any distinction between existent things; because rest and motion both are, they would become the same as each other (*Soph.* 255b).

The extended implication is that this relational structure is a universal characteristic of all being. The specialized nature of the other is just its being other πρὸς ἕτερον. “What is other is always in relation to other,” the Stranger says (*Soph.* 255d). In other words, the other cannot be attributed with both absolute (καθ’ αὐτό) and relative (πρὸς ἄλλα) existence, as then there would be an instance of non-relational otherness: “there would be also among the others that exist another not in relation to any other [οὐ πρὸς ἕτερον]” (*Soph.* 255d; Bluck 1975, 148-149). Being, however, can maintain both absolute and relative relations; we recall from our discussion of the *Parmenides* that the principle of self-predication that belongs to the ideas can be expressed either as an idea relates to itself or as it relates to other ideas. Similarly, absolute sameness and relative difference together identify a relational capacity inherent in things, and so “all being is relation, whether to itself or to something other” (Gonzalez 2009, 92). In this way being and non-being co-inhere in all things that exist, and since being and non-being both are, they co-inhere in each other:

...being and the other pass through [διεληλυθότα]⁸⁵ all things and through one another, and the other, since it participates in being, exists through this participation, but is not that in which it participates but other, and because it exists as other than being [ἕτερον δὲ τοῦ ὄντος ὃν ἔστι] it is most clearly and from necessity non-being. (*Soph.* 259a)

Revealing the relational structure of being thus overcomes the dilemma that emerges from the inability of rest and motion to participate in each other: being, rest, and motion is each the same in relation to itself, and other in relation to the others (*Soph.* 256e).

The Eleatic Stranger then proposes that language is one of the greatest kinds in addition to the others, without which philosophy would not exist (*Soph.* 260a). Language depends upon the interweaving (συμπλοκή) of ideas, as the absolute separation of all things would “obliterate all thought and discourse” (*Soph.* 259e). As one category of being, however, language is subject to the same ontological rules as the others, namely that it may or may not be able to combine with other classes, principally non-being. If language mixes with non-being, false opinion and speech will exist; if it does not, then language will only reflect the truth (*Soph.* 260b-c). The grammatical analysis of the λόγος makes it clear that language is rife with falsehood and deceit. The salient detail for our purposes here is that this analysis also shows that what creates the possibility for language and discourse, namely the capacity for ideas to participate with each other, neither guarantees the truth of any assertion about beings, nor precludes one from making a false assertion. True and false speech emerge as equally fundamental possibilities of manifesting being as δύναμις κοινωνία.

As an account of being, a λόγος is said to require the combination or mixture of two elements, a noun (ὄνομα) and a verb (ρῆμα), and it must be about something (τινός). The Stranger proposes two statements for them to consider, “Theaetetus sits,” and “Theaetetus flies.”

⁸⁵ Whereas the Loeb edition uses the plural participle of διέρχομαι, other manuscripts use the dual participle, διεληλυθότε, indicating a more fundamental reciprocity between being and non-being.

The first is clearly true and the second false; the first “says things that are as they are about you” (λέγει τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστι περὶ σοῦ), while the second says things “other than as they are” (ἕτερα τῶν ὄντων; *Soph.* 263b). An initial issue is to determine what the linguistic elements of the λόγος are meant to reference. The λόγος refers to beings (τὰ ὄντα) in relation to a particular subject (περὶ σου). It was just said that language manifests relations among ideas, and so one possibility is that the components of the λόγος stand for eidetic entities only. This possibility, however, maintains the ontological separation between ideal and sensible reality, and so cannot be attributed to Plato. Due to its detachment from sensible things, the result is “an *a priori* analytical λόγος inapplicable to the sensible realm and so unable to produce truth and knowledge about our world” (Fronterotta 2013, 213). To be sure, it was also just said that the attempt to separate everything from everything else (πάν ἀπο παντός ἐπιχειρεῖν ἀποχωρίζειν) is contrary to any real philosophical endeavor (*Soph.* 259d). The *Parmenides* thoroughly demonstrates moreover that this includes the attempt to separate sensible and intelligible reality, and so parts of the λόγος instead stand for both sensible and intelligible entities by attributing an eidetic property to an individual substance.⁸⁶

If one accepts instead that the λόγος involves both ideal and sensible things, the truth of any assertion becomes contingent upon the particular circumstances in which the assertion is made. What is needed, then, is a way to bridge knowledge of universal kinds with the

⁸⁶ That the components of the λόγος do not stand only for sensible entities is made clear in Cornford’s commentary. On a purely perceptual basis, “Theaetetus sits” is true on this account because the structure of this statement corresponds to the immediate structure of things, i.e. Theaetetus sitting before the Stranger. The sophist could object, however, that a false statement cannot be accounted for through its correspondence with something, because “there are no non-existent facts for it to correspond with” (Cornford 1935, 311). The λόγος “Theaetetus flies” is not false in this case, but meaningless, and therefore about nothing. By identifying τὰ ὄντα with the ideas, “Theaetetus sits” is true because it correctly attributes a universal property to Theaetetus. Therefore, because the existence of non-being has been thoroughly demonstrated, the statement “Theaetetus flies” can correspond to the reality of non-being (Ibid., 315-316). It is false, in other words, because flying, as a property other than sitting, is for Theaetetus something “other than things that are.”

contingency of human experience, without which this description of the λόγος is also problematic. Fronterotta argues that Plato is defending a version of semantic realism within a correspondent model of truth. He finds that for Plato, the “things that are” that language describes therefore covers both sensible and ideal entities, so that the interweaving of subject and predicate in the λόγος “reproduces a corresponding relation between a real ‘substance’ and a real ‘property’” (Fronterotta 2013, 211). Fronterotta also claims, however, that this linguistic approach produces an “*a posteriori* analytical λόγος whose criterion of truth must be confirmed each time on the basis of the content of sensible experience, and so unable to produce universal and necessary, or scientific, truth and knowledge” (Ibid., 213). This is because, by making a claim about Theaetetus and a property that he does or does not possess, the Stranger cannot also be referring to an ideal type behind Theaetetus himself such as “man” or “human” (Ibid., 213; 221). Otherwise, the λόγος would only refer to ideal entities, which we just saw cannot be the case. Consequently, the truth or falsehood of the λόγος is relative to the particular circumstances in which the individual subject of the λόγος manifests a property that it possesses.

Despite its shortcoming with respect to universal and necessary knowledge, Fronterotta suggests that this second approach is more reasonable to accept as it seems to reflect more closely the actual situation of the dialogue, namely the Stranger speaking about how Theaetetus appears to him here and now. For Gadamer, however, a proper approach to the Platonic λόγος requires understanding that its linguistic elements refer to both sensible entities and the ideal properties that these entities possess.

Following Gadamer’s claim that Plato develops a single ontological framework, in which “to be means to be an idea” (DD, 137; slightly modified), and in which the ideas are “ideas of appearances” (IG, 16-17), the λόγοι “Theaetetus sits” and “Theaetetus flies” are properly

understood as statements about beings (τὰ ὄντα) that manifest certain relations among ideas through their appearance in sensible things (περὶ σου). Gadamer argues furthermore that Plato attributes a fundamental temporal property to language. The verb (ῥῆμα; *Zeitwort*), Gadamer suggests, “undoubtedly pertains to the flowing of words,” i.e. movement and time (GW VII, 363). Thus not only does the λόγος manifest compatible and incompatible relations among ideas, it also indicates an essential “temporization of the statement itself,” i.e. the Stranger’s assertion about “Theaetetus here, this man thrown into time [*diesen in die Zeit geworfenen Menschen*]” (GW VII, 363). The λόγος, in other words, exhibits relations among the ideas as these relations manifest themselves contingently and temporally in perceptible reality.⁸⁷

In Gadamer’s view, then, the Stranger clearly implies ideal types when referring to Theaetetus and any properties he may possess. The primary reason why these statements are true or false, therefore, is not because they predicate a universal category of an individual substance, whose correspondence can then be empirically tested and verified. Rather, their truth or falsehood reflects something more fundamental about beings: the idea of “man” or “human” which “Theaetetus” implies is either compatible or incompatible with the ideas of “sitting” and “flying” (DD, 148). This compatibility is not governed solely by the correspondence between language and reality, but rather the power of language “to disclose and enhance the intelligibility of the real” (Wachterhauser 1999, 95). The definition of being as δύναμις κοινωνία means that each idea by itself necessarily includes and excludes those ideas with which it can and cannot

⁸⁷ Fronterotta also locates a reference to time in Plato’s λόγος. He argues that in recognition of the temporal aspect of language, the truth or falsehood of a proposition “depends on a contingent verification, subject to time, of the relations that exist between one or more sensible subjects and one or more ideal kinds” (Fronterotta 2013, 220). However, because he attributes a correspondence model of truth to Plato, this temporal property only further relativizes the context in which an empirical analysis will obtain truth or falsehood: “true and false are posited now as mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive, but only in relation to an identical section of time” (Ibid.). This approach does not address the fact that part of the reason why the statement “Theaetetus flies” is false is because Theaetetus does not partake in the idea of flying as such.

participate. Thus even though the false λόγος is “undoubtedly wrong [*Unrightiges*],” the incompatibility of the idea of man with the idea of flying “makes it clear that something impossible [*Unmögliches*] is said here, not really something wrong” (GW VII, 363).

The unity between sensible and intelligible reality that Plato’s participation thesis presupposes means, furthermore, that the λόγος “completes itself only in the *Zeitwort*,” i.e. the contingent circumstances in which the idea makes itself present (GW VII, 368-369). The intelligibility of reality is inescapably bound up in language, but, by pointing to ideas whose natures can never be fully expressed, language also functions in order to point us beyond what is immediately present toward a greater understanding of the intelligible world.

We should consider here the fact that Plato presents the reader with an assertion which is not merely incorrect, but unintelligible. Plato intentionally creates a distinction between truth and falsehood using what Gadamer describes as “possible” and “impossible” assertions, each of which may also correctly or incorrectly correspond to a given state of affairs. For this reason, it is important to distinguish between different qualities that an assertion can possess. The statement “Theaetetus sits” is both ontologically and empirically true; the ideas that this statement implies are compatible, and their combination reflects the present state of affairs. The statement “Theaetetus flies” is both ontologically and empirically false; the ideas that it implies are incompatible, and it obviously does not reflect any state of affairs. The salient detail here is that it is due to an incompatibility among ideas that the statement “Theaetetus flies” is necessarily false on an empirical basis.⁸⁸ By comparison, the statement “Theaetetus stands” is

⁸⁸ That is, within the context of the dialogue. Obviously such a statement is no longer necessarily false, which is precisely the broader point that Gadamer makes with respect to the ability of language to transcend and transform conventional standards of meaning.

ontologically true insofar as it expresses a possible relationship among certain ideas, even though it even though it would be empirically false whenever Theaetetus is not standing.

What this discussion shows is that the true or false correspondence between language and reality depends upon a prior awareness of the possible and impossible relations among the ideas that serve as the necessary, ontological basis of this correspondence. Our apprehension of a given state of affairs, in other words, is primarily an apprehension of a possibility that belongs to the ideas themselves, i.e. in terms of their capacity to present themselves together with other ideas in a way that we can intelligibly perceive. This point, and its significance for Gadamer's hermeneutic theory, will be developed in greater detail in chapter four where we will elaborate the speculative structure of language. This discussion shows, furthermore, that the infinite and unending scope of dialectical inquiry into the nature of the ideas does not imply that their appearances are also unlimited. As we have seen, the web of relations in which any idea is situated includes those ideas to which it can be related and excludes those to which it cannot. It is due to the inherent limits of human thought that a complete, systematic knowledge of these relations is impossible, and thus why dialectical activity is in principle unending.

Gadamer thus makes it clear that Plato's "idealistic" approach to the relation between being and language should not be interpreted through the lens of an empirical science. The mathematical identification of the λόγος as a unity of "so-many" is only meant to determine the logical conditions for the relation between the One and the Many, or the unity of the idea and the multitude of ideas that it implies. This structure, which we elaborated in our discussion of the *Theaetetus* through the paradigm of number, is a prerequisite for the dialectical knowledge established in the *Sophist*. Thus Gadamer distinguishes dialectical knowledge from modern empirical science, for which knowledge means superiority (*Herrschaftswissen*) and control

(*beherrschen*) over an area of experience (GW VII, 346). By contrast, the ontological framework of Plato's theory of language and ideas, over and above its mathematical precursor, reflects "a moral understanding [*Ordnungswissen*] that knows that there is disorder and uncontrollable contingency in the event of experience [*Geschehen*], so that all so-called knowledge is set by a different limit than experience" (GW VII, 346).

Gadamer characterizes hermeneutics as idealistic in the same sense. Rather than trying to establish a system of correspondence between words and things, hermeneutical experience reveals how "the ideality of the meaning lies in the word itself," and that this experience "of itself seeks and finds words that express it. We seek the right word—i.e., the word that really belongs to the thing—so that in it the thing comes into language" (TM, 417). Language is the medium of our finite, historical experience of the infinite totality of being. Every word has an "inner dimension of multiplication," such that "every word breaks forth as if from a center and is related to a whole, through which it alone is a word" (TM, 454). Thus:

Every word causes the whole of the language to which it belongs to resonate and the whole world-view that underlies it to appear. Thus every word, as the event of a moment, carries with it the unsaid, to which it is related by responding and summoning. The occasionality of human speech is not a causal imperfection of its expressive power; it is, rather, the logical expression of the living virtuality of speech that brings a totality of meaning into play, without being able to express it totally. All human speaking is finite in such a way that there is laid up within it an infinity of meaning to be explicated and laid out. (TM, 454)

We saw how for Plato the conditions that make language as such possible do not necessarily imply any distinction between true and false speech. Philosophical dialectic thereby emerges as "perhaps the greatest knowledge," as its object is precisely which things can and cannot be associated with each other (*Soph.* 253d-e). Similarly, the conditions under which understanding happens in hermeneutics do not necessarily imply any distinction between valid and invalid interpretations. The circularity that describes the back-and-forth movement from interpretation to

application to reinterpretation, such that one can distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate prejudices, is productive in the sense that it reveals new possibilities of meaning (TM, 298). The concept of meaning, Gadamer states, “represent[s] a fluid multiplicity of possibilities [...] but within this multiplicity of what can be thought—i.e., of what a reader can find meaningful and hence expect to find—not everything is possible” (TM, 271). This ambiguity, however, is essential for both Gadamer and Plato, as it necessitates the infinite and unending nature of dialectical activity that can attend to the essential finitude of human thought and experience.

3.6: Conclusion

In this chapter we outlined Gadamer’s understanding of Plato’s epistemology and ontology in some of his late dialogues in order to lay the initial groundwork to justify the claim that Gadamer’s hermeneutical ontology is deeply Platonic. In chapter one, we demonstrated that the hermeneutical object maintains both a unitary and a multiple existence. The text or its analogue retains its essential identity over and above any interpretation of its content, and at the same time the content of the text is such that it can inhere within different historical contexts. The discussion in the present chapter has demonstrated that Gadamer’s understanding of the hermeneutical object does not simply coincide with his understanding of Plato’s philosophy, but that the application of this core principle—the unitary and multiple existences of the text—is deeply informed by his understanding of Plato’s ontology, and is grounded in part in the ontological framework that he identifies in Plato’s late dialogues.

The principle evidence that Gadamer’s hermeneutics has one of its primary sources in Plato’s ontology of ideas comes from Gadamer’s focus on the principles of the One and the

Many in Plato's dialogues. The dialectical relationship between the One and the Many, Gadamer writes, "establishes the finite limits of human discourse and insight—and our fruitful situation halfway between single and multiple meaning, clarity and ambiguity" (DD, 119-120). The undivided unity of the εἶδος, Gadamer says, is the shared goal of all who seek understanding (GW VII, 345). It unifies oneself with others in coming to an understanding of the concepts and ideas that constitute our shared reality. At the same time, the essential finitude of human thought precludes any total or systematic knowledge of this reality. In light of this fact, the principle of the indefinite Many establishes dialectic as an "unending and infinite" process directed toward understanding the ideas (DD, 152). Plato's ideas, like the "things themselves," identify the most basic intelligible structures of reality in and through which reality becomes meaningful for us. Given that this reality is shared it naturally follows that things become meaningful for different people in different ways, but for the same reason the variety of insights into these things are in principle consistent and reconcilable. Wachterhauser summarizes this point aptly: "Thus we always seek a unified, consistent account of any phenomena, even when the differences in our understanding of the phenomena force us to see this unified account as something we strive for as our 'final goal,' i.e., our regulative ideal" (Wachterhauser 1999, 66). This "eidetic turn" that is a basic and fundamental component of Plato's philosophy is something that we all do, Gadamer claims (GW VII, 346). For both, it is the basis of their understanding of the nature of human thought.

Beginning with the *Parmenides*, we saw that Gadamer argues that Plato upholds his theory of ideas despite criticisms of it in this dialogue. Specifically, Gadamer argues that this dialogue reveals two central principles in Plato's ontology of ideas: first, that the apparent separation between sensible and intelligible reality presupposes their conceptual unity and

therefore does not commit Plato to a two-world ontology; and second, that in light of the difficulties that this theory faces, Plato reformulates his participation thesis around the claim that the ideas participate in each other. Gadamer finds that by demonstrating that the One necessarily implies the Many and vice versa, Plato illustrates that the unity of an idea implies a plurality of other ideas. The web of relations among the ideas can then be understood and articulated in terms of their unity under a single εἶδος in what Gadamer calls the *arithmos* structure of the λόγος.

We turned next to the *Theaetetus* in order to elaborate this structure. Gadamer claims that the dilemma concerning the relation between letters and syllables presents the clearest representation of the dialectical relationship between the One and the Many. He argues that the conditions for this relationship are elaborated logically through the *arithmos* structure of the λόγος. The *arithmos* model illustrates that the unity of an idea is nothing other than the multitude of parts that constitute it, just as a number is nothing other than the units that are counted in order to reach that number. At the same time, however, this model demonstrates that the idea necessarily transcends the plurality of things that it unifies, as shown by the fact that a number has properties that cannot be attributed to its parts. Elaborating the content of this model in its geometrical and linguistic representations demonstrated two things: that despite having no rational explanation (ἄλογος), the parts of a whole are knowable in terms of their relational capacity; and that an account of an entity must appropriately express the interrelatedness of its parts in terms of the whole in which they are unified.

Finally, we resituated the logical structure of the *arithmos* model within the ontological framework developed in the *Sophist*. The relational existence that characterizes the class of elemental entities in the *Theaetetus* is revealed as the primary ontological condition of being

itself, i.e. as the capacity (δύναμις) to exist in common (κοινωνία) with others. Along with the other “greatest kinds,” being is thus established as one of the transcendental elements that make dialectical knowledge and discourse possible through identification and differentiation among the ideas. Thus the ideas themselves become the elements of discourse. Therefore, just as the One implies the Many, the unity of each idea implies the many ideas in which it participates. Importantly, having identified the positive existence of non-being as otherness, the unity of the εἶδος now also implies that in which it does not participate. Within this framework, the ontological orientation of dialectic and of the *arithmos* structure of the λόγος is given priority over an empirical analysis: an account of something is true or false if it articulates a possible or impossible relation among ideas, knowledge of which is the proper domain of dialectic, and not merely if it corresponds to an external state of affairs.

For Gadamer, the grammatical analysis of the λόγος provides the final proof of the participation of an individual in the ideas by illustrating conversely how the presence of the ideas themselves in individual things becomes manifested through language (GW VII, 364). A statement like “Theaetetus flies” is false not just because, in the context in which this statement is made, Theaetetus is not flying, but because the idea of “human” is incompatible with the idea of flying. The multitude of ideas that the unity of the idea of human nature implies does not include flying. Importantly, Gadamer locates an essential temporal aspect in the λόγος through one of its components, the verb (ρῆμα, *Zeitwort*). The idea is present in the individual who is *in time*. By using number as its paradigm, the mathematical structure of the λόγος characterizes the Many ontically as collection of “so-many”; the number five is a collection of five units, for example. Ontologically, however, this principle represents an indefinite multitude which necessarily precludes any systematic organization of the ideas as the contingent circumstances in

which the ideas make themselves present is always undergoing change. Importantly, this principle is qualified by the recognition that the unlimited scope of the Many does not imply that the ideas can appear in any way whatsoever. Knowledge, therefore, “occurs as the self-presentation of the thing which is known. Such self-presentation is a process full of movement. The aspects of the existent thing, the views which it offers of itself, shift and at the same time the points of view or opinions which the human soul develops also shift, in that they refer to the thing in different respects” (DD, 146).

This characteristic of dialectical knowledge, as the ability to distinguish things through identification and differentiation, is for Gadamer the point of Plato’s ontological analysis of the *arithmos* in terms of sameness and difference. “Differences,” he writes, “are possible relationships” (DD, 146). What emerged from our discussion in chapter one was a conceptualization of the hermeneutical dialogue as the space within which the potential validity among different articulations of meaning can be evaluated with respect to their common idea. Gadamer therefore develops a hermeneutical ontology of identity and difference in order to explain how the hermeneutical object maintains both a unitary and multiple existence. This supports our claim that Gadamer develops his hermeneutical ontology through his understanding of Plato’s single-world ontology of ideas.

4. Chapter Three: Language, tradition, and the historically effected consciousness

4.1: Introduction

This chapter argues that Gadamer identifies the historicity of consciousness as an ontological precondition for understanding, and that he utilizes Plato's theory of philosophical rhetoric as the mode of linguistic expression that most closely manifests the content of this form of consciousness.

In making this argument, this chapter aims to extend the analysis of the previous chapters. It is in light of the indeterminacy inherent in human understanding that Gadamer ultimately claims that the process of questioning and answering "guarantees" truth (TM, 484), i.e. in terms of evidentness as opposed to certainty. We saw in the first chapter that the object of hermeneutical reflection is primarily the probable or evident nature of the things themselves, and which Gadamer argues maintains unitary and multiple existences. Gadamer has been criticized, however, for lacking an explicit account of the conditions that make it possible to distinguish between valid and invalid interpretations of meaning. Critics have claimed on the one hand that the priority he lends to tradition puts too much constraint on the scope of interpretation, and on the other that prioritizing the essential openness of interpretation threatens to relativize truth. Attempts to navigate this dilemma tend to focus on the dialogical structure of hermeneutics.⁸⁹ A dialogue maintains a minimal justificatory demand with respect to the subject matter that unifies

⁸⁹ Richard Bernstein argues that although our engagement with history and tradition is, in Gadamer's view, always critical, he never answers the question "of what is and what ought to be the basis for the critical evaluation of the problems of modernity." "What is required," Bernstein writes, "is a form of argumentation that seeks to warrant what is valid in this tradition" (Bernstein 1983, 155). He finds that the dialogical framework of hermeneutic experience implies "powerful regulative ideal that can orient our practical and political lives" (Ibid., 163) but that this ideal remains implicit in Gadamer's work. Steven Cauchon argues somewhat similarly that Gadamer's account of hermeneutic understanding, specifically the dialogical encounter with the other and the fusion of horizons, needs to be prescriptive and not merely descriptive. In other words, hermeneutics "ought to clearly endorse openness as a normative value-commitment that encourages a willingness to change in light of what we learn while engaged in dialogue" (Cauchon 2016, 102). This willingness, Cauchon contends, is not just a description of what happens in understanding, "but rather a critical and conscientious step in its process" (Ibid.).

the interlocutors. Their conversation remains open toward other possibilities of meaning, but these possibilities are contained within the scope of the subject matter they are investigating insofar as it is understood via tradition.

Chapter two then elaborated Plato's theory of ideas insofar as it serves as one of the main sources for Gadamer's hermeneutical ontology. We saw how for Gadamer Plato reformulates the ontological claim that being is both one and many in mathematical terms, and that according to Plato's definition of being as δύναμις, the essence (οὐσίᾳ) of an idea is understood according to its potential (δύναμις) to exist in common with other ideas. Plato's concept of number is thus paradigmatic for Gadamer as it illustrates how one and the same entity can be essentially both a unity and a multiplicity without any material difference, illustrating logically how the ideas can be present "in" the sensible realm.

The mathematical structure of the *arithmos* model is thus a prerequisite for gaining deeper, dialectical insight into the nature of being. Socrates makes it clear in the *Republic* that the mathematical education of the guardians prepares them for the transition from developing the purely logical consequences of certain ideas to comprehending the dialectical relationships among the ideas themselves (Zuckert 1996, 76). Gadamer writes that for Plato, "someone understands what cognition, knowing, insight, is only when he also understands how it can be that one and one are two and how 'the two' is one" (DD, 135). Each idea is both a whole that is constituted by nothing other than the unity of its parts, which is to say, other ideas, and a sum whose nature is greater than, and so irreducible to its parts (DD, 132). In his view, the more salient detail here is that the reciprocity between unity and multiplicity implies that the generation of the series of numbers continues indefinitely. The apprehension of each idea as a sum is the awareness that explicit knowledge of this nature is essentially incomplete. But this

incompleteness is precisely the point that Gadamer wants to make with Plato: in its analogy to thought, the infinite series of numbers thus reflects the inherent inconclusiveness and indeterminateness of dialectical knowledge (DD, 151). The principles of the One and the Many generate the unending series of numbers “just as they make all discourse possible” (DD, 152).

Gadamer therefore emphasizes the reflexive capacity of human understanding which seeks to ground the particularity of an assertion in a shared reality, and in doing so come to a shared understanding about this reality. This capacity is especially important, as hermeneutical consciousness is necessarily guided by preconceived notions of meaning that are inherited through tradition. These notions are what Gadamer calls a “prejudice,” whose positive meaning he rescues from the Enlightenment’s so-called “prejudice against prejudice.” All hermeneutical understanding involves a preconception of meaning as a necessary first step toward gaining substantial knowledge of the subject at hand.

Gadamer recognizes, however, that without also critically reflecting upon the reasons one has for presenting a certain point of view, there is the possibility that a false or illegitimate prejudice will lead to a misunderstanding of things (TM, 292). To address this issue, he appropriates Heidegger’s description of the hermeneutical circle as part of the ontological structure of understanding (TM, 293-294). The hermeneutical circle describes the reciprocal movement between prejudice and interpretation. Drawing out the implications of one’s fore-conception of meaning alters not only one’s preconception of meaning, but also the content of the tradition that supplies this fore-conception in the first place. “Tradition,” Gadamer writes, “is not simply a permanent precondition; rather, we produce it ourselves inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence further determine it ourselves” (TM, 293). This is not just a logical or epistemological claim. Referring again to Heidegger’s

demonstration of the productivity of the hermeneutical circle, Gadamer writes, “It is not so much our judgments as it is our prejudices that constitute our being” (PH, 9). Understanding is self-understanding, and so our constant involvement in the search for knowledge is an ongoing search for self-knowledge.⁹⁰

There are two principle conditions that a hermeneutical dialogue must satisfy in order to successfully obtain a genuine understanding between the interlocutors. First, they must agree on the subject matter that they have in common and whose nature they wish to uncover. Second, they must be open to the possibility that what the other says about this subject matter is true, even if this entails a contradiction. Central to Gadamer’s hermeneutical theory is that especially this second condition forces the interlocutors to bring into question the hidden prejudice or bias that serves as the necessary ground of their claim. Arguably, however, Gadamer leaves open the possibility that under certain circumstances an understanding can be reached that does not require this moment of critical reflection. He describes classical texts, for example, as having a timeless quality that resists historical criticism (TM, 288). This authoritative quality does not mean that whatever a classical text says is necessarily true such that one *must* agree with it.⁹¹ The claim that a classical text makes is still based primarily in the evident structure of the things themselves, but Gadamer points out that what makes a text “classical” is that its claim speaks to something so fundamental that it rings true throughout different historical periods.

⁹⁰ Earlier approaches to hermeneutics presuppose that the object under investigation can be understood as a complete whole by knowing the correlation between all of its parts. Gadamer repeatedly refers to Schleiermacher, for whom hermeneutics was a methodological tool to assist other fields in attaining their ideal of epistemological certainty. On this approach, “the circular movement of understanding runs backward and forward along the text, and ceases when the text is perfectly understood” (TM, 293).

⁹¹ The development of non-Euclidean geometry or Einsteinian physics shows that such an agreement is not mandatory even in matters of scientific certainty.

In this respect, Jürgen Habermas becomes a valuable critic of Gadamer's hermeneutics. In his view, tradition itself represents this kind of authority in Gadamer's hermeneutics but in a way that threatens the hermeneutical principle of openness. The problem that Habermas identifies is not that understanding is influenced by a prejudice or bias, but rather that hermeneutics lacks an appropriate critical apparatus that can determine when and where tradition perpetuates a false prejudice that misrepresents the nature of the things themselves. Thus while he agrees with Gadamer that understanding is reflexive and that truth is a matter of consensus (Habermas 1988, 164), he argues that Gadamer overlooks the possibility that understanding and truth may be "systematically distorted" due to a lack of critical reflection upon their ideological basis (sc. Warnke 1987, 111). In such cases one must be able to forego the perspectives that such a prejudice may justify and investigate instead the social and historical conditions that have produced this prejudice in the first place (Ibid., 113). Habermas argues that the critical apparatus which hermeneutics requires cannot itself be conditioned by tradition, and so one must therefore account for extra-traditional factors that develop the meaning of truth in social and historical processes.

Habermas claims, then, that there are conditions for determining the validity of judgments that extend beyond the scope of hermeneutical reflection, and that therefore the hermeneutical event of truth must be situated within a larger framework that can reveal when this event is the product of ideological distortion. What hermeneutics requires in his view is "a system of reference that transcends the context of tradition as such" (Habermas 1988, 170). Furthermore, since language mediates our understanding of tradition, language also facilitates domination and force in understanding in line with some ideology (Ibid., 172). Thus the framework that Habermas wants to develop must transcend the medium of language as well.

Whereas Habermas insists that tradition must be subordinated within a broader conceptual framework, we will argue two things: first, that Gadamer successfully defends the universality of hermeneutical reflection by identifying historicity as an ontological precondition for understanding; and second, that the apprehension of historical being belongs to the historically effected consciousness, which understands this being primarily in terms of its probable or evident structure. The essential historicity of understanding means that truth is always historically mediated. Thus “what we understand truly and how we understand it changes as the historical horizon of inquiry shifts” (Wachterhauser 1999, 48). Furthermore, language, as the medium of the hermeneutical phenomenon, operates wherever understanding happens. Because the conditions which make it possible to discriminate between valid and invalid prejudices can and must be understood, Gadamer therefore maintains that language also mediates these conditions. Thus by virtue of its awareness of its effective history, hermeneutical consciousness does not require a broader, rational framework within which the validity of historically mediated principles can be determined, as it is by virtue of its awareness of its own historicity that hermeneutical reflection contains within itself the capacity to reflect upon tradition and identify those elements which contribute to the development of inauthentic forms of historical and social consciousness.

Importantly, Gadamer bases his defense of the universality of hermeneutical reflection within a conceptualization of philosophical rhetoric. Plato’s *Phaedrus* becomes a valuable resource for Gadamer here, as this dialogue illustrates how rhetorical language can be grounded in dialectic and thus oriented toward the ideas. In Gadamer’s view, the Socratic dialogue demonstrates that, consciously or not, all claims to knowledge and wisdom involve a “turning to the idea” that the interlocutors have in common (GR, 30). In light of this turn, Platonic dialectic

describes an “art of thinking” that reveals the inherent questionability of such claims (GR, 31). As a mode of persuasion, rhetoric by nature reflects the probable or evident nature of things rather than their certainty. Its dialectical function is thus to manifest our primary mode of insight into the structure of our shared reality. Thus the primary relevance of rhetoric to hermeneutics is that as a mode of inquiry into the nature of things it reflects not some kind of specialized insight, but a natural capacity that everyone possesses by virtue of having reason (PH, 20-21; RAS, 122), i.e. the inherent reflexivity in self-understanding and self-knowledge. This capacity identifies for Gadamer nothing less than the “natural disposition of man toward philosophy” through which thinking “is never satisfied in saying this or that” and is thus “constantly [pointing] beyond itself” (GR, 31).

We will begin this chapter with an overview of Habermas’ criticism of Gadamer’s hermeneutics. Then, we will elaborate Gadamer’s defense of the universality of hermeneutical reflection in response to Habermas’ criticism. In doing so, we will see that in mounting this defense Gadamer elevates tradition to the level of a transcendental subject, which is apprehended by the historically effected consciousness in terms of the probable or evident structure of traditional principles as these principles manifest themselves in particular historical contexts. Finally, we will elaborate Gadamer’s appropriation of Plato’s philosophical rhetoric as the mode of language that most closely attends to the evident nature of the things themselves, and which is therefore able to properly navigate our consciousness of tradition.

4.2: Habermas and the critique of ideology

Like Gadamer, Habermas is concerned with the conditions under which coming to a shared understanding becomes possible. He makes a distinction similar to Gadamer’s between

the natural and social sciences, which he terms “empirical-analytic” and “historical-hermeneutic” respectively. Each science refers to a sphere of inquiry that is governed by a mode of interest: the empirical-analytic sciences are governed by technical or instrumental interest; whereas the historical-hermeneutic sciences are governed by a practical interest in communication and meaning (Ricoeur 1981, 80-81). Developing a theory of practical activity within a social framework, Habermas situates the problem of understanding within the context of human action as witnessed through historical and social processes (Teigas 1995, 17). The articulation of meaning within the historical-hermeneutic sciences thus entails a “double hermeneutic”: coming to a shared understanding requires a sensitivity to both the normative framework which establishes a set of shared social values, practices, and beliefs, as well as the contingent circumstances of actions within this framework that illustrates their intentionality.⁹² By contrast, the empirical-analytic sciences separate this normative framework from the contingency of any hermeneutical situation. “Norms of actions” are detached from the practical, social framework that gives them meaning (Warnke 1987, 109) in order to organize experience within a “behavioural system of instrumental action” (Ricoeur 1981, 80).

Coming to a shared understanding within the social sciences is therefore a matter of knowing both the theoretical framework that dictates how forms of communication are constructed and the practical sense in which language is actually used to express meaning or intention. Habermas is therefore critical of attempts to construct a purely theoretical framework of human action and understanding. He finds that linguistic analysis, for example, tries to

⁹² Ricoeur illustrates the proximity between Gadamer and Habermas’ positions here. The domain of the historical-hermeneutic sciences, he explains, obtain understanding “through the interpretation of messages exchanged in ordinary language, by means of the interpretation of texts transmitted by tradition, and in virtue of the internalization of norms which institutionalize social roles” (Ricoeur 1981, 81). For Ricoeur, the exchange of meaning that is based on internalized norms expresses something very similar to the relation Gadamer identifies between fore-knowledge and interpretation, where the latter is “subsumed by the interpreter” to the conditions of the former (Ibid.).

develop a meta-language with which it would be possible to give a formal, external description of a culture or grammatical structure of a form of life (Habermas 1988, 136). This approach threatens to undermine the intimate unity between theory and praxis that develops the range of meanings of social interactions and forms of life. Habermas argues that a theory of linguistic analysis overlooks the implicit connection between “language and praxis” or “grammar and life form” (Ibid., 130) that properly attends to understanding as a form of consensus about a common subject matter. By contrast, a purely formal language would be monological; it could be understood without having to develop any practical skill (Ibid., 131) and would thereby disconnect the normative framework of language from human activity and social behavior (Ibid., 135).

The possibility of learning a new language illustrates for Habermas the short-sightedness of a purely formal theory of human action and meaning. If it were possible to give a formal description of a language and its corresponding lifeworld, the linguistic analyst would be able to adopt an alternative form of life freely. In other words, he would not require a point of reference in the form of life he has left behind. Habermas insists, however, that learning a language is both a theoretical and practical exercise (Ibid.). In his view, then, the point that linguistic analysis misses in wanting to ground the social sciences in pure theory is that learning a new language is not just a matter of transposing one theoretical framework for another, but rather of learning “the new language of value and practice from the ground up, as it were, by virtual participation, as a member, in the activities of a given group” (Warnke 1987, 110). Learning a new language and form of life is an issue of mediating between “different patterns of socialization,” and so understanding a foreign concept is therefore possible only insofar as this concept can be made meaningful within one’s own language and practical interests (Habermas 1988, 137, 146).

Habermas elaborates the possibility of achieving this consensus through Gadamer's approach to translation. According to Gadamer, translation is only possible if a common subject matter exists between the translator and whatever he is translating. Since learning a language requires actually living in it (TM, 386), translation is therefore a matter of coming to a shared understanding about this subject matter and not simply substituting one set of symbols for another (TM, 387). Similarly, Habermas rejects the positivist concept of an ideal meta-language that provides a set of general rules within which the plurality of linguistic frameworks operates (Habermas 1988, 132, 148). The translator, then, does not transpose himself into another language in order to learn it, just as the interpreter does not transpose himself into the mind of the author in order to understand a text (sc. Warnke 1987, 110-111). The translator, rather, "must preserve the character of his own language, the language into which he is translating, while still recognizing the value of the alien, even antagonistic character of the text and its expression" (TM, 388-389). As Warnke puts it, he learns to say in his own language what is said in another (Warnke 1987, 110).

For Habermas, one of the more salient features of Gadamer's hermeneutics is therefore the "tendency to self-transcendence that is inherent in the practice of language" (Habermas 1988, 144). A shared understanding for Gadamer is achieved through the fusion of horizons (TM, 390). Each individual language thus contains within itself the possibility of stepping outside itself and the worldview that it presents. It is for this reason, Habermas says, that we are never restricted to a single grammatical framework. Rather, "the first grammar that one masters also enables one to step outside of it and interpret something foreign, to make something that is incomprehensible intelligible, to put in one's own words what at first eludes one" (Habermas 1988, 143). Translation is therefore a productive activity, in that the assimilation of foreign meanings

develops the scope of one's own language and form of life. In this way hermeneutics clarifies for Habermas the conditions under which the social sciences obtain knowledge through communication and consensus (Warnke 1987, 111).

It is by virtue of its character of self-transcendence that Habermas claims that hermeneutics, in contrast to the methodology of the empirical-analytic sciences, can serve as the basis for the cultural sciences. According to his description of the logic of the hermeneutical circle, the anticipation of completeness in fore-knowledge has no "rigorous" content. Rather, the interpretive schema that fore-knowledge presupposes works as a hypothesis to be tested scientifically in its application within social and practical contexts. In this way hermeneutics reveals in ordinary language "the *empirical* content of individuated conditions of life while investigating *grammatical* structures."⁹³ These grammatical structures provide a normative framework for the cultural sciences, the apprehension of which develops internally through the operation of social processes. Thus the transcendental framework of a form of life is approached and understood empirically through the interpretation of its own language and language games (Habermas 1972, 194; sc. Teigas 1995, 100).

Habermas argues that despite the contribution that hermeneutics makes to the social sciences, Gadamer overlooks the possibility that a consensus will be "systematically distorted" through ideology. The problem Habermas identifies is not that understanding can be influenced by a prejudice or bias, but rather that hermeneutics lacks an appropriate critical apparatus that allows it to reflect upon tradition as the cause of this prejudice. As Alan How explains, the salient feature of Gadamer's account of language for Habermas is that Gadamer views language

⁹³ Habermas 1972, 173; emphasis his. Later he describes the hermeneutical circle in this context as follows: "The apparently circular method of a reciprocal explication of the parts in the light of a diffusely presunderstood whole and, conversely, of the whole in the reflection cast by the progressively more exactly defined parts may suffice for the interpretation of specific expressions of life and concrete developmental histories" (Ibid., 184-185).

as both “inwardly and outwardly porous” (How 1995, 123, 125). It is outwardly porous by virtue of its ability to translate and appropriate foreign meanings, and inwardly porous by virtue of its ability to evaluate its own internal, normative structure. For Gadamer, a conversation between two people who speak the same language involves minimally an exchange of different points of view, and so even here, where there is hardly any interruption in meaning, the hermeneutical task of coming to a shared understanding is still at work.⁹⁴ According to Habermas, however, Gadamer lends too much authority to tradition, to the point of identifying it as an absolute. Consequently, hermeneutic reflection loses its power of self-transcendence and thereby its ability to reflect upon its own internal, normative structures (Habermas 1988, 172). Without this critical apparatus, hermeneutics remains unable to confront those prejudices which distort meaning by conforming it to social or historical ideology, and unable to separate them from those prejudices which contribute to the development of social and historical processes.

Habermas thus moves the conditions for understanding and communication beyond the scope of hermeneutics in order to create the space for a critical apparatus that can locate and relieve the cause of distortions. He finds that Freudian psychoanalysis provides the solution to the problems surrounding the possibility of distorted communication. Teigas summarizes Habermas’ approach to psychoanalytically controlled interpretation as follows:

The analyst uses theoretical hypotheses, assumptions, and presuppositions which, while they can provide explanatory potential, they can, on the other hand, be thought of as parts of the overall cycle of a hermeneutical interpretation. Instead of moving between the

⁹⁴ TM, 388-389. For this reason I find that Donatella Ester Di Cesare misinterprets Gadamer’s view on translation when she writes the following: “Speaking is not translating. Rather speaking and translating are opposites and stand against each other. Speaking occurs in the everydayness of dialogue. Only where saying is interdicted by the encounter with the strangeness of the foreign language does speaking degenerate into translating. Thus, translating is not the primary modality of speaking” (Di Cesare 2012, 51). Gadamer says that hermeneutics operates within the space between familiarity and strangeness (TM, 295). Translating and speaking are hardly opposite, then, as understanding necessarily involves some form of translation in the sense of mediating between meanings. The translation of a foreign language is thus a specialized case of mediating between different worldviews rather than different perspectives within the same worldview.

parts and the whole, as in the hermeneutical circle, the whole here is understood in accordance with a fixed theory; it is preunderstood in specific guidelines which the psychoanalytic theory in use dictates. Also, the way in which the parts belong to the whole is also supplied by the theory. The symptomatic expressions are relayed to specific structures that generate them. The distortions can be traced upon explicit confusions between the prelinguistic and linguistic organization of symbols (as the theory informs us). (Teigas 1995, 152-153)

Whereas hermeneutics proceeds from preconceptions that are cultivated historically and elaborates the logic of the hermeneutical circle as a reciprocal process between the whole and its parts, the process of a controlled interpretation locates a causal relation between whole and part according to generalized patterns (Ibid., 153). Psychoanalysis uses a theoretical framework to evaluate normative behavioral patterns. With respect to language, psychoanalysis thereby corrects linguistic deformities that have become privatized in language games. The therapist traces these “desymbolized” meanings to their original symbolic form, allowing the patient to translate them back into public language (Warnke 1987, 125). With respect to social relations, the patient becomes aware of the otherwise unconscious motivations for his actions according to which he deviates from accepted social paradigms. The psychoanalytic approach to a “controlled interpretation” thus provides the cultural sciences with a method for evaluating prejudices, the lack of which is detrimental to Gadamer’s hermeneutics in Habermas’ view.

Using psychoanalysis as a model for this reflective activity, the social sciences can thereby incorporate dimensions of human action and interest that extend beyond the scope of tradition. This approach develops what Habermas calls an “ideal speech situation,” a model of communication free from distorting prejudices and ideology (Habermas 1980, 206). He claims that language mediates domination and power in addition to tradition, thereby necessitating the transition from hermeneutical reflection to a critique of ideology (Habermas 1988, 172). Similarly, in his program of universal pragmatics, Habermas defends the thesis that “not only

language but speech too—that is, the employment of sentences in utterances—is accessible to formal analysis” according to the methodology of a “reconstructive science” (Habermas 1998, 26). The notion of an ideal speech situation in effect tries to uphold the Enlightenment project of rational, unbiased inquiry against Gadamer’s criticism of this approach. It provides a space within which claims can be evaluated with certainty of their meaning by organizing these claims according to a universalized capacity to articulate meaning, rather than leaving this capacity relative to particular groups within a society (Ibid., 34-35).

Lorenzo Simpson’s description of transcendental ethnocentrism illustrates the deficiency in Gadamer’s hermeneutics that Habermas wants to identify.⁹⁵ Simpson argues that even though hermeneutical sensitivity to the cultural other is certainly necessary for cross-cultural understanding, Gadamer’s claim that Habermas’ project of emancipatory reflection “dissolve[s] all of the structures of intelligibility intrinsic to the culture in question” (Simpson 2016, 24) is misleading. Without an emancipatory element, the hermeneutical interpretation of other cultures inevitably remains rooted in cultural relativism (Ibid.). Simpson thus proposes a theory of transcendental ethnocentrism that does not presuppose *a priori* categories of truth and meaning, but still allows an outside observer to interpret the meaning of cultural practices without having to adopt their ideological background. He proposes that each culture can maintain its own internal standards of reasonable social interaction without precluding the possibility that these standards can change in light of an external claim that they themselves would find reasonable. In this sense, a “hermeneutically self-aware ethnocentrist” would be in a position to interpret the

⁹⁵ Habermas suggests correctly that the conditions for coming to a shared understanding must apply between geographical or cultural distances as well as temporal distances (Habermas 1988, 148; 151). Gadamer modifies his claim in *Truth and Method* that “only temporal distance can solve the question of critique in hermeneutics” to read that “often” temporal distance can accomplish this (TM, 376 n. 44). While this change likely indicates Gadamer’s awareness of the fact that tradition can sometimes perpetuate a distorted interpretation (Grondin 1990, 56), it suggests perhaps as well his recognition that the space between familiarity and strangeness exists vertically between different cultural groups and not just horizontally between different points in history.

cultural other using his own standards of meaning but without precluding the possibility that these standards may change in light of what his experience of the cultural other reveals (Ibid., 26). The grounds for critiquing social practices are therefore “*internal* to the cultural horizons that sustain those practices, grounds that make it unnecessary that critique appeal to anything beyond the standards of rationality and/or central vocabulary of a particular cultural group” (Ibid., 27; emphasis his). It becomes necessary to make such a critique when a cultural ideal is inherently biased or prejudiced, but insofar as Gadamer’s hermeneutics does not permit this level of reflection, i.e. upon cultural tradition as the cause of a distorting prejudice, it does not successfully move beyond the relative interests of a given cultural group.

Simpson extends Habermas’ appeal to the self-transcendent character of language which has the corresponding claim that, by recognizing that one’s own cultural ideal is not absolute, one can evaluate its internal standards of meaning from an external perspective. As Simpson explains, “if challenged in ways that are understandable to them, [a culture can] be held accountable to *reasons* that have a non-parochial purchase and that are binding for them” (Ibid., 28; emphasis his). Such a claim makes no appeal to transcendental categories, but rather appeals to normative standards within each culture through what Simpson calls “second-order rationality.” He suggests, as does Gadamer, that there is a general form of reasoning that everyone possesses by virtue of being a rational agent. Appealing to second-order rationality thereby makes it possible, Simpson suggests, to “intelligibly mark a distinction between what even everyone in a particular epistemic community *happens* to believe and what is, by their *own* lights, *reasonable* for them to believe” (Ibid.; emphasis his). A cross-cultural commitment to the standards of second-order rationality therefore implies that members of a cultural community

must assent to the greater force of reason beyond the scope of their own cultural tradition where this reason is presented.

Ricour explains that the source of this disagreement between the nature of self-reflection in Gadamer's hermeneutics and Habermas' critique of ideology is the initial starting point of their respective projects. Whereas Habermas begins with the "critical social sciences" which he connects to an interest in "emancipation," Gadamer's initial point of reference is the human sciences which are essentially concerned with the "renewal of cultural heritage in the historical present" (Ricoeur 1981, 82). The issue that Habermas takes with Gadamer's project, then, is that by grounding hermeneutical consciousness in history he does not allow for a non-traditional interpretation of meaning to take place:

From the outset, the destiny of Gadamer's hermeneutics is tied to these sciences. They can incorporate a critical moment, but they are inclined by nature to struggle against the alienating distancing of the aesthetic, historical and lingual consciousness [cf. PH, 4-8]. Consequently, they forbid the elevation of the critical instance above the recognition of authority and above the very tradition reinterpreted. The critical instance can be developed only as a moment subordinated to the consciousness of finitude and of dependence upon the figures of pre-understanding which always precede and envelop it. (Ibid.)

By contrast, the mode of self-reflection operative within the critical social sciences functions in order to reveal the dependency of meaning on the inherited authority of tradition. As the vehicle for the interest in emancipation from these dependencies, self-reflection thus provides the subject with a form of rational autonomy over and above the constraints of social and political institutions. The "critical instance" involved in Habermas' critique of ideology thus takes priority over Gadamer's hermeneutical consciousness (Ibid., 83).

Habermas argues that by experiencing the limits of a cultural tradition from within, one can recognize that tradition is not absolute, and that it is in fact one of many factors that jointly contribute to the development of social relations. What is therefore required is a framework

within which tradition becomes comprehensible through the extra-traditional factors that constitute social processes, “so that we can indicate the conditions external to tradition under which transcendental rules of worldview and action change empirically” (Habermas 1988, 174). Habermas argues that Gadamer does not notice that the “linguistic structures” of tradition and the “empirical conditions under which [these structures] change historically” are not themselves mediated by tradition. Rather, the extra-traditional factors manifest these things in and through tradition, operating “behind the back of language” and so affecting “the very grammatical rules in accordance with which we interpret the world” (Ibid.). For this reason Habermas claims that language, as the medium of tradition, is also a medium of domination and social power or labor, which he claims cannot be reduced to the kinds of normative relationships manifested in tradition. As Teigas explain, part of Habermas’ task is thus to see “whether there is a *different way of understanding meaning* methodologically, especially the meaning of distorted communication, which can avoid and ‘transcend’ the hermeneutic understanding” (Teigas 1995, 147; emphasis his). The proper, normative framework of the cultural sciences thus requires a marriage between the kind of methodology that an empirical-analytic procedure employs in order to obtain certainty on the one hand, and, on the other, the power of reflection and self-transcendence inherent in hermeneutics and ordinary language that extends from evidentness (sc. How 1995, 117).

4.3: The hermeneutical claim to universality

We saw briefly in chapter one that Gadamer does not consider the authority of tradition to be absolute. He explains that the acceptance of an authority figure is always based in reason and is far from implying a “subjection and abdication” of reason (TM, 281). It is reasonable to

trust the word of classical texts because of their timeless quality (TM, 290). Gadamer therefore rejects Habermas' proposed antithesis between tradition and reason as he finds that there is always a rational basis for the acceptance of an authoritative text. Habermas, he argues, defines tradition as a dogmatic power, and that for this reason the critique of ideology presupposes that understanding only happens when false or distorting prejudices are revealed through critical reflection (PH, 32-33). It is clear for Gadamer, however, that this antithesis is itself a form of dogmatism: "for behind this assertion stands a dogmatic objectivism that distorts the very concept of hermeneutical reflection itself" (PH, 28). He suggests that reason and tradition have an ambivalent relationship toward each other (PH, 33). In other words, the function of hermeneutical reflection to bring into question presuppositions of meaning implies that a prejudice can be validated or invalidated. With respect to authoritative texts, then, although it makes sense to acknowledge their authority on certain matters, this recognition cannot be made to imply that these texts are beyond any critical examination. Therefore, in response to Habermas' criticisms, Gadamer maintains not only that hermeneutical reflection is capable of bringing into question historical prejudices, but also that hermeneutical reflection is in fact a universal characteristic of human understanding.

Like Habermas, Gadamer wants to avoid the dogmatism that he finds is inherent in the scientific objectification of reality. Following Humboldt, he argues that each form of language constructs a "worldview," and, reciprocally, that the essence of language is the world it presents (TM, 440). Gadamer rejects, however, the presupposition of a "world in itself" (*Welt an sich*) that contains the criteria for the rational development of world and language (TM, 444). Rather, each worldview is a part contained within a whole, which does not exist *an sich* beyond these parts but is rather constituted by them:

In every worldview the existence of the world-in-itself is intended. It is the whole to which linguistically schematized experience refers. The multiplicity of these worldviews does not involve any relativization of the “world.” Rather, the world is not different from the views in which it presents itself. (TM, 444)

Similar to Habermas’ approach to forms of life and Simpson’s approach to cultural ideals, Gadamer identifies the mediation between different forms of language or worldviews as an act of translation or transposition that does not require the presupposition of *a priori* categories of truth. Each worldview can be extended into others, containing within itself the capacity for self-transcendence and thus for understanding the worldview presented in another language (TM, 445).

Habermas, as we saw, appeals to a transcendental schema that encompasses tradition and is approached through an empirical analysis of language (Teigas 1995, 100; Bernstein 1983, 185). He argues that promoting language as a universal medium of understanding causes Gadamer to overlook the fact that language must also mediate elements of force and domination which only propagate deceptions within language (Habermas 1988, 172-173; How 1995, 145). The linguistic presentation of a worldview thus requires for Habermas a comprehension of language as something that is, on the one hand, internal to a cultural tradition, and on the other, situated within a larger reference system “so that we can indicate the conditions external to tradition under which transcendental rules of worldview and action change empirically” (Habermas 1988, 174).

In contrast to Habermas’ empirical analysis of the grammatical structure of the life world, Gadamer prioritizes the ontological question of the meaning of being as it is available for presentation in language. To illustrate the difference between an empirical and ontological approach to this question, Gadamer distinguishes between aesthetic and historical consciousness on the one hand, and hermeneutical consciousness on the other. The former modes of

consciousness, Gadamer explains, attempt to objectify things scientifically in order to control or manipulate them. In doing so, the aesthetic or historical critic becomes alienated from the ontological question of the things themselves, leaving them unable to access this primary claim to truth (PH, 5).

Gadamer explains that attempts to mitigate this problem by developing a “science of hermeneutics” result in the same alienating experience that occurs in aesthetic and historical consciousness. The goal of Schleiermacher’s hermeneutical project, for example, was to develop a method of avoiding misunderstanding. Although to exclude “by controlled, methodical consideration whatever is alien and leads to misunderstanding” is not an unfair description of the hermeneutical task in Gadamer’s view (PH, 7), this formulation nonetheless belies a more fundamental experience. The possibility of coming to a shared understanding, of bridging the gap between familiarity and strangeness, already presupposes a consensus: “I may say “thou” and I may refer to myself over against a thou, but a common understanding [*Verständigung*] always precedes these situations” (PH, 7). Thus while avoiding misunderstanding through a controllable method is certainly relevant to hermeneutical interests, “it is only a partial description of a comprehensive life-phenomenon that constitutes the ‘we’ that we all are” (PH, 8). Gadamer claims that the hermeneutical task is therefore to overcome the alienating experience of aesthetic and historical consciousness and scientific hermeneutics, as there is a mode of being of the things themselves that is common to these modes of consciousness that precedes any scientific judgment.

The experience of the things themselves in hermeneutics is a negative experience. To explain what this means, Gadamer borrows the concept of a “determinate negation” from Hegel (TM, 348). The space between familiarity and strangeness is where the interpreter encounters a

different form of language to reflect an otherwise familiar concept. In other words, he encounters a different possibility of what this concept means for someone. Hegelian dialectic is significant for Gadamer because it gives experience the structure of a “reversal of consciousness” according to which consciousness has an experience of itself. Gadamer quotes Hegel’s explanation of this kind of experience:

The principle of experience contains the infinitely important element that in order to accept a content as true, the man himself must be present or, more precisely, he must find such content in unity and combined with the certainty of himself. (*Encyclopedia*, §7; TM, 349)

The concept of experience, Gadamer continues, means just that this unity with oneself is established in the reversal of consciousness: “[Consciousness] recognizes itself in what is alien and different” (TM, 349). Hegelian dialectical experience is therefore productive with respect to the meaning of being, as the “new object [of consciousness] contains the truth about the old one” (TM, 349). The interpreter obtains a more comprehensive knowledge of the matter at hand by understanding for himself what this subject matter can mean for someone else.

Gadamer indicates, however, that the relevance of Hegelian dialectic to philosophical hermeneutics does not extend any further. He writes that for Hegel, dialectic “must end in that overcoming of all experience which is attained in absolute knowledge—i.e., in the complete identity of consciousness and object” (TM, 349). While hermeneutics grants the validity of the phenomenological presupposition of the prior unity between subject and object, and furthermore has a certain implicit teleology, it always keeps the absolute unity between thinking and being at a distance. Our existence is fundamentally historical, and so understanding, both of ourselves and of *die Sache*, cannot be complete as this knowledge is always being developed (TM, 301).

Gadamer does not want to overcome the tension between familiarity and strangeness but rather

to clarify the conditions under which it remains productive for understanding.⁹⁶ With respect to our historical identity, then, “applying Hegel’s dialectic to history, insofar as he regarded it as part of the absolute self-consciousness of philosophy, does not do justice to hermeneutical consciousness” (TM, 349). Experience for Gadamer is essentially experience of human finitude and uncertainty (TM, 351). Therefore, experience cannot culminate in the transcendence of finitude as doing so would necessarily move beyond history and tradition. As above, the fact that experience remains situated within tradition does not imply that tradition is absolute. Rather, genuine experience, as characterized by its essential openness to new experience, engenders a radically undogmatic perspective toward history and tradition (TM, 350).

The hermeneutical experience of human finitude is linguistic and dialogical. Genuine experience is necessarily an experience of the other, of another claim about meaning, in a way that lets the other respond to one’s own claim (TM, 355). The openness to the other that Gadamer describes here is fundamental to hermeneutical experience because of the demand it maintains throughout the process of understanding: openness to the other, Gadamer writes, “involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so” (TM, 355). For Habermas, the idea of unconstrained communication presupposes that there are certain “universal validity claims” which must be recognized in order to obtain a consensus in a dialogue with others (Habermas 1979, 97). He suggests furthermore that for Gadamer the meanings that are transmitted through history have a normative function as well. There is certainly a dimension of normativity implicit in Gadamer’s concepts of dialogue and experience. The autonomous mode of being that belongs to the things themselves means that

⁹⁶ Thus: “Nous fondons la tâche herméneutique précisément sur la tension qui existe entre la «familiarité» et le caractère «étranger» du message que nous transmet la tradition. [...] Ce n’est pas un état psychique mais la «chose même» livrée par la tradition qui est l’objet de l’interrogation herméneutique. En ce qui concerne le caractère à la fois «familier» et «étranger» des messages historiques, l’herméneutique réclame en quelque sorte une «position de médiateur»” (Gadamer 1996, 85-86).

language, as the “preliminary medium that encompasses all beings insofar as they can be expressed in words,” is primarily the language of the things themselves and not their correspondence to human thought (PH, 77). The things themselves are, as Wachterhauser puts it, the “beginning and end of all inquiry;” the intelligibility that belongs to language “is not to supplant the intelligibility of things but to complement and complete that intelligibility in such a way that the things themselves become more manifest and provide the final warrant for any justifiable articulation.”⁹⁷

A central point of contention between Gadamer and Habermas concerns the content of our awareness of these norms and how they can be implemented in social institutions through communication. As discussed earlier, for Habermas the transcendental framework of a form of life can be apprehended through an empirical analysis of its grammar and language games (Habermas 1972, 194; 1988, 174). As Bernstein explains, in order for universal validity claims to be appropriately realized as normative concepts in social institutions, the institutions themselves must be organized in such a way that they do not block or distort communication that serves this analysis (Bernstein 1983, 190). It is for this reason that Habermas argues that tradition must be subordinated within a larger, rational framework of communication. Bernstein writes, “Whatever role authority may play [in communication], it is not sufficient when challenges are made to the validity of such universal norms. The norms can only be validated by the *participants* in a practical discourse” (Ibid., 190; emphasis his).

⁹⁷ Wachterhauser 1999, 9. In his essay, “Y a-t-il de l’universel dans l’action,” Bertrand Saint-Sernin argues that a universal element of human activity must satisfy three conditions: first, this element must be treated mathematically; second, the actors must reach a good level of self-knowledge; and third, the sequence of cause and effect must be controlled. He concludes that only a divine entity could satisfy these conditions, as the inherent finitude of human knowledge and experience precludes us from such an all-encompassing vision (Saint-Sernin 2009, 58). Indeed, as Plato and Gadamer suggest, such mathematical insight into the nature of universal forms is merely a prerequisite to dialectical knowledge, which recognizes its inherent limitations.

By virtue of its essential dialogical framework, the hermeneutical experience of tradition is analogous to the experience of the other, as this experience demands an openness to tradition's "claim to validity" in a way that this claim "has something to say to me" (TM, 355). It is for this reason that Habermas claims that, because tradition represents an ideological force, recognizing the validity of meaning that has been passed down through tradition only reinforces the structure of those institutions that distort communication. Gadamer contends that the consequence of this position, i.e. that within hermeneutics tradition is "the only ground for acceptance of presuppositions," is misleading. The authority that belongs to tradition, he explains, "is rooted in insight as a hermeneutical process" (PH, 34). Hermeneutical experience, in other words, as an experience of the voice of tradition, functions in order to validate or invalidate traditional meaning. For this reason Gadamer finds that Habermas employs an idealist conception of reflection that falsely objectifies the nature of the institutions within which human reason is developed through communication and dialogue (PH, 35). This idealism "culminates in questioning the immanentism of transcendental philosophy with respect to its historical conditions, conditions upon which [Habermas] himself is dependent."⁹⁸ We cannot remove ourselves from the movement of history and experience. If the members of a community were to endorse Habermas' ideal of unconstrained communication, the fact remains that any universal validity claims which emerge would always be implemented historically. As such, these validity claims could never preclude the possibility that other claims will emerge.

⁹⁸ PH, 36. Insofar as Habermas presents his theory of communicative action as a "reconstructive science" of the ideal conditions for unconstrained communication, it is questionable whether or not this theory a "failed transcendental argument that only feeds into relativism and decisionism" (Bernstein 1983, 194). As a solution to this difficulty, Bernstein suggests that Habermas can be understood as promoting a teleological orientation within communication toward mutual understanding. In this way, communication necessarily involves a "claim to reason" that "directs us to overcoming systematically distorted communication" and institute universal normative validity claims in social and political institutions (Ibid., 195). This approach, however, brings Habermas into closer proximity with Gadamer, as both thinkers advocate, albeit in different ways, for the possibility of engaging in critical reflection of our historical situation (Ibid., 196).

Therefore, the essential negativity of hermeneutical experience already contains insight into the possibility that understanding can be distorted. The point of reflecting upon presuppositions of meaning is to “bring before me something that otherwise happens *behind my back*,” and so it is clear for Gadamer that freeing oneself of the constraints of ideology cannot happen without self-reflection (PH, 38; emphasis his). Prejudices are therefore constantly being called into question throughout the process of becoming experienced. In light of the claim that hermeneutical reflection is universal, Gadamer insists that this function of reflection is just as relevant to the natural sciences as it is the human sciences. It can assist the “methodological endeavor” of science “by making transparently clear the guiding preunderstandings in the sciences and thereby open new dimensions of questioning.”⁹⁹

Experience is therefore the basis of historical understanding, and history is the basis of experience. Hermeneutical reflection situates “new dimensions of questioning” in an historical context, such that both the formal and material conditions for understanding may be subject to reciprocal change throughout the process of becoming experienced. For Habermas, speech is distorted if the material conditions for understanding do not adequately embody universal validity claims. As above, these conditions must reflect an ideal speech situation, i.e. the formal conditions for understanding.¹⁰⁰ Gadamer claims, in contrast, that “in view of the [negative] experience that we have of another object, both things change—our knowledge and its object.

⁹⁹ PH, 39. Bernstein argues that it remains unclear how Habermas thinks that his theory of communicative action as a “reconstructive science” would be better at implementing an ideal speech situation than an empirical-analytic approach: “I agree with Habermas that there are no good reasons to rule out the viability of scientific reconstructive theories. But there are also no good reasons to rule out the possibility that such analyses and theories might be replaced or displaced by new, sophisticated empirical-analytic theories” (Bernstein 1983, 192). The salient point, Bernstein suggests, is that it is “methodologically prudent to be open to different types of research programs” (Ibid.). Gadamer’s point, then, is that the value of this openness is constantly reaffirmed through the essential negativity of hermeneutical experience.

¹⁰⁰ As Bernstein explains, for Habermas “there is a type of argumentation and rationality that is appropriate for the redemption of universal normative validity claims,” and so he endeavors to establish a program of universal pragmatics that can “identify and reconstruct the universal conditions of possible understanding” (Bernstein 1983, 186-187).

We know better now, and that means that the object itself ‘does not pass the test.’ The new object contains the truth about the old one” (TM, 349). This effect is part of the “reversal of consciousness” that Gadamer appropriates from Hegel. By grounding understanding in history and experience, Gadamer allows for a reciprocal transformation in the material and formal conditions for understanding which plays out as effective history.¹⁰¹

It is therefore in light of the historically effected consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*) that Gadamer asserts the primacy of prejudices for hermeneutical understanding. It is by virtue of the inherent reflective activity of this consciousness that prejudices are effective and productive:

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 world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something—whereby what we encounter says something to us. (PH, 9)

As we saw, one of the more salient features of hermeneutics for Habermas is its capacity for “self-transcendence.” The capacity for historical consciousness to reflect upon its prejudgments is vital for both hermeneutics and the social sciences, as it can counter the false objectivism of positivist sciences. The development of historical consciousness necessitates that each horizon, by virtue of its finitude, is essentially open and subject to change via its fusion with another

¹⁰¹ One might object that Gadamer’s approach effectively renders understanding groundless if the conditions under which we obtain truth are constantly being brought into question. Gadamer addresses this concern in his foreword to the second, German edition of *Truth and Method*: “Hence the present investigations do not fulfill the demand for a reflexive self-grounding made from the viewpoint of the speculative transcendental philosophy of Fichte, Hegel, and Husserl. But is the dialogue with the whole of our philosophical tradition—a dialogue in which we stand and which as philosophers, we are—groundless? Does what has always supported us need to be grounded?” (TM, xxxiii). Wachterhauser summarizes Gadamer’s positions as follows: “Gadamer argues that there is a kind of self-validating truth that is available to those who are willing to participate in the dialogue of question and answer which we find in the philosophical tradition. This implies a rejection of the equation of knowledge with certainty, an equation which itself generates the skeptic’s unanswerable doubt. Instead, Gadamer insists on a self-validating truth which does not pretend to deliver certainty but which nevertheless argues that many things that are not certain can be known and are true. This pertains especially to those truths we confront in the human sciences. Either we accept such truths as valid on their own terms or not. We cannot find an ultimate foundation or final justification for such truths. They are simply part of our experience, an experience we cannot finally step outside of in order to justify from a standpoint outside of it” (Wachterhauser 1999, 12).

worldview. This fusion does not involve forgoing one's own horizon and transposing oneself into another, just as learning a new language does not mean abandoning one's own. Rather, the notion of a transposition between historical frameworks belongs to the naïve methodology of historical science which objectifies the content of the past, thereby suspending the relevance of its truth-claim for the present situation of the historian (TM, 300 ff.). This methodological approach furthermore undermines the ontological situation of the historian by divorcing him from his own essential historicity, and thus his self-understanding in relation to the tradition he interprets.

Gadamer is also skeptical of the implication he sees in Habermas' criticism of tradition, namely that prejudices are only ideological, such that critical reflection functions only to overturn them. In his view, Habermas wants to utilize the concept of effective history as a way for the social sciences to reflect upon the content of their fore-knowledge, but in a manner that gives them control over the future direction of this knowledge. Doing so will allow the social sciences to project a universal history for the members of a community without which the future that each individual member anticipates remains provisional at best (PH, 27-28). Gadamer claims, however, that Habermas' position entails a dogmatic opposition between the natural development of tradition and its "reflective appropriation." He argues that the projection of a universal history objectifies the content of history, and in doing so alienates individual consciousness from the history that is constantly operative within understanding. Habermas' approach implies, in other words, that the understanding of each individual observer is no longer a part of the event that constitutes his own historical situation (PH, 28).

Gadamer therefore argues that this reflective activity does not function outside of effective history. Rather, it justifies those prejudices which remain productive for the

development of hermeneutical consciousness and undermines those which do not (PH, 32-33). Consciousness of effective history thus performs its own double hermeneutic. It “determines in advance both what seems to us worth inquiring about and what will appear as an object of investigation” in light of one’s historical situation, but this determination inevitably changes in light of the total structure of the tradition that encompasses each historical horizon (TM, 300). Although the possibilities that this projection will open up can never be fully understood due to the natural limit of historical vision, Gadamer insists that the consciousness of effective history has the ability both to validate legitimate prejudices and to bring into relief elements of dogmatism or domination in tradition that distort understanding. The historically effected consciousness functions in part by “finding the right questions to ask” (TM, 301), but the very nature of the question implies that it does not necessarily conform to conventions. The “right question” could be the one that disrupts a socio-political practice which has perpetuated the subordination of one group of people to another.

For Gadamer, the historically effected consciousness is intrinsically related to the linguistic presentation of a worldview. The constant development of a language and its worldview unfolds as effective history. Importantly, Gadamer indicates that consciousness of effective history implies an awareness of the internal, normative guidelines of the linguistic constitution of the world:

The consciousness that is effected by history has its fulfillment in what is linguistic. We can learn from the sensitive student of language that language, in its life and occurrence, must not be thought of as merely changing, but rather as something that has a teleology operating within it. This means that the words that are formed, the means of expression that appear in a language in order to say certain things, are not accidentally fixed, since they do not once again fall altogether into disuse. Instead, a definite articulation of the world is built up—a process that works as if guided and one that we can always observe in children who are learning to speak. (PH, 13)

In contrast to Habermas' claim that "linguistic structures and the empirical conditions under which they change historically" remain external to tradition (Habermas 1988, 174), Gadamer maintains that the formal conditions for the development of hermeneutical consciousness are themselves historically mediated. These conditions are therefore subject to revision via reflection on tradition and effective history. The historian, for example, who approaches history as a critical science is "so little separated from the ongoing traditions (for example, those of his nation) that he is *really himself engaged* in contributing to the growth and development of the national state."¹⁰² The historian comes to understand himself just as much as the historical object. In this respect Gadamer states that the historically effected consciousness, which achieves self-understanding by bringing our prejudices to the fore, is "inevitably more *being* than consciousness" (PH, 38; emphasis his). The "right question" that emerges through consciousness of effective history thus belongs to the understanding of oneself as historical, that is, as historically situated.

It is by virtue of its unique sensitivity to the evident or questionable nature of judgments and assertions that Gadamer claims that hermeneutical reflection has a universal function within human understanding.¹⁰³ Habermas argues, however, that this ambiguity in language is susceptible to pseudo-communication. The psychoanalytic approach to a controlled interpretation is meant to reinforce generalized patterns that follow a causal relation between universal and particular in an ideal speech situation. On this approach it is possible to achieve an "unforced universal agreement" which Habermas claims can avoid the possibility of pseudo-communication (Habermas 1980, 206). But precisely because it is an ideal it is questionable if

¹⁰² PH, 28; emphasis his. For the same reason Gadamer claims that Habermas overlooks the fact that his critique of language and tradition is itself an act of linguistic and historical reflection (PH, 30).

¹⁰³ By contrast, insofar as psychoanalytic emancipation cannot account for cases where tradition is not ideological it cannot claim the same status (Teigas 1995, 131). Were it given this status, Gadamer argues, this form of reflection would entail the "dissolution of all authority" and establish an "anarchistic utopia" in the social sciences (PH, 42).

this situation can be meaningfully realized in any practical sense.¹⁰⁴ Hypostasizing an ideal form of speech betrays the fact that beyond the context of their clinical relationship the analyst and patient are on even terms with everyone else in a larger social community. For this reason Gadamer claims that psychoanalytic emancipation is in fact a specialized form of hermeneutic reflection that has its own specific area of application (PH, 41-42). The hermeneutical relation between whole and part, in contrast to a causal relation, is reciprocal. As such, it operates prior to the empirical relation between general and particular that Habermas elevates to an ideal. Human understanding and human nature are both essentially historical and finite, and so in becoming experienced “man is ceaselessly forming a new preunderstanding” which in turn is brought into question via hermeneutical reflection (PH, 38). This activity, as we saw, is an essential feature of understanding and so applies just as much to the natural sciences as it does any other field by enabling them to bring their own presuppositions into question (PH, 39).

The historically effected consciousness therefore achieves the hermeneutical task of avoiding alienating forms of consciousness by identifying the historicity of consciousness as an ontological precondition for understanding. “The true historical object,” Gadamer writes, “is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other, a relationship that constitutes both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding” (TM, 299). The horizons of the past and present thereby constitute “one great horizon that moves from within and that, beyond the frontiers of the present, embraces the historical depths of our self-consciousness” (TM, 303). The historically effected consciousness takes neither a subjective nor an objective stance toward history. True historical knowledge, which the fusion of horizons achieves, reflects the fact that

¹⁰⁴ Sc. Grondin 2000, 483-484. This approach also depends upon a prior distinction between normal and abnormal forms of communication and social behavior (Warnke 1995, 127). This distinction is arguably the product of a cultural bias, and so it is questionable how it might be universalized on a large scale within any given cultural group.

the horizons of the past and the present constitute a single, historical horizon that embraces them both (TM, 303). The fusion of horizons thus involves “rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other,” such that acquiring a horizon means that “one learns to look beyond what is close at hand—not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion” (TM, 304).

4.4: Philosophical rhetoric

The logical priority of the question over the answer is an essential component in the hermeneutical claim to universality. In his defense of the ubiquity of hermeneutical reflection and the medium of language, Gadamer contends that ideology can be more appropriately understood as a form of “false linguistic consciousness,” which can be made meaningful and intelligible as ideology through hermeneutical reflection (PH, 31). Belonging to the presentation of a worldview, an ideological form of consciousness takes the form of a “closed” question, in that the guiding concept of this form of consciousness has been restricted dogmatically to a range of allowable meanings. A closed question, in other words, rigidly maintains certain presuppositions of meaning. In doing so, it precludes the openness that is necessary for a genuine, hermeneutical experience of the other and for a more comprehensive understanding of their common object (TM, 357). By creating the space for self-reflection, the dialogical framework of hermeneutics thus enables one to encounter forms of dogmatism which distort understanding and modify one’s prejudices toward meaning accordingly. Emancipating the

interpreter from this false consciousness therefore also emancipates the idea itself, allowing the idea to assert its own meaning openly and autonomously.¹⁰⁵

Gadamer is careful to emphasize that the openness of a question is not a total openness. The significance of the question is that what it brings into question remains indeterminate. A key feature of this indeterminacy is, somewhat paradoxically, its limitation to the nature of the subject matter and the scope of possible answers (TM, 357). Without a horizon, the question remains empty (*leeren*) rather than open (*offen*). Its sense remains *utterly* indeterminate and therefore receptive to any interpretation whatsoever. Elsewhere, Gadamer explains that a pre-condition for the articulation of meaning is that judgments must be made in light of the necessary structure of the things themselves, but that this structure is articulated according to its manifestation in contingent circumstances. He refers to Hegel's notion of "freedom for all" as the situation in which every rational agent can claim to interpret, and therefore know history. Each claim to historical knowledge is accidental by nature, as it reflects only the limited perspective of each interpreter. These claims do not contradict the idea of a necessary, intelligible order, but instead highlight aspects of this necessity. In this way history is something that can provide "freedom for all": it is an "irrefutable principle and yet still requires ever anew the effort toward achieving its realization" (RAS, 10). To understand this point, Gadamer says, is to understand the "dialectical relationship of necessity and contingency" (RAS, 10). The question of the meaning of being reflects the same relation between necessity and contingency. Properly asked, the question is neither closed so that it coheres with predetermined answers, nor empty so

¹⁰⁵ Gadamer explains that a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be sensitive to alternative meanings. That is, hermeneutic consciousness naturally brings with it a preconception of meaning, but it does not cling to these preconceptions in the face of another point of view. Its sensitivity to alterity, then, "involves neither 'neutrality' with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings" (TM, 271-272).

that it has no actual, substantive content. Rather, in a genuine dialogue the back-and-forth of question and answer has its scope determined by the structure of the subject matter in question, and at the same time this subject is presented in the context of the dialogue itself, that is, the contingent circumstances of the interlocutors.

An essential feature of language in a genuine dialogue is therefore its “I-lessness” (PH, 65). The interlocutors subordinate themselves to their shared subject matter such that any response, though particular to certain circumstances, is elicited from the subject matter itself:

When one enters into dialogue with another person and then is carried along further by the dialogue, it is no longer the will of the individual person, holding itself back or exposing itself, that is determinative. Rather, the law of the subject matter is at issue in the dialogue and elicits statement and counterstatement and in the end plays them into each other. (PH, 66)

Within hermeneutics, then, the “art” of communication achieves a shared understanding as the “coming-into-language [*Zur-Sprache-kommen*] of the thing itself” (TM, 371; WM, 384). The shared understanding that is the product of the fusion of horizons and the historically effected consciousness is really this achievement of language, i.e. the presentation of the things themselves in the linguistic constitution of a worldview.

In his essay “The Nature of Things and the Language of Things,” Gadamer comments on the tension between autonomous and non-autonomous identifications of being. In his view, this tension creates a dualism between the subjectivity of the human will and the objectivity of being-in-itself.¹⁰⁶ Likewise, in *Truth and Method* Gadamer rejects the identification of a being-in-itself

¹⁰⁶ Here, the latter view prioritizes the human capacity for self-determination, and thus understands reality as something that exists for us. Gadamer explains that the Neo-Kantian attempt to renew idealism took this approach in seeking “the total determination of the object by cognition” through a rejection of metaphysical idealism and, in fact, Kantian dualism (PH, 72-73). The former view prioritizes the independent existence of beings as things that resist our will to manipulate and to which we must accommodate ourselves. Gadamer explains that his former teacher, Nicolai Hartmann, took this approach in rejecting the transcendental idealism of Neo-Kantianism and promoted the autonomy of beings over and above human subjectivity (PH, 73). For his part, Gadamer finds that these views exist in a dialectical tension which can be resolved, as we will see, through an appeal to classical Greek metaphysics.

as this inevitably leads to the same tension between human will and objective being (TM, 447). The particular problem he identifies is that the modern scientific approach exhibits control over its object by confining it to the space within which it is known with certainty. Gadamer contrasts this approach with the Greek notion of being-in-itself (καθ' αὐτό), which we saw in the previous chapter is intelligible through its presence in particular things. The significant implication here is that knowledge of being becomes accessible through its appearances and is therefore manifested in what is evident and contingent rather than what is certain. The relation between necessary and contingent knowledge and experience, and the linguistic manifestation of the necessary structure of the ideas, was outlined in the previous chapter, particularly our discussion of the *Sophist*.

Gadamer proposes that classical metaphysics avoids the dualism between the subjectivity of the human will and the objectivity of being-in-itself by assuming a prior unity between thought and being (PH, 74). Language, as the medium of their correlation, thereby obviates the tension between subjectivity and objectivity by reflecting their co-determination rather than the correspondence of one to the other (PH, 75). As above, the achievement of language is its ability to present the nature of the things themselves in and through a dialogue about this nature. In other words, the necessary structure of being is manifested through nothing other than the subjective standpoints involved in a conversation.

Importantly, the ability of language to mediate between subjectivity and objectivity suggests that language can also mediate the conditions that permit a distinction between valid and invalid articulations of meaning. We saw in the previous chapter that an assertion about the meaning of being must reflect an ontological possibility that belongs to the things themselves. Furthermore, given the dialogical character of understanding, assertions must also be commensurate with each other if the interlocutors in a conversation are to genuinely come a

shared understanding. Thus if hermeneutical reflection is truly universal in its scope, then it must also encompass the conditions for meaningful discourse as they emerge through the process of conversation and reflection. Hermeneutics must, in Gadamer's view, "[give] account of what its own kind of reflection achieves" (PH, 38). This concern with identifying a measure of truth within reflection is about more than just establishing the conditions under which articulating the meaning of being is sensible to others. This concern has to do with how statements about things become meaningful to others as possible truths about a shared subject matter such that together they develop a more substantive and comprehensive knowledge of it.

Gadamer focuses on Plato's approach to philosophical rhetoric as the mode of language that properly mediates between stable, unchanging ideas and their shifting array of appearances. He finds that rhetoric, as developed in the Platonic tradition, is uniquely suited to the universal function of hermeneutical reflection:

Rhetoric from oldest tradition has been the only advocate of a claim to truth that defends the probable, the *eikós* (verisimile), and that which is convincing to the ordinary reason, against the claim of science to accept as true only what can be demonstrated and tested! Convincing and persuading, without being able to prove—these are obviously as much the aim and measure of understanding and interpretation as they are the aim and measure of the art of oration and persuasion. And this whole wide realm of convincing "persuasions" and generally reigning views has not been gradually narrowed by the progress of science, however great it has been; rather, this realm extends to take in every new product of scientific endeavor, claiming it for itself and bringing it within its scope. (PH, 24)

Gadamer suggests that philosophical rhetoric illustrates how language can present a claim whose meaning is grounded in evidence and not certainty, and in a way that it can be understood and evaluated by another person.¹⁰⁷ In the quotation above he is not trying to undermine the value of certainty within the natural sciences. Rather, he is suggesting that, should natural scientists claim that their research has purchase beyond the scope of their field, this claim depends on their

¹⁰⁷ For a discussion ancient rhetoric and its relation to persuasion and validity, see Danblon 2010.

ability to persuade non-specialists of its legitimacy. As understanding always begins in the evident structure of things, the universality of rhetoric is thus proportional, in Gadamer's view, with the universality of hermeneutical reflection (PH, 24-25).

Commenting on his claim that the historically effected consciousness is "more being than consciousness," Gadamer explains that his principle concern in making this claim was to express the "philosophical issue of accountability." He writes, "In this context I asked: in how far is method a guarantor of truth? It is the role of philosophy to make us aware that science and method have a limited place within the whole of human *Existenz* and its rationality" (GR, 24). The fundamental linguisticity of all human understanding means that the common ground that exists between people is ultimately the linguistic constitution of the world itself. "Every attempt by means of critical reflection and argumentation to contend against distortions in interhuman communication only confirms this commonality" (GR, 25). In this respect, the goal of hermeneutical philosophy is to lead us "back to the uttering of what is meant and back to the things we have in common, the solidarities that are the bearers of our speaking" (GR, 26). In contrast to scientific efforts to exhibit things only in terms of certainty, hermeneutics turns to the things themselves because it recognizes that the fundamental ground of human knowledge is questionable and uncertain. Gadamer therefore emphasizes the "rationality of the rhetorical way of arguing," which "works with arguments and with probabilities" and is thus "a far more determining factor in society than the excellence of science" (GR, 27). As above, Gadamer's point is not that methodological certainty is not inherently valuable, but rather that the "monologicality of science" must be integrated into a greater collective consciousness involving social and political institutions.

Gadamer explains that he utilizes classical metaphysics and specifically Plato's theory of ideas in order to promote Platonic dialectic as a model for hermeneutical reflection. Specifically, Platonic dialectic develops an "art of thinking" that is both a natural, human capacity and one that involves the hermeneutical "turning to the ideas" that we have in common and that unite us in conversation. The acceptance of the ideas, Gadamer writes:

does not designate the acceptance of a doctrine so much as a way of questioning that the doctrine has the task of developing and discussing. This is the Platonic dialectic. Dialectic is the art of having a conversation and includes the art of having a conversation with oneself and fervently seeking an understanding of oneself. It is the art of thinking. But this means the art of seriously questioning what one really means when one thinks or says this or that. In doing so, one sets out on a journey, or better, is already on the journey. For there is something like a "natural disposition of man toward philosophy." (GR, 31)

The notion of an art of thinking might imply that there is some kind of normative framework within which coming to a shared understanding is achieved. With respect to the power of language to present a worldview or form of life, Gadamer and Habermas agree that these things develop through our practical involvement in the world and socio-political processes. For Gadamer, however, understanding "is not dependent on an explicit awareness of the rules that guide and govern it. It builds, as does rhetoric, on a natural power that everyone possesses to some degree" (PH, 20-21). We all possess language: Gadamer maintains Aristotle's definition of the human being as the ζῶον λόγον ἔχον, the living thing with language (PH, 59-60), and so we all possess the ability to articulate and communicate meaning as part of our natural existence. Rhetoric reflects the already finite and open character of judgment and the possibility, fundamental to both Platonic dialectic and Gadamerian hermeneutics, that "truth" can mean different things in different contexts. Thus by growing up within a language and participating in linguistic and social processes one becomes acquainted with how the world can be presented in

that language (PH, 62-63), but not necessarily through formal instruction in rules of grammar and syntax (PH, 64).

Gadamer suggests as well that there is a dialectical art that pertains to speaking and writing which aids thought and understanding. Specifically, this art produces clarity in meaning where there is otherwise ambiguity (TM, 394-395). The common subject matter of a dialogue frames the conversation between the interlocutors, but obviously they must communicate with each other in a way that is mutually understandable in light of this subject matter. The sophistical counterpart of this art, then, does not produce obscurity but rather diminishes the scope of the question even to the point that there can be only one possible answer, namely whatever answer the sophist wants from his interlocutor.

It is helpful to consider at this point some of the key principles that contribute to Plato's development of philosophical rhetoric and that are relevant to Gadamer's hermeneutics. In the *Phaedrus*, after delivering a series of speeches on love (ἔρωτες), Socrates brings into question the difference between good and bad speaking or writing (*Phaedr.* 258d). He suggests first that in order to speak well about something the speaker must know (εἰδέναι) the truth about his subject. Phaedrus points out, in what is surely intended irony on Plato's part, that a good orator does not necessarily have to know (μανθάνειν) what is actually "good and noble" but only what most people suppose (δοκεῖν) is good and noble, as persuasion has to do with appearances and not truth.¹⁰⁸ Socrates argues in response that a skilled orator could only convince people that base things are good, and so incite them to perform vicious acts, unless he has actual knowledge of the good. It would be as if the orator, having no real knowledge of the difference between a

¹⁰⁸ οὐδὲ τὰ ὄντως ἀγαθὰ ἢ καλὰ, ἀλλ' ὅσα δόξει ἑκ τούτων εἶναι τὸ πείθειν, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας (*Phaedr.* 260a).

donkey and a horse, tried to convince someone who also does not know their difference that a horse is a donkey (*Phaedr.* 260b-c).

This preliminary exchange brings into question whether rhetoric really is an art (τέχνη) or a non-technical knack (ἄτεχνος τριβή). Socrates and Phaedrus ask, in other words, whether speaking well requires knowledge of the truth about being, and not merely opinions about being, in order to be persuasive (*Phaedr.* 260e). Socrates makes the same distinction between arts and non-technical knacks in the *Gorgias*. He argues that without being able to account for the nature of the subject matter of a speech, rhetoric is merely a knack for producing gratification in its listeners (*Gorg.* 465a). Socrates suggests, however, that while flattery is based in the self-interest of the orator, someone with philosophical knowledge of the good would, ideally, use rhetoric to convince other people of what it is best to say and do (*Gorg.* 502e-503a).

By using rhetoric as a knack, the orator assumes a kind of control over things in order to manipulate ideas and the minds of his listeners. By contrast, the art of rhetoric justifies its claims in light of the ideas themselves as they present themselves to thought. Similarly, we saw above that Gadamer attributes a certain rationality to the mode of rhetorical argumentation that appropriately attends to the inherent contingency and probability involved in the development of social and political practices. This mode of engaging with the ideas that unite people in a shared, social reality is “a far more determining factor in society than the excellence of science” (GR, 27). However, because human thought is fundamentally limited, this means that rhetoric must appeal to evidence and not certainty. Accordingly, Socrates and Phaedrus determine that the

subject matter of a rhetorical speech must be doubtful (πλανᾶσθαι) or disputable (ἀμφισβητησίμος) rather than certain.¹⁰⁹

Given the inherent uncertainty of rhetorical arguments, Socrates establishes two principles which in his view properly identify rhetoric as not just an art, but more importantly as a form of dialectic. He and Phaedrus agree that ideally the parts of a speech will be related to each other as an organic whole (*Phaedr.* 264c). This demand for organization reflects the need for clarity in speech which is otherwise ambiguous, something which Socrates claims is lacking in the first speech on love (*Phaedr.* 263d-264b). The first principle, then, is that in order to manifest (δηλὸν ποιεῖν) the nature of an entity, the orator must know the relation of its parts to each other as they are unified under this entity.¹¹⁰ Speech (λόγος) that is based in this knowledge will achieve clarity (σαφές) and an internal consistency (ὁμολογούμενος). The second principle is that the orator must be able to divide this entity into its parts according to its “natural joints” (*Phaedr.* 265e). This principle also aims at achieving clarity in light of a prior ambiguity. Socrates explains that in his preceding speeches he identified love as a kind of madness, first as an evil to be avoided, and then as something divine. Both forms of madness constitute the idea of love, and so it is up to the orator to disambiguate them in a speech on love (*Phaedr.* 265a-b).

Importantly, good rhetoric is therefore grounded in knowledge of the One and the Many. Moreover, it is because it has this knowledge that Socrates identifies this form of rhetoric as

¹⁰⁹ *Phaedr.* 263b-c. This might explain why in the speeches on love, for example, the speakers were able to illustrate first that the lover, and next that the beloved, should be favoured.

¹¹⁰ εἰς μίαν τε ἰδέαν συνορῶντα ἄγειν τὰ πολλαχῇ διεσπαρμένα, *Phaedr.* 265d.

dialectical.¹¹¹ The dialectician thus emerges as the person who is able to utilize rhetorical techniques in order to properly deal with the manifold appearances of an idea as they emerge in a dialogue with others.¹¹² By contrast, the non-dialectical rhetoric that teaches someone the techniques for writing and delivering a speech, but does not orient the orator towards the ideas themselves, will not amount to much when compared to the content of language that does reflect the ideas (*Phaedr.* 267e).

In drawing out the implications of his identification of rhetoric as a form of dialectic, Socrates makes his well-known argument that in order to be truly persuasive the orator must know both the nature of the particular soul he is trying to convince as well as the particular form of argumentation that will be most effective on this soul (*Phaedr.* 271d-272b). On the one hand, this approach can lend itself to misuse and abuse, such as when lawyers argue for a case without any regard for the truth of the matter (*Phaedr.* 272d-e). On the other hand, however, someone who is concerned with understanding the nature of the ideas will search for what is truly persuasive in the opinions of others. In other words, as an art of communication dialectical rhetoric has the unique ability to express genuine insight into the nature of things based on the particular, contingent circumstances of the interlocutors and the mode of language that reflects these circumstances. Here Socrates compares the orator to the doctor who knows not only what health is but also how to produce health in his patients. By contrast, someone who knows certain

¹¹¹ *Phaedr.* 266b-c. We recall Gadamer's claim, that for Plato "Someone understands what cognition, knowing, insight, is only when he also understands how it can be that one and one are two and how 'the two' is one" (DD, 135).

¹¹² Thus while Mark Moes is correct to distinguish between dialectical and non-dialectical rhetoric, he is incorrect in my view to conclude that in the *Phaedrus* Socrates identifies dialectic as an instrument of rhetoric, as opposed to rhetoric as mode of manifesting dialectical knowledge (Moes 2007, 42-43).

rhetorical or medical techniques but does not know how to apply them in concrete circumstances knows only the “preliminaries” of rhetoric or medicine, but not rhetoric or medicine itself.¹¹³

By assuming that Socrates is meant to embody the dialectical activity being described in the *Phaedrus*, it becomes clear why Gadamer uses Plato’s dialogical form as the model of hermeneutical understanding. In *Truth and Method* he writes:

A person skilled in the “art” of questioning is a person who can prevent questions from being suppressed by the dominant opinion. A person who possesses this art will himself search for everything in favor of an opinion. Dialectic consists not in trying to discover the weakness of what is said, but in bringing out its real strength. It is not the art of arguing (which can make a strong case out of a weak one) but the art of thinking (which can strengthen objections by referring to the subject matter). (TM, 361)

As the art of conducting a conversation, he continues, “dialectic is also the art of seeing things in the unity of an aspect” (TM, 361). By focusing on the substantive content of a shared subject matter, dialectic attends to both the particular situations of the interlocutors and the unity of the subject matter itself. The Platonic dialogue thus becomes a model for the development of human understanding and hermeneutical consciousness as it situates the interlocutors in a dialectical relation with respect to each other, and a subordinate relation with respect to their common subject matter. In this way, they can test the strength and validity of their judgments in light of the nature of this subject itself and thereby come to a more comprehensive understanding of it.

¹¹³ *Phaedr.* 268e-269a. It should be pointed out that Socrates is not promoting dialectic as a specialized skill that only a few people could attain. In the *Cratylus*, for example, the dialectician is identified as someone with knowledge of the proper use of names, whereas the act of naming is given to the lawmaker (νομοθέτης). As Gonzalez points out, the dialectician does not have some kind of specialized knowledge of language, as though nobody else knows how to properly communicate. Rather, what is being emphasized in this dialogue is the dialectician’s practical ability to manifest the form to which a given word refers (Gonzalez 1998, 67, 303 n. 13). The difference between dialectic and ordinary discourse is that dialectic has an explicit awareness of the proper function of a name, which is to manifest a distinct essence (διακριτικὸν τῆς οὐσίας; *Crat.* 388c), or the “specific, stable nature” which serves as the form of the name (Ibid., 66). This is why the question “What is virtue?” has a different meaning for the dialectician than the layman. While there is no obvious problem with the ability of ordinary discourse to refer to distinct things and even ideas, in using the term “virtue,” for example, ordinary language refers to a particular manifestation of virtue and not necessarily virtue itself (Ibid., 68). In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates includes collection (συναγωγή) and division (διάρσεις) as part of dialectical rhetoric. In the *Sophist*, which gives a great deal of attention to this particular mode of dialectic, we see that no specialized knowledge is required to utilize this method. The Eleatic Stranger, who prefers delivering speeches, converses easily with Theaetetus, himself fairly young; and they have no trouble defining the angler as a preliminary exercise with this method.

Here, however, the hermeneutical claim to universality would only seem to reinforce the Habermasian demand for an ideal framework within which meaningful communication can be carried out. As Wachterhauser explains, the contingency of hermeneutical understanding and experience arguably precludes any reference to necessary, universal conditions for meaningful communication. Making such a reference would require an ahistorical perspective in order to apprehend what is common to and inheres within each historical moment. Such a perspective is absent within hermeneutics, suggesting that universalism is absent as well (Wachterhauser 1999, 52-53).

In defense of the universality of Gadamer's hermeneutics, Wachterhauser argues that the essential historicity of human understanding does not preclude us from making and understanding universal claims, and that the inherent fallibilism in human thought does not contradict these claims. All assertions are made in light of the fact that they might commit some error, but the possibility of being wrong "is never sufficient to show that we *cannot* be right" (Wachterhauser 1999, 53; emphasis his). What the historicity of human understanding does preclude for Gadamer is dogmatic certainty in any claim to truth, "but it does not preclude truth as such" (Ibid., 54). The apparent contradiction that critics identify occurs with respect to Gadamer's affirmation of the autonomy of the things themselves over and above our perception of them, i.e. eidetic essences that maintain their selfsame identity over time while inhering in a plurality of historical contexts. The error here, Wachterhauser suggests, is in thinking that our apprehension of the things themselves occurs in a "timeless intuition":

Gadamer's affirmation of the identity of certain universals cannot be understood as an achievement of a timeless intellect. Rather, identity can only be affirmed when it is demonstrated in concrete circumstances in historically mediated terms that the questioners of such an identity actually share. [...] Such an identity is never given once and for all but can only be maintained when and insofar as it can be shown to obtain. (Ibid., 54-55).

The point of any interpretive act is therefore not to produce an account whose certainty is beyond question. The point, rather, is to show what can be “*convincingly demonstrated* in real acts of interpretation” (Ibid., 55; emphasis mine). The consciousness of effective history, as an awareness of the paths that these universal structures have traced over time, justifies claims about the meaning of being while acknowledging that the validity of such claims are provisional, as they are always partially grounded in some set of contingent circumstances.

The same point was made in the previous chapter regarding the participation of the Many in the One. We saw that Plato ultimately overcomes the problem of participation by illustrating how language acts as a bridge between sensible entities and the eidetic structures that these entities can manifest. Importantly, the grammatical analysis of the λόγος revealed that such an account is only completed when it reveals the presence of the ideas in a temporal context. Likewise, for Gadamer our perception of the eidetic reality of the things themselves only occurs within time. Knowing occurs, Gadamer says, as the “self-presentation of the thing which is known. Such self-presentation is a process full of movement. The aspects of the existent thing, the views which it offers of itself, shift and at the same time the points of view or opinions which the human soul develops also shift, in that they refer to the thing in different respects” (DD, 146). Our understanding of the things themselves is always changing as new historical contexts emerge and reveal different aspects of them, making a complete and timeless account impossible (Wachterhauser 1999, 57).

Gadamer finds that Plato’s philosophical rhetoric is therefore proportional with the universality of hermeneutical reflection. Philosophical rhetoric reflects the nature of hermeneutical consciousness, that is, the mode of self-understanding that is open to the possibility that different articulations of meaning may be true by attending to the dialectical

relationship between the unity and multiplicity of the ideas. Rhetoric by nature reflects the essential openness and finitude of human knowledge and experience that are central to both Socratic inquiry and hermeneutical reflection. Therefore, philosophical rhetoric uniquely attends to the nature of dialectical inquiry and the priority of the question in human understanding by situating this knowledge and experience within the unity of the ideas with respect to which our shared reality is developed.

4.5: Conclusion

The relevance of Platonic dialectic to Gadamer's hermeneutics goes back to Gadamer's 1931 book, *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*. There, Gadamer argues that one of Plato's unique accomplishment is the discovery of a "characteristically positive quality" of dialectic, which otherwise remains an essentially negative activity (PDE, 19). He explains that while Academic dialectic can successfully separate appearances from the thing itself by "laying bare the object field," it does not necessarily have the means to make any positive reference to its object (PDE, 19). In his view, Platonic dialectic stands out by creating the demand for a "positive justification of the possibility of addressing [its object]" (PDE, 19). Evidently, Gadamer recognized the importance of the dialectical relation between necessity and contingency for hermeneutics, and in particular their mediation in language:

When [λόγος] presents something together with reasons or causes for it, talk makes the distinctive claim to assert something universal and necessary about an individual entity. In doing so, such talk is, in a distinctive way, a speech that lets the other person speak too. (PDE, 28)

Any claim to a necessary reason or cause always involves a claim to the evident (*Einsichtigkeit*) nature of the matter at hand (PDE, 36). Thus a true dialectical contradiction occurs when, as

Gadamer writes, “one and the same faculty of reason has to grant validity to both opinion and counter-opinion” (PDE, 44). This does not happen when one interlocutor speaks opposite the other, but rather when the thing itself “speaks” contrary to someone (PDE, 44).

In this chapter, we have discussed one of the central criticisms of Gadamer’s position, namely that without a broader, non-historical framework, hermeneutics lacks an appropriate critical apparatus that can distinguish between assertions which truly manifest an aspect of things themselves and assertions which only manifest an ideological distortion of them. For Habermas, the self-transcendent nature of language is illustrative of our capacity to transcend as well the historical forces which contribute to our preconceptions of meaning. The inherent reflexivity involved in emancipating oneself from the forces of prejudice functions as a form of rational autonomy over and above the ideological constraints of social and political institutions. He proposes that our practical involvement in social and political institutions allows us to interpret empirically the transcendental structure of our “lifeworld,” within which a consensus is possible that is free from coercion and force (Ibid., 183-185; Teigas 1995, 100). Habermas argues that this “critical instance” in his critique of ideology therefore takes priority over the form of consciousness and experience that Gadamer describes in his hermeneutics.

We saw that, in response to Habermas’ criticism, Gadamer contends that hermeneutical reflection is a universal property of human understanding. The essential historicity of human existence means that there is no ahistorical position from which we can interpret the principles of our shared reality prior to their instantiation within tradition. Rather, the necessary conditions for disclosing truth about the things themselves are understood relative to the historical circumstances in which these conditions are manifested and apprehended. We saw furthermore

that the relativity of historical knowledge does not contradict the notion that there are universal essences that inhere in many different historical contexts.

In Gadamer's view, the tension between the subjective determination of meaning and the objectivity of the things that we find meaningful can be mediated through language. He argues that classical metaphysics "transcends the dualism of subjectivity and will, on the one hand, and object and being-in-itself, on the other, by conceiving their pre-existent correspondence with each other" (PH, 74). The question that therefore poses itself to the human intellect is, "are there finite possibilities of doing justice to this correspondence?" (PH, 75). Gadamer insists that language can effectively and productively mediate between the finitude of human subjectivity and the infinite possibilities of meaning that being-in-itself contains. The things themselves, the autonomous structures of our shared reality, are understood in and through language, but these things are not identical to their linguistic form (Wachterhauser 1999, 59). Gadamer's assertion that "being that can be understood is language" contains both of these insights, i.e. that our understanding of being is fundamentally linguistic, but that being-in-itself is not entirely contained within language.

It was argued, then, that Gadamer identifies the linguistic form that hermeneutical consciousness takes with Plato's conception of philosophical rhetoric. In his defense of the universality of hermeneutical reflection, Gadamer refers to the fact that the contingency of human understanding necessitates that truth claims are primarily provisional and based in evidence and not certainty. Rhetoric is therefore the clear candidate for a form of linguistic consciousness that most appropriately attends to the hermeneutical phenomenon: "Convincing and persuading, without being able to prove—these are obviously as much the aim and measure of understanding and interpretation as they are the aim and measure of the art of oratory and

persuasion” (PH, 24). The ubiquity of rhetoric is thus proportional with that of hermeneutical reflection. The particular value of Plato’s philosophical rhetoric is that, as a mode of dialectic, it is necessarily oriented toward the ideas themselves over and above the self-interest of any individual who is making a claim about these ideas. For Gadamer, philosophical rhetoric is therefore an appropriate vehicle for hermeneutical consciousness, as it reflects the need for hermeneutical consciousness to mediate between the contingency and finitude of human experience on the one hand, and the autonomous structure of the things themselves on the other.

Importantly, by identifying the linguistic structure of the things themselves, Gadamer obviates Habermas’ criticism that hermeneutics lacks an appropriate critical apparatus for reflecting upon this structure. Gadamer maintains that Habermas’ critique of ideology is itself an historically mediated position which can be understood through the effective history leading to its development. In his view, by arguing that meaningful communication must be constructed within an ideal speech situation, Habermas produces precisely the kind of ideological force that he claims Gadamer’s conceptions of tradition and language represent for hermeneutics. The “eidetic turn” that Gadamer appropriates from Platonic dialectic and rhetoric certainly adds an element of idealism to Gadamer’s hermeneutics,¹¹⁴ but Gadamer combines this idealism with the essential linguisticity and historicity of human understanding (Wachterhauser 1999, 61). Their interaction precludes us from making dogmatic assertions about the essential structures of our shared reality, and from presuming that these structures can be known with absolute certainty,

¹¹⁴ In “Dialektik ist nicht Sophistik” Gadamer writes that the the object of knowledge is “the relationship of Ideas and the complete articulation of what is meant, which is reached at times as an indivisible *Eidos* as the shared goal of all who seek understanding. Such is in truth the final goal, for which we strive in light of the commonality of the interpreted world. This has to do with the essence of language. I am not capable of seeing how one can see this basic constituent [*Grundverfassung*] of all speaking other than how Plato described it as a relationship of Ideas. That may sound “idealistic.” However, the substitutions of the *Eidos* or the intuitive unity of what is meant with the concept of a rule and its applications—whose validity insists upon itself here in opposition—appears to me as only another way of describing the same eidetic turn that we all perform, even when we only use signs or open our mouths” (GW VII, 345-346; Wachterhauser’s translation).

but it does not prevent us from making any judgment whatsoever about them insofar as they are apprehensible to hermeneutical consciousness (sc. Wachterhauser 1999, 54-55).

5. Chapter Four: Understanding as participation and the speculative structure of language

5.1: Introduction

This chapter will argue that Gadamer's definition of the fundamental historicity of human understanding, as a mode of participation in tradition, develops in part from the same logical orientation that Plato takes toward his theory of ideas.

In making this argument, this chapter aims to identify how Gadamer's description of hermeneutical consciousness, developed in chapter three, is essentially related to his understanding of Plato's participation thesis, developed in chapter two. In the previous chapter we saw that, in defense of the ubiquity of language and tradition, Gadamer claims that human understanding is fundamentally historical, and that it is therefore misleading to suggest that the measure of truth must transcend language and history. Gadamer claims that the consciousness of effective history operates within the movement of history, and as such is able to reveal elements of dogmatism that have been transmitted historically and thereby emancipate itself from them. In his view, Habermas' claim that tradition must be subordinated within a larger framework of communicative action is itself a dogmatic objectification of the content of history, the effect of which is the alienation of historical consciousness from the progression of history itself. Gadamer demonstrates that the awareness of one's historical situation implies the ability to transcend this situation through hermeneutical experience and reflection, and that tradition, whose authority is inherently tied to the historical transmission of ideas, is therefore subject to this criticism as well.

For this reason the previous chapter also elaborated the relevance of Plato's philosophical rhetoric to Gadamer's hermeneutics as the mode of communication that most appropriately manifests hermeneutical consciousness. Gadamer finds that developing this consciousness is an

essentially dialogical affair. He repeatedly refers to Platonic dialectic as the best illustration of the unity of the interlocutors in light of a shared concept that transcends their particular perspectives (sc. Zuckert 1996, 78). The finitude of human understanding and experience means that any claim about the meaning of being is inherently partial and limited, necessitating a dialogical framework for understanding. Such claims are therefore first and foremost possible truths whose validity with respect to their necessary ground is tested conversationally. Philosophical rhetoric is thus for Gadamer the mode of communication that highlights the function of language as mediating between the contingency of hermeneutical experience and its necessary ground in the ideas that unite the I and Thou in conversation.

In the second chapter, we explained how for Gadamer the problem of the participation of the Many in the One inevitably brings into question the possibility of the participation of the ideas in each other (DD, 136-138). We recall that in Gadamer's view Plato's *arithmos* structure of the λόγος "solves" the problem of participation by showing how language can successfully mediate between the contingency of sensible experience and the necessary, eidetic ground of this experience. In *Idea of the Good*, Gadamer therefore claims that Plato never intended the problem of participation to be insoluble.¹¹⁵ In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer finds that his philosophical hermeneutics may suffer from the same pseudo-problem. He suggests that, if the theoretical participation in the essence of the things themselves that hermeneutics describes also implies the logical separation between contingent and necessary experience analogous to the Platonic

¹¹⁵ "Did Plato at first really underestimate the problem in the participation of the appearances in the ideas? Did he teach that the ideas were apart for themselves until one day he recognized that the problem of participation entailed in the postulation of such ideas for themselves was altogether insoluble? Or do both postulations belong together: the ideas being for themselves, the so-called *chōrismos* (separation), and the difficulty, to which one is thereby exposed, concerning participation, or *methexis*, as it is called? Could it be that *chōrismos* and *methexis* go together even from the start?" (IG, 9-10; GW VII, 133).

separation between appearances and ideas, this problem only conceals a deeper truth, namely the ontological unity of these realms of knowledge and experience (TM, 476).

In addition to the hermeneutical claim to universality, the final sections of *Truth and Method* elaborate the speculative structure of language in light of its function as the medium of hermeneutical experience. Elaborating this structure, Gadamer again refers to the nature of understanding as an event, describing it here as something that is constituted by an activity belonging to the thing itself (*der Sache selbst*; TM, 459; WM, 467). This activity, Gadamer claims, indicates a “universal ontological structure, namely the basic nature of everything toward which understanding can be directed” (TM, 470). It is here that Gadamer identifies speculation as the mode of language that manifests this ontological structure, for which reason it too has a “universal ontological significance” (TM, 470).

In order to elaborate the speculative structure of language, Gadamer appropriates the ancient Greek meaning of θεωρία as participation. Beginning with the experience of the work of art, Gadamer describes the ontological significance of the relationship between the interpreter and the subject matter being interpreted. He claims that the essence of the interpreter or “spectator” is determined by his “being there present” (*Dabeisein*) with the work of art or its analogue. “To be present,” he writes, “means to participate” (TM, 121). Referring to the traditional meaning of the θεωρός,¹¹⁶ Gadamer articulates the essence of θεωρία as a way of being “purely present to what is truly real,” and as mode of “true participation, not something active but something passive (pathos), namely being totally involved in and carried away by what one sees.”

¹¹⁶ TM, 122. Traditionally, the θεωρός was someone who took part in a religious festival or celebration on behalf of the πόλις. Andrea Nightingale argues that in light of this meaning Plato adapts the notion of θεωρία to describe a moment of noetic insight either into divine matters or into the nature of the ideas (Nightingale 2004, 73-74; cf. McNeill 1999, 264-265). For an historical overview of the role of the θεωρός, see chapter one in Nightingale 2004.

Uncovering the meaning of the activity that belongs to the things themselves requires first an explanation of Gadamer's concept of play (*Spiel*) as a description of the experience of the work of art. This experience is the model for describing the event of being in terms of an activity on the side of being. Gadamer describes the players as participating in the "original essence" or "true being" of the play. Therefore, the activity of the players does not imply any subjective determination of the content of the play. Elsewhere, Gadamer describes the structure of play as "not so much the subjective attitude of the two men confronting each other as it is the formation of the movement as such, which, as in an unconscious teleology, subordinates the attitude of the individuals to itself" (PH, 54). Rather, play presents itself to the players: presentation (*Darstellung*) is the "mode of being of the work of art" and thus "self-presentation" is the true nature of play (TM, 115). The ontological significance of the work of art, and its relevance to the speculative structure of language, is therefore that it presents itself in terms of its own possibilities of being (*Seinsmöglichkeiten*; TM, 117; WM, 123).

Gadamer's ontology of the work of art is meant to demonstrate principally how the participation of the interlocutors in a theoretical subject allows the participants to transcend any historical distance between them. Consequently, the participants in the work of art become contemporaneous with each other by virtue of their belonging to the artwork as something identical and shared across historical or temporal distance (TM, 119). The work of art itself, however, does not transcend history or time *per se*. Gadamer claims that its essence is neither timeless nor suprahistorical. These concepts invite an irresolvable dialectical antithesis with temporal and historical entities, and therefore do not adequately attend to the hermeneutical phenomenon (TM, 119). Gadamer instead identifies the essence of the work or art in terms of an antithesis between being and becoming, which implies that this tension does have a positive

resolution in terms of the coming into being of the work of art (TM, 120-121). The essence of the work persists over time, and as part of the event of understanding it becomes present in different historical moments.

Gadamer's approach to the event-structure of understanding therefore presupposes the logical form of Plato's λόγος. Chapter two elaborated Gadamer's understanding of the λόγος in terms of the dialectic of the One and the Many, and chapter three showed that this dialectic is necessarily historical and finite. The concepts that contribute to Gadamer's hermeneutic theory that have been discussed so far in this dissertation are part of the necessary background needed to develop the speculative structure of language and thus the universal function of language and hermeneutical reflection. Gadamer explains that, having grounded the hermeneutical phenomenon in the essential finitude of historical experience, he is now in a position to elaborate his conception of language as a speculative medium of thought and experience (TM, 453). The speculative structure of language is thus an essential component in the hermeneutical claim to universality, and one which remains committed to certain Platonic insights.

The structure of this chapter is therefore as follows. First, we will outline the theoretical orientation toward the ideas using Socrates' method of hypothesizing the εἶδος. Gadamer explains that this method is meant to produce an account (λόγος) of the necessary reason or cause of one's perception of an entity. For him, Socrates method of hypothesizing the εἶδος is thus representative of Platonic dialectic in general, as it illustrates in his view how language orients thought toward the ideas in order to uncover the necessary, ontological ground of the contingency and finitude of human experience (PDE, 68). Second, we will elaborate the structure of play through Gadamer's ontological description of the experience of the work of art. This experience conforms to Plato's participation thesis, namely as a reflection of the *arithmos* model

and the dialectical relationship between the One and the Many: the true being of play is that it transcends the particular, historical context of the players; yet its essence is constituted by nothing other than its performances over time. Finally, we will elaborate the speculative structure of language which, guided by the finitude of historical experience, situates Plato's dialectic of the One and the Many on its "true and fundamental ground," i.e. the essential finitude of historical experience (TM, 454).

5.2: Hypothesizing the εἶδος

Socrates' method of hypothesizing the εἶδος provides initial insight into the theoretical framework that Gadamer develops for his philosophical hermeneutics, and specifically the speculative structure of language. In *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, Gadamer states that in order for *Dasein* to have a "secure disposition" with respect to the matter at hand "it must understand that entity in its being—in its own proper potential [*in seiner eigentümlichen Möglichkeit*]" (PDE, 64; GW V, 47). *Dasein*'s dispositional state remains couched in the evident nature of things prior to their scientific certainty. Gadamer suggests that both Plato and Aristotle recognize that the unattainability of pure, theoretical insight is an essential characteristic of human nature (PDE, 5). For this reason, exhibiting the necessary reason or cause of something always involves a claim to its "evidentness" (*Einsichtigkeit*; PDE, 36; GW V, 28). In light of their motivation to come to a shared understanding of being, then, each speaker presents his claim as a possibility that extends from the necessary structure of being. A true dialectical contradiction thus occurs when "one and the same faculty of reason has to grant validity to both opinion and counter-opinion" (PDE, 44). This does not happen when one interlocutor merely speaks opposite the other, but rather when the thing itself "speaks" against him (PDE, 44). A dialogical framework therefore provides the

space within which these evident structures can be communicated to others, where the process of coming to a shared understanding involves the mutual consideration of possible ways of articulating the necessary structure of the things themselves which are understood to transcend the viewpoints of the interlocutors themselves.

Gadamer appropriates the traditional meaning of θεωρία as participation in order to establish our role as historical participants within tradition. Platonic dialectic, he says, reflects the fact that the unity of an idea “may never be apprehended in the unrestricted presence of some *unus intuitus*” (RAS, 60). The ideas are certainly comprehensible, but this comprehension is partial at best due to the “ineradicable finitude” of human thought. Our theoretical insight into the content of tradition thus implies a practical activity, namely the articulation of the meaning of the things themselves as they are presented in and through history. Continuing, Gadamer writes:

Hermeneutics tries to establish this point [about Platonic dialectic] inasmuch as it characterizes the context of tradition within which we exist as an ongoing reacquisition that proceeds into infinity. It endeavors to make its own just how every vital and productive conversation with someone else knows how to mediate the other’s horizon with one’s own. (RAS, 60)

Gadamer thus characterizes our participation in effective history as a universal condition for understanding. In order to arrive at a shared understanding it is necessary that all interested parties have some kind of knowledge of their common subject matter (PDE 38-39). The one thing that everyone always has in common is some kind of knowledge of the good. “All Dasein,” Gadamer writes, “lives continually in an understanding of aretē” (PDE, 53). Similarly, the event of understanding presupposes the historical situation of the interpreter and thus his orientation toward traditional meanings of things. History, like the good and like other ideas, is not

diminished by our participation in it, but is in fact developed and given an increase in meaning by virtue of being shared.¹¹⁷

Socrates' method of hypothesizing the εἶδος illustrates how language provides a link between the evident and contingent experience of things and their necessary ground, and in so doing develops a more comprehensive knowledge of them.¹¹⁸ Describing the genesis of this method, Socrates explains that in his youth he became dissatisfied with materialist accounts of being due to their tendency to reduce complex entities to their parts and then explain the nature of these entities in terms of just their parts. Significantly, the paradigmatic example of Socrates' difficulty with a materialistic approach is the attempt to explain how the addition of two units forms the number two (*Phaed.* 97a-b). Ultimately he discovers that unless one accounts for both formal and material causation one cannot explain the nature of an entity as whole in terms of its parts. The Pythagoreans did not make this distinction; they viewed number as immanent in things as the cause of their internal harmony, but did not locate an ontological difference between numbers and physical entities.¹¹⁹ Thus knowing in hindsight that the solution to the

¹¹⁷ In his essay "What is Practice? The Conditions of Social Reason" Gadamer describes participation in θεωρία as "[having] been given away to something that in virtue of its overwhelming presence is accessible to all in common and that is distinguished in such a way that in contrast to all other goods it is not diminished by being shared and so is not an object of dispute like all other goods but actually gains through participation" (RAS, 77). For a further elaboration of the transcendental role of Plato's ideas for Gadamer's hermeneutics, see Wachterhauser 1999, 84-91.

¹¹⁸ Naturally, the term 'method' is being used loosely here. While Socrates' approach in the *Phaedo* and *Meno* certainly proceeds according to some methodology, the point of this comparison is not to attribute to Gadamer any kind of method for elaborating the substantive content that frames a hermeneutic dialogue.

¹¹⁹ *Met.* 986a12-20. Thus in his conversation with the two Pythagoreans, Simmias and Cebes, Socrates easily points out the ontological distinction between formal and material causes of harmony, or between harmony and what is in, or has, harmony (*Phaed.* 92a-c). In "Plato als Porträtist," Gadamer writes that number is paradigmatic of noetic reality not only because numbers are "something that we cannot grasp with our hands, something that even the natural scientist cannot comprehend within the means of his own ontological criterion," but also because in numbers "we produce something that exercises the force of reality on us" (GW VII, 238; Wachterhauser's translation). Thus in the *Phaedo*, he writes, "it is Plato's interpretation of Socrates' concern for the soul which first provides the Pythagoreans with an appropriate understanding of their own mathematics. The world does not consist of numbers even though it is true that the recurrent rhythms in the processes of nature obey numerical determinations (if only in the mere approximations of which perceptible being is capable" (DD, 32). For this reason, in his view Simmias and Cebes commit a "naturalistic" fallacy when they identify the soul with "numerical being of nature" rather than something that has a harmony that it must maintain in order not to lose it (DD, 32).

difficulty that he experience in his youth involves an appropriate understanding of the dialectical relation between the principles of unity and multiplicity, Socrates describes his discovery that ontologically the ideas of “one” and “two” persist despite any material change in units through addition or subtraction.

The principles of the One and the Many have their linguistic analogue in the manifold ways of expressing the nature of a single, unified entity. In his youth, however, Socrates had his sights set higher than just the possibility of speaking about things. He wanted to discover the singular cause of all things, including unity and multiplicity. Having read in Anaxagoras’ book that mind (νοῦς) is this fundamental principle, Socrates found that the good represents the cause he is looking for: things are organized according to what it is best for them to be (*Phaed.* 97c). The good thus accounts for the unity of something’s parts with respect to the reason why they are organized in such a way, thereby preserving the thing’s unity within its multiplicity without reducing one to the other (Gonzalez 1998, 191).

Of course, Socrates’ hopes for a substantial explanation of the nature of mind and the good came up short. He found that Anaxagoras made no attempt to elaborate these concepts, and since a direct inquiry into the good seems to be impossible he turned to the best alternative, viz. language. He describes his approach to the hypothesis and propositional language as follows:

I assume [ὑποθέμενος] on each occasion a λόγος which I consider strongest, and whatever seems to me to agree with this I assign as being true [ὡς ἀληθῆ ὄντα], whether with respect to some cause or any other being whatsoever, and whatever disagrees I assign as false. (*Phaed.* 100a)

As David Wolfsdorf suggests, in this context “hypothesis” refers to a “cognitively secure proposition” which can serve as the point of departure for related, secure propositions (Wolfsdorf 2008, 36-37). In other words, in contrast to the modern scientific method, wherein the hypothesis is insecure and thereby confirmed or denied by subsequent observations, in its Platonic context

the hypothesis determines the relevance and validity of subsequent claims related to the same object of inquiry. Thus hypothesizing the εἶδος is meant to provide the strongest justifiable account of the necessary ground of something's being the way it is.

For Gadamer, Socrates' method clarifies the nature of dialectical activity and the terms on which *Dasein* undertakes this activity. The simplicity of Socrates' approach resides in the fact that the hypothesis posits as the ground of an entity "not another entity but the being of the entity itself" (PDE, 68). In apprehending the necessary being of an entity, he says, Socrates' method elaborates the content of *Dasein*'s "anticipatory disposition over what is to be produced":

Thus the procedure of hypothesis, and of dialectic in general, has the goal of comprehending entities, through the logos, in their being, so as to be able to have disposition over them in their ability to be together with other things. Only on the basis of this grasp of its being can one give an accounting with regard to one's own being toward it, which is what is involved, in general, in reaching an understanding *about* it. (PDE, 68; emphasis his)

The point of this dialectic, Gadamer continues, "is to arrive at a positive relation to the problem of the ground (the reason or cause), the problem that is posed by the idea of knowledge" (PDE, 68). Without direct insight into the nature of the good, knowledge appears to be ultimately groundless. Hypothesizing the εἶδος thus provides this ground as a claim that is fulfilled specifically in language (λόγος).

The method of hypothesis provides a way to elaborate the unified nature of being that the dialectical use of words presupposes, and which otherwise remains ambiguous. In "Dialectic and Sophism in Plato's *Seventh Letter*," Gadamer argues that Plato presupposes a fundamental ambiguity between words and what they represent. In his *Seventh Letter*, Plato claims that there are four means of communicating the nature of being, viz. the name (ὄνομα), account (λόγος), image (εἶδωλον), and knowledge (ἐπιστήμη; *Ep. VII. 342a ff.*). Gadamer understands these

means as modes of disclosure (ἀληθεύειν) and therefore as only partially revealing their object (DD, 103). Thus while they are necessary in order to obtain knowledge:

One can never be sure that with these means the thing itself is displayed in its full, “disconcealed” intelligibility. This is the basic experience in every philosophic endeavor, in every philosophic discussion: words, words, only words, and nevertheless these words which are just words are not supposed to be mere empty talk. They should be capable of constructing the thing meant in another person, erecting it so that it is there in him. (DD, 104)

Because they are only a means to true knowledge of being, the contribution that they make to a more comprehensive understanding of the “full, disconcealed intelligibility” of the things themselves is always questionable. “The whole basis of language and speaking,” Gadamer writes, “the very thing which makes it possible, is ambiguity and metaphor” (DD, 111). The salient point here is that language is possible *at all* on this basis; and so true and false speech, speaking well and speaking poorly, are equally contingent upon this possibility. In giving an account of a stable, unchanging εἶδος, however, the method of hypothesis provides an “unambiguous identity” of being, which Gadamer says is a “positive solution to the fundamental problem of dialectic, that the one is many and the many are one” (PDE, 73). This mode of dialectic is thus “not an end but a first beginning” (PDE, 73). It does not come to a conclusion about the nature of things, but rather allows the search for the truth about being to begin in earnest (PDE, 73).

Gadamer’s characterization of the εἶδος as the beginning of dialectic and philosophy provides the theoretical starting point for hermeneutical interpretation. As with Plato, the articulation of the meaning of being is for Gadamer essentially partial. As we have seen this partiality presupposes an understanding of the evident nature of beings, and not their certainty. That is, the articulation of meaning is always expressed in the first place as a possibility. Central to Gadamer’s idea of hermeneutic experience is the fact that we are constantly confronted with

other possibilities of meaning whose validity, as determined in a dialogue, thereby contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of things. In other words, genuine hermeneutical experience necessarily entails that our understanding of things is always undergoing change; it is a game we are always playing and always have been playing. Hypothesizing the εἶδος clarifies the scope and direction about our involvement with others in this game, in our attempts to articulate the meaning of being.

The simplicity of the method of hypothesis—positing as the ground of an entity something internal to itself—is therefore also its strength. Given the essential partiality of thought and speech, as well as the dialectical demand to speak well, one is always held accountable for one's judgments. In this respect Gadamer writes that, in hypothesizing the εἶδος, judgments are tested to see “whether the logos provides for the thing in its manifoldness the unitary reason on the basis of which it is to be understood as always the same,” that is, whether one's judgment exhibits “a manifold reality in its unitary selfsame being” (PDE, 65). The presupposition of a common subject matter means that the interlocutors in a dialogue must account not for what this subject matter is, but what reasons they have for interpreting its meaning the way they do. Providing a sufficient account of these reasons based on the contingency of one's situation is ultimately what make a shared understanding possible (PDE, 63).

In order to explain how a shared understanding is possible between different historical contexts, Gadamer orients the Platonic notion of a theoretical participation in the ideas within an historical framework, namely the hermeneutical description of the finitude of historical experience. In our discussion of Plato's *Sophist*, we saw that an account of being is meant to reflect the unity between sensible and intelligible reality that Plato's participation thesis

presupposes. For Gadamer, the fact that a proper λόγος of being must account for the presence of an idea in sensible reality means that the λόγος “completes itself only in the *Zeitwort*,” i.e. the contingent, temporal circumstances in which the idea makes itself present (GW VII, 368-369). Hypothesizing the εἶδος points to ideas whose natures can never be fully manifested within any particular context. Language therefore functions in order to orient us beyond the experience of what is immediately present and toward a greater understanding of the total intelligible world. The speculative structure of language that Gadamer develops illustrates how this function includes the determination of the meaning of being in different historical contexts commensurate with the fundamental historicity of hermeneutical experience and consciousness.

5.3: Gadamer’s speculative dialectic

5.3.1: Aesthetic consciousness and the structure of play

Gadamer wants to demonstrate that the speculative structure of language, which contributes to his claim that hermeneutical reflection is universal in its scope, situates Plato’s principles of the One and the Many on their “true and fundamental ground” (TM, 454), i.e. the essential finitude of historical experience. We saw in the second chapter that Plato’s dialectic of the One and the Many reflects the nature of being in terms of the capacity (δύναμις) of ideas to exist in common with each other, and in the third chapter that the dialectical “turning toward the idea” that philosophy describes is a rational faculty common to everyone. In this section, we will elaborate Gadamer’s concept of play (*Spiel*) in order to illustrate how the principles of unity and multiplicity are grounded historically in hermeneutical consciousness, and how our dialectical

participation in the unity of a concept manifests this concept historically in terms of its possibility for self-presentation.

Gadamer's speculative dialectic is initially developed through the concept of presentation (*Darstellung*). The significance of this concept becomes apparent beginning with his critique of aesthetic consciousness. As Richard Bernstein explains, Gadamer challenges the modern prejudice toward the work of art, namely the "modern embarrassment in even speaking about truth in regards to works of art" (Bernstein 1983, 118). Specifically, Gadamer takes issue with Kant's "radical subjectivization" of aesthetic judgment which attempts to ground aesthetic experience in human subjectivity but without wanting to relativize this experience.¹²⁰ For him, the unintended consequence of Kant's subjectivization of aesthetic judgment was the development of "aesthetic differentiation," an abstract conceptualization of aesthetic consciousness which demands that we "disregard everything in which a work of art is rooted, such as its original context and its secular or religious function, in order for the 'pure work of art' to stand out" (Bernstein 1983, 119-120; TM, 74). This abstraction is entirely methodological in Gadamer's view, and in objection he claims that there is an experience of art which extends beyond any methodological abstraction and still obtains knowledge of the work of art.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Gadamer begins his criticism within Kant's conceptualization in *Critique of Judgment* of taste and genius as situated within a state of "free play." Taste and genius are not determined by any definite concept that limits one's cognitive faculties, yet they remain "universally communicable" (Bernstein 1983, 119). Taste therefore "obeys a criterion of content," such that "what artists create and what the society values belong together in the unity of a style of life and an ideal of taste" (TM, 73). Bernstein writes succinctly, "Taste is communal, not idiosyncratic" (Bernstein 1983, 119).

¹²¹ "Is there to be no knowledge in art? Does not the experience of art contain a claim to truth which is certainly different from that of science, but just as certainly is not inferior to it? And is not the task of aesthetics precisely to ground the fact that the experience [*Erfahrung*] of art is a mode of knowledge which provides science with the ultimate data from which it constructs the knowledge of nature, and certainly different from all moral rational knowledge, and indeed from all conceptual knowledge—but still knowledge, i.e., conveying truth?" (TM, 84; WM, 103).

Gadamer wants to overcome the radical subjectivity of Kantian aesthetic consciousness in order to bring into question the possibility of a genuine experience (*Erfahrung*) of the work of art that is grounded ontologically in the work of art itself. In his view, the question of this possibility is the question of what truth really is in the human sciences (TM, 86-87). In order to elaborate the conditions on which this possibility depends, he develops his concept of play (*Spiel*). Play assumes the phenomenological presupposition of a prior unity between subject and object, rather than their separation that the natural sciences presuppose. The back and forth movement of the players within play are subordinated to the structure of play itself. For this reason, play maintains its own inherent autonomy over and above the activity of the players. The content of play, Gadamer writes, “merely reaches presentation [*Darstellung*] through the players” (TM, 103). While the unity of an idea is what unifies the interlocutors in a dialogue, the essential nature of this idea is not captured in any one conversation about its meaning. The essence of the idea transcends the particular viewpoints of the interlocutors, which is how the idea is able to be manifested in many different contexts. Similarly, the structure of play unifies the players in relation to each other but in and of itself transcends the particularity of the players.¹²² The subject matter of play is not the players, then, but rather the play itself (TM, 104; WM, 109-110).

The subject of aesthetic consciousness is therefore not the work of art *per se*, but rather the subject matter that the work of art presents and which the interpreter has in common with it. The mode of being of the work of art is therefore relational and subordinate (PH, 50; Bernstein 1983, 122). That is, the work of art exists in relation to the consciousness which perceives and interprets its content, and both are subordinate to the structure of the play which “reaches

¹²² Gadamer also develops this meaning of play in his 1962 essay, “On the Problem of Self-Understanding” (PH, 44-58).

presentation” through their back and forth movement. Likewise, the reader of a text does not interpret primarily the author’s meaning, but the subject matter that the text presents and which the reader has in common with the author. For this reason, “the being of art cannot be defined as an object of 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 [*Seinsvorganges der Darstellung*], and belongs essentially to play as play” (TM, 115; WM, 121-122). A genuine experience of the work of art, therefore, necessarily includes all of the contingent circumstances that contribute to this experience, and which are excluded in Kant’s aesthetic consciousness and aesthetic differentiation.

The ontological significance of the work of art extends into what Gadamer calls the “transformation into structure” (*Verwandlung ins Gebilde*). It is only through this transformation, he writes, that play can “achieve ideality” and be understood as play: “Only now does [play] emerge as detached from the representing [*darstellenden*] activity of the players and consist in the pure appearance [*Erscheinung*] of what they are playing” (TM, 110; WM, 116). Gadamer creates an analogy between play and drama to illustrate his point. A dramatic work, he says, is a self-contained whole whose content is presented to an audience by its actors. The actors constitute the presentation of the drama, while the content of the drama itself supercedes the subjective roles of the actors. The structure of the drama gains an “absolute autonomy” over the actors such that what exists for the audience is not the actors but “only what [the actors] are playing” (TM, 111). The drama is thus transformed into structure and achieves its ideality, by virtue of which it is presentable to the audience as a meaningful, self-contained whole. In this sense, Gadamer writes, the drama “is experienced properly by, and presents itself (as it is

‘meant’) to, one who is not acting in the play but watching it. In him the game is raised, as it were, to its ideality” (TM, 109).

The transformation of play into structure is problematic, however, insofar as it introduces a tension between the objective and relative meaning of the play itself. In being transformed, play becomes its “true being” (*wahre Sein*).¹²³ It represents a world in which the audience lives, so to speak, for the duration of the performance. As Georgia Warnke explains, the problem here is that the role of the audience for Gadamer remains ambiguous. A performance implies, or perhaps presupposes an audience, and so a spectator is essential if the play is to have meaning at all. The question is whether the audience is free to interpret this meaning more or less as they please, or if they ought to determine the meaning that the author, e.g. the playwright, had originally intended (Warnke 1987, 54). Warnke takes Gadamer at his word, viz. that the autonomous being of the structure of play is absolute, and that play therefore represents a world that operates independently of the particular beliefs or intentions of not just its spectators but also its author. Reducing the meaning of the play to the intention of its author “reflects both a failure to recognize its autonomy and, more importantly, an unjustifiable restriction on the knowledge it contains” (Ibid., 55). Similarly, Gadamer maintains that the meaning of the text or its analogue “does not depend on the contingencies of the author and his original audience,” as this meaning is always “co-determined by the historical situation of the interpreter” (TM, 296).

In light of this view, in chapter one we argued that a similar dilemma between monistic and pluralistic definitions of meaning conceals a more fundamental truth that is exhibited in the

¹²³ TM, 111; WM, 116. Gadamer repeats this phrase further down, where it seems to reference the definition of truth as disclosure. Gadamer writes, “In being presented in play, what is emerges [*In der Darstellung des Spieles kommt heraus, was ist*]. It produces and brings to light what is otherwise constantly hidden and withdrawn [*sich sonst ständig verhüllt und entzieht*]” (TM, 112; WM, 118). However, he does not use the term *alētheia* or any of the usual terms for unconcealment or disclosure, so any reference to disclosure is implicit at best.

dialectical relationship between the principles of unity and multiplicity. With respect to the experience of the work of art, Gadamer begins to elaborate the dialectical relationship between the One and the Many in terms of essence (*Wesen*) and appearance (*Erscheinung*), i.e. the presentation of an essence through play. Imitation (μίμησις) thus becomes the vehicle for the transformation of play into structure, as imitation elaborates the conditions under which the audience and the work of art exist in relation to each other within the broader framework of play. As we will see, imitation is central for explaining how Gadamer's formulates the ground of his speculative dialectic and how this dialectic situates the Platonic One and Many historically.

Gadamer elaborates the possibility of imitating the essence of play through his concept of presentation. The situation basic to imitation, he writes, is that "the thing presented is there" (*Das Dargestellte ist da*, TM 113; WM, 118). When a person imitates something, "he allows what he knows to exist and to exist in the way that he knows it" (TM, 113). Gadamer's development of imitation for his hermeneutics draws upon Plato's theory of recollection (ἀνάμνησις). For Plato, recognition refers to a kind of knowledge of being. Gadamer refers to recognition as something that we do that involves more than just re-familiarizing ourselves with something that we used to know. Recognition is especially a way of "knowing more" than what is already familiar to us: "In recognition what we know emerges, as if illuminated, from all the contingent and variable circumstances that condition it; it is grasped in its essence. It is known as something."¹²⁴ Recognition is a mode of insight into truth that is not currently present or "there," and so by imitating the content of this insight one re-presents it in the new circumstances in which it has been re-cognized. More than just being "there," the thing presented in imitation "has come into

¹²⁴ TM, 113. This characterization of recognition illustrates further what Gadamer means when he claims that the presentation of a play expresses a greater reality than the situation of the actors. In their presentation of a play, the subjective intentions of the actors are properly understood as having an accidental relation to the more essential meaning of the true being of the play itself, i.e. its meaning and autonomy via structure.

the There more authentically.”¹²⁵ Imitation implies a kind of eidetic reality in the same way that the parts of the λόγος imply certain ideas, as we saw in chapter two. Thus imitation does not merely copy something; it presents “knowledge of the essence” (TM, 114), albeit in a form that is determined by and relative to a particular situation.

Here Gadamer uncovers the unique cognitive function of imitation, namely its ability to mediate between essence and appearance. Representing something in an image in the manner described above allows the representation to claim “its own validity and truth” (TM, 114). That is, the image is not merely a copy of an original. Though it maintains an essential relation to the original, it presents its claim about the original on its own terms. Alasdair MacIntyre makes a similar point in his distinction between “external” and “internal” representations (MacIntyre 1976). An external representation is a reproduction of an original whose function is just to refer the viewer back to the original, such as a passport photo. The meaning of an external representation, then, has no independence or autonomy apart from the original. Internal representations, by contrast, do not refer to an original “in the sense that they could be evaluated with regard to their faithfulness to it” (Warnke 1987, 59). In other words, the meaning of an internal representation is not dependent on the original insofar as it presents the original on new terms. We “see the original in its light,” as Warnke puts it (Ibid.). However, it is still a representation of something, and so although the meaning of an internal representation is not identical to the original, it is not totally independent from the original either.

¹²⁵ “Das mimische Urverhältnis, das wir erörtern, enthält also nicht nur, daß das Dargestellte da ist, sondern auch, daß es eigentlicher ins Da gekommen ist” (TM, 114; WM, 120). See also PDE, 32-33, where Gadamer compares *Dasein*’s being-in-the-world and its anticipatory disposition over things to playing a game. *Dasein*’s mode of being that seeks to communicate its understanding of things to another, as a way of being with others (*Mitdasein*, BT, §26), is analogous to playing the game.

In the context of the presentation of play, then, imitation mediates between the essence of the play itself—its true being or autonomous structure—and its appearance in the representing activity of the players. Gadamer describes this mediation as pertaining to the possibility of the self-presentation of play. In *Truth and Method* he writes, “In being played the play speaks to the spectator through its presentation; and it does so in such a way that, despite the distance between it and himself, the spectator belongs to play” (TM, 115); and in *Relevance of the Beautiful*, that “The function of the representation of play [*Spieldarstellung*] is ultimately to establish, not just any movement whatsoever, but rather the movement of play determined in a specific way. In the end, play is thus the self-representation [*Selbstdarstellung*] of its own movement” (RB, 23; AS, 38-39). An essential part of play is the fact that it lends itself to a variety of interpretations depending on what becomes emphasized in a presentation of its structure. Different conductors, for example, may highlight different parts of a musical performance, or directors elements of a dramatic performance. Play’s capacity to sustain a multitude of possible manifestations of its content belongs to its capacity for self-presentation (*Sichdarstellen*), which Gadamer claims is its true nature (TM, 115; WM, 121; Warnke 1987, 65). Thus the appearances of play that reach presentation through the activity of the players are possibilities that belong to the play itself and extend from its capacity for self-presentation.

Opposed to the act of aesthetic differentiation that Gadamer claims is a consequence of Kantian aesthetic judgment is the idea of aesthetic non-differentiation (TM, 116). Rather than bracketing off the contingent circumstances under which aesthetic experience occurs, these accidental factors that determine the situation of the spectator are both constitutive and reflective of the structure of the play and its meaning as a whole (sc. Warnke 1987, 66). In this way aesthetic non-differentiation not only overcomes Kant’s radical subjectivization of the

experience of the work of art; as we will see, it also provides a productive orientation to the otherwise “insuperable” ontological gap between representations and the original things they represent.

The mimetic activity of the players, we find, situates them in a dialectical relationship with play analogous to the relationship between the One and the Many. The central idea behind the One and Many, as directed by the paradigm of number, dictates that the unity of a concept is understood through its constituent parts, which are known in terms of their relational capacity to manifest the nature of the being that unifies them. This unity, we recall, is understood in this way as a whole constituted by nothing other than its parts, and simultaneously as a sum greater than its parts. Understanding thus involves an “ongoing process of concept formation” that extends beyond the relation of a universal to a particular, as the moment of application that hermeneutics describes maintains a reciprocal development of the meaning of both the universalized idea and its particular appearances (Gadamer 2006, 404). This does not mean that new terms are constantly being invented. By definition the “undefinable manifold” that constitutes the Many is always indeterminate to some degree. Interpreting the meaning a unified concept thus requires a constant movement from the One to the Many and the Many to the One. Similarly, the transformation of play into structure, whereby it achieves its true being and ideality, is presented through nothing other than the activity of the players. They “bring into existence [*zum Dasein*] what the play itself requires” (TM, 116; WM, 122) for this transformation. But although the play cannot come to presentation without this activity, the meaning of the play as a whole that this activity manifests transcends the individual performances of the players. The kind of play that happens in a religious festival exhibits this dialectical relationship:

Here the relation to the community is obvious. An aesthetic consciousness, however reflective, can no longer suppose that only aesthetic differentiation, which views the

aesthetic object in its own right, discovers the true meaning of the religious image or the play. No one will be able to suppose that for religious truth the performance of the ritual is inessential. (TM, 115)

Play exists, therefore, “only in being played and in its presentations as a play, though it is nevertheless its own being that is thereby presented” (TM, 116).

While the activity of the players constitutes the presentation of the play, their performance is really an appearance of the play’s true being. How and what they perform is therefore one possible manifestation among many of the essence of play that play itself presents. Gadamer claims that aesthetic experience is “not at all a question of a mere subjective variety of conceptions, but of the work’s own possibilities of being [*Seinsmöglichkeiten*] that emerge as the work explicates itself, as it were, in the variety of its aspects” (TM, 117; WM, 123). While aesthetic judgment is certainly rooted in subjectivity, the spectator does not enjoy a total freedom of judgment. The spectator “fails to appreciate the obligatoriness of the work of art if one regards the variations possible in the presentation as free and arbitrary. In fact they are all subject to the supreme criterion of ‘right’ representation” (TM, 117). This is not to say that aesthetic judgments must correspond to an objective standard. It means only that within the back and forth movement of play, the work of art validates only those judgments of its content that manifest a real possibility of its being, and not any judgment whatsoever. Their dialogical relation thus reflects the process of concept formation that Gadamer finds is inherent in all understanding.

Importantly, the structure of play, and within it the relation between the interpreter and the work of art, is fundamentally historical. The concept of aesthetic non-differentiation attends to the essential finitude of historical existence, making it possible for a work of art to remain relevant over time despite the variance in the situations of its viewers. Warnke summarizes this point aptly:

Understanding is primarily an understanding of the claim a work of art imposes on us and this means that we understand a work in its relevance to our own situation. That situation does not affect simply the significance of a work but rather enters into the interpretation of the meaning itself, into what is shocking, what is unclear and into what the work “really” says. (Warnke 1987, 68)

Gadamer’s historical approach undermines any attempt to define the work of art or the text ahistorically, viz. according to its original meaning as intended by its creator. In doing so, he brings into question the conditions under which its relevance to the present via the fusion of horizons is actually possible.

In elaborating these conditions, Gadamer identifies understanding as a form of participation (*Teilhabe*). He writes, “Being present [*Dabeisein*] does not simply mean being there along with something else that is there at the same time. To be present means to participate [*Dabeisein heißt Teilhabe*]” (TM, 121; WM, 129). It is important to recognize that presence can be elaborated in two different ways: on the one hand, there is the participation of the players within the broader structure of play; and on the other, there is the participation one player with another player. Let us consider Gadamer’s example of the annual celebration of a festival. The contingency of the participants’ situation means that the festival itself changes every time it is celebrated, even though historically it is always the same festival. This means that the “original essence” (*originalen Wesen*) of the festival is always celebrated differently “even when celebrated in exactly the same way” (TM, 121; WM, 128). Each celebration is an internal representation, we might say, of the festival’s essential meaning, such that “every repetition is as original as the work itself” (TM, 120). The participants, then, do not passively observe the festival but actively become a part of it. After all, the presentation of the festival is contingent upon their activity. For this reason, the participants must also participate mutually with each

other. The audience in a drama, for instance, is only present as an audience for the actors, and the actors are only present for their audience.¹²⁶

Furthermore, in the context of aesthetic experience it is by virtue of the spectator's participation with the work of art that the work becomes contemporaneous. What presents itself to consciousness as contemporaneous "achieves full presence, however remote its origin may be" (TM, 123). As above, the content of this presentation is not something merely given to consciousness, but requires an activity on the side of the perceiving consciousness in order to be properly understood. This activity, Gadamer writes, "consists in holding on to the thing in such a way that it becomes 'contemporaneous,' which is to say, however, that all mediation is superseded in total presence" (TM, 124). He describes the spectator as being drawn out of himself in a moment of self-forgetfulness in which he achieves an unmediated grasp of the work of art in its "absolute presence."¹²⁷ In this way, the meaning of the work of art becomes understood in terms of its relevance to the present situation of the spectator and not just as a relic of the past to be approached through aesthetic or historical differentiation.

¹²⁶ In "Relevance of the Beautiful" Gadamer characterizes the participatory dimension of play as follows: "Another important aspect of play as a communicative activity, so it seems to me, is that it does not really acknowledge the distance separating the one who plays and the one who watches the play. The spectator is manifestly more than just an observer who sees what is happening in front of him, but rather one who is a part of it insofar as he literally 'takes part'" (RB, 24). Similarly, in *Truth and Method* Gadamer refers to Hegel's description of the object of experience for consciousness: "For consciousness its object is the in-itself [*an-sich*], but what is in-itself can be known only as it presents itself to the experiencing consciousness. Thus the experiencing consciousness has precisely this experience: that the in-itselfness of the object is in-itself 'for us'" (TM, 348; WM, 360). As we will see, Gadamer rejects the idea that the object of experience exists "in itself," and so the salient detail here is that the object of experience is experienced as "for us." The dialogical framework for coming to a shared understanding presupposes that the interlocutors present something for the other to apprehend.

¹²⁷ TM, 124-125. Summarizing his analysis of aesthetic being further down, Gadamer writes, "We have sought to show something about the concept of play in general and about the transformation into structure characteristic of the play of art: namely that the presentation or performance of a work of literature or music is something essential, and not incidental to it, for it merely completes what the works of art already are—the being there of what is presented in them. The specific temporality of aesthetic being, its having its being in the process of being presented, comes to exist in reproduction as a distinct, independent phenomenon" (TM, 129-130).

A brief examination of the historical reception of Alex Colville's painting, *Horse and Train*, will illustrate the contemporaneity of aesthetic experience. Colville enlisted in the Canadian army in 1942. In 1943, he was flown overseas to work as a war artist. While Colville enjoyed being in the army, he grossly detested the war. While his time in Europe was spent mostly in a state of detached observation of the day to day routine of the soldiers (Cheetham 1994, 37), he was also witness to the atrocities of war, such as the Belsen concentration camp. Colville's first sketches of *Horse and Train* that he produced in 1954 include a reference to Roy Campbell's poem, "Dedication to Mary Campbell":

I scorn the goose-step of their massed attack
And fight with my guitar slung on my back,
Against a regiment I oppose a brain
And a dark horse against an armoured train.¹²⁸

One can reasonably interpret the horse as representing the artist himself and his hostility not only toward the inhuman scale of the war that he had witnessed firsthand (Dow 1972, 41), but also toward conventionalist tendencies of a population that can permit something like fascism to develop. The image of the horse, however, presents the viewer with more than just Colville's self-representation. As Burnet suggests, the horse is a broader metaphor for the individualistic opposition to rigid conformity in thought and action (Burnet 1983, 100). Burnet's approach is supported by the fact that when Colville's work was exhibited in China in 1984, many people, especially students, saw themselves as the horse and China's communist government as the

¹²⁸ Colville included only the latter two lines in his sketches, and so despite their relevance to Colville's experience in the war commentaries on this piece tend to omit the first two lines when discussing the reference to Campbell.

train.¹²⁹ For them, Colville's work represented their struggle for freedom and autonomy against the repressive regime of their communist government.¹³⁰

The example of Colville's painting illustrates the historical nature of play and aesthetic consciousness, and as well how understanding operates as a mode of participation. The meaning of *Horse and Train* is not either what it says to a North American audience in the 1950's or to a Chinese audience in the 1980's. It means both of these things, and potentially more. Each audience celebrates, in its own way, the "original essence" of the play through their experience of the work of art. As above, this celebration requires an active participation in the work of art itself. That is, one does not passively observe the work of art; one sees oneself as belonging to it, such as when the Chinese students perceived themselves *as* the horse. In doing so, they make this meaning of the work of art present with themselves. As Gadamer indicates, in this moment the work of art becomes contemporaneous with aesthetic consciousness in such a way that it achieves "total presence" with the spectator. Their mediation "supercedes" any temporal gap as the historical distance between the spectator and the work of art disappears.

5.3.2: The speculative structure of language and the event of understanding

Gadamer's development of aesthetic consciousness and its performance within play is directly related to his approach to the speculative structure of language and its role as a universal medium of understanding. Through Socrates' hypothesizing of the εἶδος, we saw that language is understood to assert something universal and communicable by referring to the necessary reason or cause of an entity's being. The notion that the content of language is both universal and

¹²⁹ <http://www.macleans.ca/culture/arts/unpacking-the-real-alex-colville/> Accessed July 6, 2016.

¹³⁰ Of course, only five years after the exhibition of Colville's work in China, the Chinese government declared martial law in order to suppress the student-led demonstrations at Tiananmen Square. Colville's painting almost seems to have foreshadowed the iconic image of a lone civilian staring down a row of armored tanks.

communicable seems *prima facie* to resemble Kant's formulation of aesthetic judgment, i.e. that it is radically subjective while remaining universally communicable. Gadamer insists, however, that an essential feature of language is its "I-lessness" (PH, 65). That is, it is communicable in a way that "lets the other person speak too" (PDE, 28). In this respect Gadamer makes the following claim:

Now I contend that the basic constitution of the game [...] is structurally related to the constitution of the dialogue in which language is a reality. When one enters into dialogue with another person and then is carried along further by the dialogue, it is no longer the will of the individual person, holding itself back or exposing itself, that is determinative. Rather, the law of the subject matter [*die Sache*] is at issue in the dialogue and elicits statement and counterstatement and in the end plays them into each other. (PH, 66; GW II, 152)

The relation between essence and appearance, like that of the One and Many, involves an "ongoing process of concept formation" (TM, 404) that is not captured in the relation between universal and particular. Like play, the subject matter of a dialogue maintains an essence that is in itself independent of the speakers. As we saw above, the interaction between the spectator and the work of art manifests the play's true being, while the content of this manifestation does not correspond to any subjective self-determination of the players (TM, 122). The participation in play's structure is primarily an authentic presentation (*eigentlicher ins Da*) of a possible mode of the play's "original essence."

In this section, we will develop Gadamer's understanding of the speculative structure of language through its analogy to play. In particular, we will consider how a hermeneutical dialogue similarly presents an image of the "original essence" of its subject matter, namely the things themselves, and how this presentation is fundamentally historical. As above, a genuine experience of the work of art does not happen through aesthetic differentiation, but must include the contingent factors that constitute this experience. Gadamer stresses as well that one cannot

have a genuine conversation by bracketing one's own historicity and fore-knowledge of meaning. The prejudice towards meaning that is necessarily a part of one's historical situation supplies the conditions under which experience becomes possible.¹³¹ In a hermeneutic dialogue, then, the meaning of the subject at hand is elevated above the situation of the interlocutors; but, as with play in relation to the players, the subject of a dialogue nonetheless depends upon the speakers to "bring into existence [*zum Dasein*]" (TM, 116) what it requires to become present. Just as imitation mediates between the essence of play and its appearance in a performance, the speculative structure of language mediates between beings and their reflection in words.

In Chapter 5 of *Truth and Method* Gadamer turns directly to his conception of language as a medium of human understanding and historical experience. In his view, Plato's turn toward language as a medium, as expressed in Socrates' "flight into the λόγοι," provides the initial orientation toward understanding the ability of language to mediate between thought and being. Plato's approach is relevant to hermeneutics insofar as it promotes and elaborates language as the medium between the finitude of human thought and the infinite presence of being. Gadamer summarizes his view of this position as follows:

The articulation of the logos brings the structure of being into language, and this coming into language is, for Greek thought, nothing other than the presencing of the being itself, its aletheia. Human thought regards the infinity of this presence as its fulfilled potential, its divinity. (TM, 453)

Continuing, however, Gadamer states directly and unambiguously that "we do not follow this way of thinking in its splendid self-forgetfulness" (TM, 453). Ostensibly in light of Heidegger's

¹³¹ Thus Gadamer: "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 world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something—whereby what we encounter says something to us" (PH, 9). Of course, a significant part of the chapter "Elements of a Theory of Hermeneutic Experience" in *Truth and Method* is devoted to rehabilitating the positive sense of prejudice and bias (TM, 268-291). For an overview of the parallel between play and dialogue, and the conceptual progression from play to the ontological situation of the player, see Bernstein 1982, 826-828.

claim, e.g. in “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” Gadamer finds that measuring the truth of speech by its correspondence (ὁρθότης) to the “outward appearance” (*Aussehen*; *idea*, *eidos*; Heidegger 1962b, 254, 265) of beings does not attend to the finitude of human experience.¹³²

Gadamer, however, does not take this opportunity to leave Plato behind, but rather to emphasize the importance of certain presuppositions of classical metaphysics. In light of the tendency he sees to identify truth with correspondence and certainty, Gadamer finds that the increasing emphasis on scientific methodology since the 17th century has left contemporary thought entangled in the “aporias of subjectivism” (TM, 456). In his view, the scientific presupposition of the separation between subject and object has maintained an instrumental approach to language. That is, rather than operating as the medium between subject and object, language is used instrumentally as the means for elaborating their correspondence. In the previous chapter we saw that in Gadamer’s view the presupposition of a correspondence theory of truth entails an uncomfortable dualism between the subjectivity of the human will and the objectivity of being-in-itself, and that Gadamer develops his approach to language as a medium

¹³² Commenting on “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” William Richardson writes, “In Plato metaphysics in the traditional sense takes its rise, for it is he who first conceives of thinking Being as a going ‘beyond’ the beings of experience to their being-ness, which he conceives as their what-ness, their see-ableness, their Idea” (Richardson 2003, 308). Similarly, the way of thinking that Gadamer says he is leaving behind is the Greek presupposition of an infinite or divine “being of beings” (TM, 453). In “The Nature of Things and the Language of Things” Gadamer writes that, concerning the possibility of a dialectical mediation between the finitude of human experience and the infinite scope of being, “the task of metaphysics continues, though certainly as a task that cannot again be solved as metaphysics, that is, by going back to an infinite intellect” (PH, 75). Language performs this mediation, Gadamer suggests, without having to presuppose a divine, infinite intellect. Jean Grondin argues that in order to promote pluralism without being reduced to relativity, hermeneutics has developed as a “postmetaphysical” philosophy. Relativism, Grondin suggests, presupposes a form of metaphysical absolutism which, as the standard of truth, denies or represses the validity of finite human experience. In keeping with Gadamer’s statement that he is not following the Greek self-forgetfulness of being, Grondin writes, “[Hermeneutics] seeks to conquer the metaphysical forgetfulness of time that, for Heidegger, signifies exactly the same thing as a forgetfulness of Being, by developing a rigorous discourse based on and beginning with finitude” (Grondin 1990, 46-47). So, when Gadamer says in *Idea of the Good* that his development of a philosophical hermeneutics was meant in part to “withstand [Heidegger’s] challenge theoretically,” i.e. the claim that Plato initiated the metaphysical forgetfulness of being, his objection is not that a science of correspondence did not actually develop from this forgetfulness, but that *Plato* was not the one behind it. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer identifies Socrates’ “flight into the λόγοι” as what links language and human experience, but when he refers to Greek metaphysics in the next paragraph he does not mention Plato at all (TM, 453).

in order to reflect their co-determination rather than the priority or correspondence of one to the other (sc. PH, 74-75).

In Gadamer's view, the definition of truth as correspondence overlooks the finitude of human experience as "belonging" (*Zugehörigkeit*) to the "infinity of meaning" of being. He claims that by defining the soul as something that participates in the true being of the ideas, Plato and Aristotle presuppose a fundamental relationship between the self and the world which becomes central to the hermeneutical phenomenon (TM, 455). The concept of belonging first emerges in Gadamer's elaboration of the ontological significance of the work of art. Within aesthetic consciousness, understanding belongs (*zugehören*) to the work of art. In the previous section, we saw that the mode of being of the work of art is understood in terms of its capacity to present itself to its spectators or participants. That is, although the meaning of the work of art or its analogue depends on its presentation in the back and forth activity of the players, ultimately what they present in this activity is nothing other than a possibility that belongs to the work of art itself. The nature of belonging is therefore elaborated primarily in terms of the mode of being of the work of art itself (TM, 87; WM, 106).

Gadamer appropriates Humboldt's conceptualization of "world" (*Welt*) and his approach to language as the presentation of a worldview (*Weltansicht*) in order to assist with identifying language as the medium between finite, human experience and the infinite meaning of being to which we belong. Gadamer explains that the world is a "world" only insofar as it "comes into language," while at the same time language has "real being" only by presenting (*darstellen*) a world (TM, 440; WM, 447). Their relation is described as fundamentally open in a way that is meant to reflect the openness of hermeneutical experience toward tradition, the text, etc. The "true being of language," furthermore, only exists within dialogue and coming to an

understanding, which means that we only have a world insofar as we share it with and present it to others (TM, 443). Gadamer contrasts the concept of world with that of “environment” (*Umwelt*). He describes environment as a kind of confinement within convention, such that our relationship to the world is characterized by its “freedom from environment” (TM, 441). For this reason, the presentation of a worldview and the process of coming to an understanding do not depend upon an instrumental use of language. Language for Gadamer “is a center (*Mitte*), not an end (*telos*)” (Wright 1986, 204; cf. Grondin 2006, 479-480). Rather, language is the medium in and through which the presentation and shared understanding of the world become possible.

The experience of the work of art is thus a model of the dialectical relationship between the finitude of human experience and the infinity of being. Importantly, the mode of presenting the nature of being is language. It is only language, Gadamer claims, that is both “related to the totality of beings” and can mediate the “finite, historical nature of man to himself and to the world” (TM, 454). Language, then, has its own “dialectic of the word” according to which:

every word [has] an inner dimension of multiplication: every word breaks forth as if from a center and is related to a whole, through which alone it is a word. Every word causes the whole of the language to which it belongs to resonate and the whole world-view that underlies it to appear. [...] All human speaking is finite in such a way that there is laid up within it an infinity of meaning to be explicated and laid out. (TM, 454)

The hermeneutical phenomenon, expressed here in terms of belonging, can be illuminated therefore “only in light of the finitude of being, which is wholly verbal in character” (TM, 454). For this reason, Gadamer wants to reinvigorate the classical view which, as we just saw, identifies the soul as participating in true being and thus reflects the primary relationship between soul and being as belonging together.

In order to account for the terms on which one “belongs” to the infinite meaning of being, and so too what it means to experience being as an event that language mediates, it is important

to identify Gadamer's understanding of the nature of being itself. We recall that the event of understanding is essentially historical; the event itself is achieved through the application of the meaning of the hermeneutical object to the particular, historical situation of the interpreter (TM, 308). By its analogy to the structure of play, being must be something in which the I and Thou participate and whose "original essence" they present historically. The participation in a festival, for example, brings the festival to presentation as an event whose essence and meaning are constituted by the particular circumstances of the participants, but, reciprocally, are possibilities of the festival's own self-presentation. This is how Gadamer can claim, for example, that the "original essence" (*originalen Wesen*) of the festival is always celebrated differently "even when celebrated in exactly the same way" (TM, 121; WM, 128), and that "every repetition is as original as the work itself" (TM, 120). The presentation of being in play is thus what Gadamer calls the "event of being" (*Seinsvorganges*) or the "coming into being of meaning" (*Sinn-geschehens*).¹³³ Similarly, the world reaches presentation as part of the event of being and the event of language (*sprachlichen Geschehen*; TM, 446; WM, 453) that occur through acts of speaking and writing.¹³⁴ In developing the speculative structure of language, Gadamer claims as well that hermeneutical experience reflects an understanding of the activity of the things themselves that happens to one as an event (*das ein Geschehen ist*; TM, 460; WM, 469). In light of this claim, he also says in the conclusion to *Truth and Method* that the "event-structure of all understanding" entails from the ontological view that "being is language—i.e. self-presentation" (TM, 481).

¹³³ TM, 115, 157; WM, 122, 170.

¹³⁴ Sc. Bernstein 1983, 145. Significantly, Gadamer concludes Chapter 2 of *Truth and Method*, "The Ontology of the Work of Art and its Hermeneutic Significance," by arguing that hermeneutical consciousness surpasses and includes within itself the idea of aesthetic consciousness that he develops.

It is clear that for Gadamer the idea of participating in or belonging to the event of being does not presuppose something like the Kantian distinction between phenomena and noumena (sc. Grondin 1990, 47; Wachterhauser 1999, 111-112); nor does he attribute a two-world ontology to Plato (IG, 132 ff.; GW VII, 345, 380). The event of language in his view reflects “not only what persists but what changes in things” (TM, 446; WM, 453). The permanent, unchanging nature of entities is always knowable by virtue of having “a prior association with the human mind” (TM, 447), but the being that language mediates is not identifiable with just the content of this fore-knowledge. Gadamer grounds experience in historical finitude, and so the manifestation of the content of one’s fore-knowledge is always essentially incomplete and therefore subject to change.

More broadly, Gadamer rejects the scientific presupposition of a “world in itself” (*Welt an sich*) that exists beyond language and the relative manifold of worldviews that each language presents (TM, 444; WM, 451). In his view it is misleading to assume that the being that is reflected in language must be an “in-itself” that can be ascertained, and so controlled, through its objectification in scientific reasoning (TM, 447; WM, 454). Gadamer claims that “there is no being-in-itself [*Ansichsein*] that is increasingly revealed” in each new act of appropriation within tradition (TM, 458), and that hermeneutics must therefore “see through the dogmatism of a “meaning-in-itself [*Sinnes an sich*]”.¹³⁵ Rather, the event of being that occurs in a genuine dialogue uncovers something that the minds of the interlocutors do not contain on their own. They may be able to anticipate some activity on the side of the things themselves, as this is

¹³⁵ TM, 468; WM, 477. I agree with Bernstein’s evaluation, namely that for Gadamer the subject of our understanding, i.e. the “things themselves” (*die Sache*), does not exist “*an sich*” such that “we must “purify” ourselves of all forestructures and prejudgments in order to grasp or know them “objectively” (Bernstein 1983, 137). Fuyarchuk explains the tendency in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to interpret Plato as a neo-Kantian and the progenitor of idealism (Fuyarchuk 2010, 54-59). Gadamer criticizes this approach in *Idea of the Good* for its insensitivity to historical differentiation and its failure to appreciate the unity of thought between Plato and Aristotle (IG, 2-3, 24).

already an essential feature of understanding, e.g. as the fore-conception of completeness, but this anticipation is based primarily in evidence and not certainty. Something “comes into being that had not existed before and that exists from now on” (TM, 458), and so is always beyond the interpreter’s ability to control. Moreover, as we saw in the previous chapter, the fact that experience can contradict one’s fore-knowledge is equally essential to hermeneutics. Like the true being of play, the real subject of thought maintains an autonomous existence. Thus the essential nature of being and its presentation in the event of language cannot be confined within the objective certainty and control of scientific methodology.¹³⁶

In order to properly identify the nature of being and the experience of it as an event, Gadamer refers to the dialectical activity involved in Hegelian and Greek science. What Hegel and the Greeks call dialectic, he says, is the mode of thought that unfolds that which “consistently follows from the subject matter itself” (TM, 460). Gadamer contrasts this conception of dialectic with the methodology of the natural sciences. The difference between Greek and Hegelian dialectic on the one hand and scientific methodology on the other is that the former, we might say, presents an internal representation of being whereas the latter presents an external presentation. He criticizes the scientific objectification of a being-in-itself (*Ansichsein*) in part by comparing it to the Greek notion of being καθ’ αὐτό, which in his view maintains the proper dialectical relationship between essence and appearance (TM, 447). Similarly, in developing the speculative structure of language, he finds that language mediates an “internal necessity of the thing itself” which goes beyond the subjectivity of understanding and “toward the idea that subject and object belong together” (TM, 457). Gadamer also claims that his

¹³⁶ Thus Gadamer: “This structure of the hermeneutical experience, which so totally contradicts the idea of scientific methodology, itself depends on the character of language as event that we have described at length” (TM, 459). For his extended view on this subject, see Gadamer’s essay, “The Nature of Things and the Language of Things” (PH, 69-81).

criticism of scientific methodology here has its strongest justification through Hegel's appeal to Greek methodology, namely as a way of dealing with an "action of the thing itself" and not something alien to it (TM, 459).

The being to which hermeneutical consciousness belongs is therefore the being that is revealed through the hermeneutical event of understanding, i.e. the experience of tradition and history that is mediated by language. For Gadamer the hermeneutical experience of the event of being is "not our action upon the thing, but the act of the thing itself" (TM, 459). In contrast to the methods of the natural sciences, then, he finds that "there is something resembling dialectic in hermeneutical experience: an activity of the thing itself, an action that, unlike the methodology of modern science, is a passion, an understanding, an event that happens to one."¹³⁷ The event of being, in other words, is an activity that belongs to the things themselves, namely their self-presentation to the consciousness that participates in them, i.e. in terms of their eidetic structure that is transmitted historically. Parallel with how aesthetic consciousness belongs to the movement of play, hermeneutical consciousness belongs to tradition in that it is always being addressed by tradition. The meaning of play, we recall, is presented through the activity of the players. This parallel suggests, then, that the meaning of tradition is manifested through the activity of its participants. The presupposition of a primary relationship between thinking and being means that one cannot help but hear the address that tradition makes and that one is therefore obligated to respond to this address. We recall that the mode of presenting the nature of being is language, i.e. the dialectic of the word. Just as play achieves its true being and ideality

¹³⁷ TM, 460. Wright explains Gadamer's position here as follows: "By working out what is speculative within Hegel and Plato, Gadamer does not mean to equate what is metaphysical within their dialectics with a hermeneutical conversation. Rather his intention is to recover the speculative structure of language by distinguishing it from what is metaphysical within their dialectics" (Wright 196, 207-208). The speculative feature of Platonic and Hegelian dialectic, as indicated here, is the articulation of meaning as an activity on the side of the subject matter itself, and not the interpreter or spectator of this subject matter.

through its presentation by the players, the things themselves achieve a kind of true being through the dialogue that constitutes the hermeneutical event of understanding.¹³⁸

In light of the event-structure of understanding, and especially the priority given to the theoretical participation in the activity of being, Gadamer explains that what philosophical hermeneutics has in common with both Greek and Hegelian dialectic, as per his characterization of them here, is their “speculative element.” In *Plato’s Dialectical Ethics* we see an early indication of Gadamer’s approach to the speculative structure of language. There, Gadamer explains the significance that he sees that Socrates’ hypothetical method has for language and the articulation of the meaning of being:

Language already contains an understanding of the world in those respects in which it remains the same. For the words by which we designate things already have the character of a universality that remains the same. Every word has its meaning, which is one, by comparison with the manifoldness of what can be designated by means of it. [...] Thus language makes the identical universality of a nature stand out from the manifold of what is given in changing perception and designates each entity by means of what it always is.¹³⁹

He emphasizes what he sees as the intended irony of Socrates’ description of language as being like a reflection in a pool of water (*Phaed.* 99e). For Plato, images that are merely external representations, such as reflections, barely exist. Having almost no connection with the being that they represent, images are characterized by their lack of necessary qualities and so constantly shift their appearance. For Gadamer language is decidedly not an image of this kind, nor is it for Plato in his view:

¹³⁸ TM, 458-459. Gadamer emphasizes the etymological link between “belonging” (*Zugehörigkeit*) to tradition and our ability to hear (*hören*) its address. We hear what tradition says whether we want to or not, and so the ubiquity of this address is commensurate with that of the language that we use to formulate a dialogue with it.

¹³⁹ PDE, 70-71. Similarly, in “Dialectic and Sophism in Plato’s *Seventh Letter*” Gadamer writes, “All four means [i.e. words, account, image, and knowledge] are trapped in the dialectic of the image or copy, for insofar as all four are intended to present the thing in and through themselves they must of necessity have a reality of their own. That which is meant to *present* something cannot *be* that thing” (DD, 112-113; emphasis his).

What is meant by a word is something that remains while points of view fluctuate. The thing that remains in this way and is posited as the cause of reason is the lasting aspect of appearance (eidos): that which always makes up the thing—its essence.¹⁴⁰

This characterization of language here has clear connection to the description of the event of language in *Truth and Method*. Here, the content of language is constituted by both sameness and difference in relation to that of which it is an image, and so manifests an internal representation of being. That is, words are not identical to the beings to which they refer, as this would merely duplicate being, but neither are words wholly different. Their meanings maintain an essential relation to the beings they represent, giving language an ontological stability and weight that external representations lack.¹⁴¹

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer refers to Hegel in order to elaborate the content of speculative thought and language. Once again we see a distinction between internal and external representations of being, which here are Hegel's identification of the speculative proposition and the judgment respectively. The judgment, Gadamer writes, is just a predicate attached to a "subject-concept." A judgment of this kind "does not pass over from the subject-concept to another concept that is placed in relation to it; it states the truth of the subject in the form of the

¹⁴⁰ PDE, 72-73. For his part, Socrates says, "Now perhaps my metaphor is not quite accurate; for I do not grant in the least that he who studies realities [τὰ ὄντα] by means of conceptions [ἐν τοῖς λόγοις] is looking at them in images any more than he who studies them in the facts of daily life" (*Phaed.* 100a; Fowler's translation with Greek inserted).

¹⁴¹ Socrates and Cratylus also discuss the possibility that language is an imitation (μίμησις) of reality. If names are exact duplicates of what they name, there would be no distinction between images and reality (*Crat.* 432c-d). Gonzalez contends that Cratylus' position, that there is no such thing as a false name and thus no such thing as false speech (*Crat.* 429a-430e), is consistent with the imitation theory of names: if a name is a name by virtue of its likeness to the thing it names, then any amount of unlikeness would mean that the name is the name for something else which it is like in those respects (Gonzalez 1998, 82). The implicit criticism is that a wholly natural theory of language without any convention is logically impossible (Ibid, 308 n. 41). By bringing into question the possibility of correct and incorrect names, then, Socrates also brings into question the very theory of imitation which Cratylus' view presupposes, creating the demand for a degree of conventionalism in their theory of language (Ibid, 83). That is, names must be somewhat unlike what they name, which allows a single name to refer to many things. In this spirit, Gadamer writes the following: "In the everyday use of language as well as within the so-called humanities, what increases speech's wealth of association and extends its store of knowledge can lead to confusion when everything depends on the singularity of significations. The metaphorical essence of language makes definition necessary and justifies the use of terms of art" (Gadamer 1992, 352).

predicate” (TM, 462). The speculative proposition, by contrast, “does not state something about something; rather, it presents the unity of the concept” (TM, 462). Quoting Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Gadamer illustrates that in the speculative proposition “the predicate is rather the substance” and so “the subject has passed into the predicate and has thus been superceded” (TM, 462). In this way, Gadamer explains, stating that “God is one” for example does not mean that unity is a property that can be predicated of God, but rather that it is in God’s nature to be a unity. There is an evident similarity here to his explanation of the simplicity of the Socratic hypothesis, i.e. that it unfolds the nature of an entity according to something internal to it rather than according to another entity. In other words, it would seem that for Gadamer, Socrates’ assertion that “the soul is immortal” is speculative in the same way that “God is one” is speculative.¹⁴²

By virtue of its speculative element, then, the event of language in hermeneutics “mirrors” being by presenting an internal representation of it. It does not merely assign a predicate to a subject. Instead, the reflection of being in play “is nothing but the pure appearance [*Erscheinung*] of what is reflected, just as the one is the one of the other, and the other is the other of the one” (TM, 462; WM, 470). The speculative element of language for hermeneutics functions “as the realization of meaning, as the event of speech [*Geschehen der Rede*], of mediation, of coming to an understanding”; and so the event of being is essentially speculative precisely because in it “the finite possibilities of the word are oriented toward the sense intended as toward the infinite” (TM, 464; WM, 473). Unlike judgments, speculative propositions do not

¹⁴² Di Cesare suggests convincingly that Gadamer’s claim that “being that can be understood is language” is also speculative, which implies in her view that the nature of being “is not exhausted by the predicate *language*.” If it were “it would not only be identified but defined as well, and hence Being would be something defined and determined, the very approach that Heidegger makes in his criticism of the ‘forgetting of Being’” (De Cesare 2012, 9-10). For his part, Gadamer maintains that this claim was never meant to establish an identity between being and language (GR, 130, 417). The being that can be understood, he says, is the being that “shows itself” (GR, 162).

merely reflect beings but instead express “a relation to the whole of being.”¹⁴³ Gadamer, however, maintains a distinction between hermeneutical and Hegelian speculative discourse. He emphasizes the “radical finitude” of hermeneutic experience and its locus in the space between familiarity and strangeness. To posit a moment in which the tension between familiarity and strangeness is overcome is to posit the completion of experience and the apprehension of an infinity of meaning within a finite intellect (Bernstein 1983, 163). Unlike Hegel’s logic, hermeneutics does not have the “problem of a beginning,” and by the same token it unfolds without end (TM, 467). The examples of celebrating a festival and participating in a work of art illustrate the historical endlessness of the speculative process: “The paradox that is true of all traditional material,” Gadamer writes, “namely of being one and the same and yet of being different, proves that all interpretation is, in fact, speculative” (TM, 468). Each celebration is a unique event which nevertheless remains essentially related to the being of the festival itself; and each interpretation “is no mere reproduction or repetition” of something belonging to tradition but “a new creation of understanding” (TM, 468).

The primary philosophical origin of Gadamer’s speculative dialectic is Plato’s ontology of ideas, in particular the participation thesis and the *arithmos* structure of the λόγος. Gadamer claims that Hegelian speculative dialectic is justified as a way of dealing with an “action of the thing itself” through its appeal to the Greek science of being (TM, 459). Plato demonstrates that knowledge depends on correctly apprehending the nature of the One and the Many (DD, 135).

¹⁴³ TM, 465. The difference between speaking about Being (speculation) and speaking about beings (judgment) corresponds to the difference between the primary and secondary levels of understanding and interpretation to which Gadamer refers repeatedly, and which we discussed in the first chapter. Here Gadamer states that speech becomes speculative through the “detachment of what is said from any subjective opinion and experience of the author” (TM, 465). This detachment indicates the difference, for example, between the self-understanding of the human sciences and the scientific methods pertaining to literary, historical, or aesthetic criticism (e.g. TM, 329-334); between the substantive and contingent motives behind one’s claim to reason (PDE, 41-42); or between the true being of the play that unifies its players and the subjective attitudes of the players themselves (PH, 54).

The principles of unity and multiplicity do not reflect the application of a universal to a particular, but rather their mutual determination. The One is nothing other than the unity of the Many; and the Many is nothing other than the multitude of relations unified under the One. Gadamer adopts these principles in order to describe the hermeneutical event of being and language. This event reveals an activity on the side of beings, namely their capacity to present themselves to thought in terms of their manifold possibilities of meaning. Through our participation in this event, we manifest these possibilities with respect to the historical context in which they become apparent to us. In this way, articulating the meaning of being bridges our limited perspective of our shared reality with the necessary principles that unify us with others in this reality:

Language already contains an understanding of the world in those respects in which it remains the same. For the words by which we designate things already have the character of a universality that remains the same. Every word has its meaning, which is one, by comparison with the manifoldness of what can be designated by means of it. [...] Thus language makes the identical universality of a nature stand out from the manifold of what is given in changing perception and designates each entity by means of what it always is. (PDE, 70-71)

For Gadamer, we attain theoretical insight into the nature of things through what is handed down to us through tradition, and we manifest this nature in the world by presenting it through our involvement with others. This process has no formal beginning or end, but rather refers to an “ongoing process of concept formation” inherent in hermeneutical understanding (TM, 404) that involves the reciprocal relation between the ideas and their appearances.

5.4: Conclusion

The argument of this chapter has demonstrated that Gadamer appropriates the ancient Greek meaning of $\theta\epsilon\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\alpha$ in order to explain the nature of human understanding as a form of

participation in the self-presentation of the ideas and concepts in light of which we construct our shared, social reality. The theoretical approach to the ideas that this chapter elaborates refers to Gadamer's use of Platonic dialogue and dialectic as an illustration of the philosophical "turning toward the idea" that describes the orientation of hermeneutical consciousness toward the things themselves, and the possibility of understanding the essential principles of reality as they present themselves to thought, and so further substantiates our claim that Gadamer bases his hermeneutical ontology in Plato's theory of ideas.

We began by outlining Socrates' method of hypothesizing the εἶδος and its relevance to Gadamer's hermeneutical interests. Socrates' approach illustrates how language provides a link between the evident and contingent experience of things and their necessary ground in order to justify an assertion about the meaning of these things. The salient feature of this approach is that the hypothesis posits as the ground of an entity "not another entity but the being of the entity itself" (PDE, 68). In this way, the validity of an assertion depends primarily on whether or not it "provides for the thing in its manifoldness the unitary reason on the basis of which it is to be understood as always the same," that is, if it exhibits "a manifold reality in its unitary selfsame being" (PDE, 65). As we saw in our discussion of the grammatical structure of the λόγος in chapter two, it is only in a secondary sense that this validity is a matter of the empirical correspondence between perception and reality. Thus in these initial steps toward developing the theoretical content of Gadamer's hermeneutical ontology, the ideas remain implicated in our discourse about being and thus, as per Plato's participation thesis, the ontological gap between sensible and intelligible reality remains closed.

We then elaborated the content of Gadamer's speculative dialectic. First, we explored his understanding of aesthetic consciousness in terms of its theoretical orientation toward the

essential principles of our shared reality. The experience of the work of art, especially through its characterization as play (*Spiel*), is paradigmatic for explaining the nature of hermeneutic experience as a form of participation within the historical transmission of meaning. We saw that the structure of play is something that transcends the particular situation of the players, allowing it to inhere within different situations and historical contexts. At the same time, this structure only has meaning in and through the players' presentation of the "pure appearance" (*Erscheinung*) of its formal structure. Thus each celebration of the same festival, for example, is an original presentation of the festival's meaning, even though each celebration happens differently.

Finally, we turned directly toward Gadamer's description of the speculative element of language. The salient point that he makes is that the speculative proposition does not simply attribute certain properties to an entity, but rather identifies something that belongs to the essential nature of that entity. As with Socrates' hypothesis of the εἶδος, the speculative proposition offers an internal representation of things; the grammatical object of this proposition is not another entity in addition to its subject, but something that belongs to that subject itself. By virtue of its speculative element the event of language reveals the internal structure of being. The speculative proposition does not simply attach a predicate to a subject; rather, "it presents the unity of the concept" (TM, 462) in light of its own possibilities for presentation (*Seinsmöglichkeiten*).

Accordingly, the original essence or true being of the subject matter that Gadamer uncovers in the experience of the work of art and the speculative structure of language is governed by the same ontological principles of identity and difference that sustain Plato's theory of ideas. The ideas remain the same, yet can become present in a plurality of ways. Likewise, the

things themselves retain their own identity but can inhere in different historical and cultural contexts. The essential historicity of hermeneutical consciousness and experience means, furthermore, that each appearance is always unique to the particular circumstances in which it becomes manifest as an event. By grounding the hermeneutical phenomenon in the essential finitude of historical experience, Gadamer claims to establish also the true, fundamental ground of the One and the Many. Thus we saw how in the experience of the work of art the spectator becomes contemporaneous with the object of his experience.

The speculative dimension of language that Gadamer emphasizes pertains to the action of the thing itself. This action only becomes apparent, however, in the back and forth movement between self and other as in play or a dialogue. In Gadamer's view, the principle of the indeterminate Dyad is for Plato "the principle of all differentiation and all differing, which is to say that it codetermines reality" (DD, 155). In chapter two we saw that the unity between sensible and intelligible reality that Plato's participation thesis presupposes means that the λόγος "completes itself only in the *Zeitwort*," i.e. the contingent circumstances in which the idea makes itself present (GW VII, 368-369). By grounding the hermeneutic phenomenon within the finitude of historical experience, Gadamer identifies the Dyad as the ontological principle of historical differentiation and the codetermination of historical reality within hermeneutic experience, and the One as the principle of the unity of being whose self-presentation is revealed in a multiplicity of historical horizons. The self-presentation of being and its mediation in language is always determined "by situation and context," but what is determined pertains "not to the speaker but to what is spoken" (TM, 483). In this way, the ontological gap between essence and historical appearance does not appear to be a problem for hermeneutics, any more than it is a problem for Plato to claim, in Gadamer's view, that being is an "original image" that

becomes imitated in appearances of it (RB, 17). If anything, the apparent difficulty concerning participation in Plato's ontology is precisely the point that Gadamer wants to emphasize in his hermeneutical ontology by characterizing hermeneutical understanding as a form of participation.

6. Chapter Five: Practical hermeneutics and the conditions for shared understanding

6.1: Introduction

This final chapter will argue that Gadamer identifies philosophical hermeneutics as a practical activity in order to draw out the distinction between authentic and inauthentic experience.

By elaborating Gadamer's complex identification of hermeneutics as a practical activity (GR, 21), the argument in this chapter extends that of the previous chapter. In chapter four we saw that the theoretical participation in the principles of our shared reality implies as well the active presentation of these ideas on the side of the participants. In light of this activity, the central problem that the present chapter will address is as follows: If, in the context of Gadamer's hermeneutics, a shared understanding between the partners in a dialogue is sufficient to obtain genuine or authentic truth, then there is nothing that necessarily distinguishes the content of this dialogue from one which obtains degenerate or inauthentic understanding.

As we will see, as a mode of inauthentic experience, sophistry poses a genuine threat to the philosophical search for truth, both in the context of Plato's dialogues and Gadamer's hermeneutics. Gadamer argues that what truly distinguishes the philosopher from the sophist is not their arguments *per se*, but rather the intention behind their respective arguments (GW VII, 356). We will see that the practical dimension of Gadamer's hermeneutics includes additional criteria, beyond mere agreement, that create a meaningful distinction between authentic and inauthentic experience, and that this distinction emerges as a consequence of the intentionality behind the articulation of meaning.

In “Text and Interpretation” Gadamer explains both his relation to and his departure from German Romanticism and Romantic hermeneutics. German Romanticism, he says, presupposes that individual thoughts are ineffable, such that the event of understanding represents an “insurmountable barrier between human beings.” The ineffability of thought, in Gadamer’s view, “points to an inherent law of linguistic expression, a law which not only sets limits for linguistic expression but also determines its importance in forming the common element that unites people” (GR, 158). In order to overcome the inherent estrangement between reader and author, Romantic hermeneutics therefore developed psychological and grammatical methods for situating the interior speech of the author against an exterior linguistic horizon whose commonality makes communication between individuals possible (Lawn & Keane 2011, 126).

Following Heidegger’s analysis of *Dasein* and his attempt to overcome the “subject-object bifurcation” on which the methodology of Romantic hermeneutics rests, Gadamer says that he directed his own efforts toward answering the following questions:

First, how do the commonality of shared meaning, which is built up in conversation, and the impenetrable otherness of the other mediate each other? Second, what, in the final analysis, is the nature of language? Is it bridge or barrier? Is it a bridge built of things that are the same for each self over which one communicates with the other over the flowing stream of otherness? Or is it a barrier that limits our giving up of ourselves and that cuts us off from the possibility of ever completely expressing ourselves and communicating with others? (GR, 164-165)

Following Heidegger, Gadamer’s contribution to the field of hermeneutic theory is the development of hermeneutics as an ontological phenomenon. By identifying understanding as what constitutes the basic nature of human *Dasein* as being-in-the-world and being-with-others (GR, 56, 158-159), Heidegger clarifies for Gadamer the way in which “understanding *is* being” (PH, 49; emphasis his). Gadamer is therefore critical of the efforts to develop a hermeneutical

science of interpretation, as this approach passes over the ontological question of understanding by reducing hermeneutics to an empirical study applied within other conceptual frameworks.

Nonetheless, the above quotation shows that for Gadamer the inaccessibility of interior linguistic expression, and thus the possibility of coming to a shared understanding, is a problem that should be taken seriously. In “Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem” Gadamer explains that the distinction between self and other, between which we say that there is either an understanding or misunderstanding, presupposes a common reality that encompasses their particular horizons of understanding (PH, 7-8). Within a hermeneutical framework, then, Gadamer’s first question is really about the conditions under which a shared understanding is genuinely possible with respect to a common subject matter, as this framework presupposes a common measure between the partners in a dialogue.

What the question of the inaccessibility of inner thought is really meant to address is therefore the possibility that a dialogue may fail to achieve a shared understanding despite the common reality that exists between the interlocutors. Thus Gadamer’s second question in the above quotation addresses the fact that language can function as either a bridge or a barrier toward coming to a shared understanding depending on how it is utilized. This distinction in the function of language provides the initial step toward distinguishing between philosophical and sophistical modes of discourse within a hermeneutical context.

The plan for the current chapter is as follows. First, using a principle of incommensurability, we will outline a conceptual framework for effective communication that presupposes the common ontological origin of the partners in a dialogue, and which thereby demonstrates the necessary openness of hermeneutical consciousness toward the experience of the other. Second, we will identify the original (*ursprünglich*) and authentic (*eigentlich*) form of

the hermeneutical object through Gadamer's conceptualization of the "literary text." This concept offers a paradigmatic way of understanding the autonomous existence of the things themselves and their ability to "speak themselves," i.e. their capacity for self-presentation that we covered in the previous chapter. Third, we will elaborate the sophisticated imitation of being as the presentation of an inauthentic form of the hermeneutical object. Specifically, we will see that the sophist internalizes being's power for self-presentation, allowing each person to represent reality, and by extension the conditions for truth, however they see fit, rendering the agreement between the self and the other inauthentic. To conclude, we will show that the Socratic "turning toward the idea" that underscores one of the ontological origins of Gadamer's hermeneutics implies a justificatory demand whose practical function can both sustain genuine, philosophical discourse and reveal sophisticated or inauthentic modes of experience.

6.2: Incommensurability and hermeneutical openness

Commensurability refers to a common measure between two things, and incommensurability the lack of such a measure. Greek mathematicians discovered the problem of incommensurability when trying to measure the sides and diagonal of a square. The length of the diagonal is an irrational number and therefore does not have a unit in common with the sides.¹⁴⁴ In the philosophy of science, incommensurability typically refers to the lack of a common ground between competing conceptual schemes or scientific paradigms. Proponents of the incommensurability thesis claim that the lack of a common measure between paradigms

¹⁴⁴ Plato was certainly aware of the nature of irrational numbers. According to Burnyeat, the Pythagoreans had already discovered the irrationality of certain square roots by the time he wrote the *Theaetetus* (Burnyeat 1978, 503). Socrates' explanation of the "Platonic number" in the *Republic* (*Rep.* 546c), as well as his discussion with the slave in the *Meno*, illustrates this.

supports conceptual relativism, which they use to challenge the “transcendental permanence” of any non-relative standards of truth (Bernstein 1983, 79). The conceptual relativist can thus maintain that meaning is relative to the organizing scheme within each conceptual framework. Without a common, underlying framework the standards or methods for observing and interpreting phenomena therefore do not necessarily need a meaningful expression in a competing scheme. As we saw principally in chapter three, a similar claim has been used to criticize hermeneutics. It has been argued that without a meta-language that provides a common set of linguistic rules for the articulation of meaning it is questionable whether or not translation between languages, and thus different worldviews, is really possible.

In his essay, “On the very idea of a conceptual scheme,” Donald Davidson questions whether or not a transcendental or meta-linguistic framework is necessary in order to uphold the possibility of translating between conceptual schemes. In his view, the issue here is whether or not conceptual relativity can be maintained if each scheme is developed within its own particular form of language, but without the presupposition of a common ontological basis. He suggests that if conceptual relativity is true, the total meaning of a given language will fall within the standards of its corresponding conceptual scheme, such that it will be impossible to translate anything from one language into another. Thus if a conceptual scheme encompasses the total range of meaning that its form of language allows, there is a complete failure of translatability. However, if the scheme is not all-encompassing, there is only a partial failure of translatability and some degree of overlap between languages and concepts will exist (Davidson 1984, 185). The total failure of translation between conceptual schemes is therefore impossible following the presupposition of a shared ontological basis for their construction. Furthermore, while a partial failure of translation between schemes is still certainly possible, the fact that this failure can be

recognized means that it is at least apprehensible, leaving open the possibility that it can be overcome.

Davidson criticizes proponents of conceptual relativism who, in his view, miss this point. He explains, for example, that the linguist B. L. Whorf attempted to illustrate the incompatibility of Hopi with English by using English to convey something in Hopi for which there is no English counterpart (Davidson 1984, 184). For Davidson, the lack of a counterpart in English for certain foreign concepts illustrates an area of incomparability and incompatibility between the two languages, but their incommensurability.¹⁴⁵ The fact that we can render a foreign concept into meaningful English demonstrates that the relativity of each language and its corresponding conceptual scheme is not absolute. English does not possess a suitable cognate for the Greek concept of εὐδαιμονία, for instance, but the translation of this term as “happiness” or “well-being” is certainly acceptable. Of course, one must remain aware of the fact that as a translation of εὐδαιμονία, “happiness” has much more complex meaning than its ordinary use in English.¹⁴⁶ We can thus create a comparable meaning of εὐδαιμονία in English without presupposing a

¹⁴⁵ Commenting on Thomas Kuhn’s work in the history and philosophy of science, Bernstein illustrates an important difference between incommensurability, incomparability, and incompatibility. Incompatibility refers to logical incompatibility in the sense that “statements or theories are logically incompatible if they entail a logical contradiction” (Bernstein 1983, 82). Thus for Kuhn, “rival paradigm theories are logically *incompatible* (and, therefore, really in conflict with each other); *incommensurable* (and, therefore, they cannot always be measured against each other point-by-point); and *comparable* (capable of being compared with each other in multiple ways without requiring the assumption that there is or must always be a common, fixed grid by which we measure progress)” (Ibid., 86; emphasis his). The salient point is that determining the incompatibility of two or more different conceptual schemes, scientific paradigms, etc. presupposes that they are at least comparable. Although Kuhn denies that their comparability necessitates a common logical framework or language that allows for a neutral, point-by-point comparison, he is aware of the fact that there must be some overlap between rival theories, as without some point of contact any reasonable debate about their validity, accuracy or comprehensiveness would be impossible (Ibid., 85). As Davidson might say, there is only a partial, but not a total failure of translation between conceptual schemes despite their incompatibility.

¹⁴⁶ In his essay, “L’avenir de la philosophie est-il grec?”, Grondin compares Heideggerian “destruction” with Gadamerian translation. The former refers to the attempt to “unblock” and return to the original experience of the inhabitants of another language, i.e. the Greeks. The latter, by contrast, attempts this return by appropriating this experience for our own contemporary situation, i.e. by translating this experience into language that is meaningful for us. Importantly, Grondin explains that Gadamer’s approach does not imply that translation distorts this original experience, only that understanding this experience cannot happen without an act of translation (Grondin 2002b, 72-73).

third, neutral framework that encompasses the two languages. Davidson argues that since all human thought is essentially linguistic it is clearly possible for speakers of different languages to inhabit another conceptual scheme and thus compare the two insofar as these languages are translatable (Ibid., 185). The relativity of conceptual schemes is thus minimized by importing meanings from a foreign language into one's own. Where different languages share some of the same linguistic entities, the meaning of these shared entities can be extended; and where one encounters new linguistic entities, these can either be introduced into one's own conceptual scheme or described through pre-existing entities.

Davidson rejects the claim that there must be some kind of meta-language in order to make a meaningful comparison or translation between conceptual schemes. In his view, each scheme presents a different interpretation of the same original content, and so the possibility of either a partial or a total failure of translation must be explained in light of this common, ontological basis (Davidson 1984, 187). As Gadamer says, any disagreement presupposes a prior, shared understanding (PH, 7). Davidson introduces here what he calls "scheme-content dualism." This concept identifies the fact that the empirical content of many different experiences of the world at large do not necessarily take place within the same linguistic or conceptual framework (Davidson 1984, 189). Instead, differences in conceptual schemes can arise through variations in the way that different groups of people organize the content of their experience, even though the object of their experience is identical. The functionalist approach to cognitive science, for example, emphasizes the language of physiological states, whereas folk psychology continues to speak in terms of mental states. Based on the premise that they have an equal appeal to an original, uninterpreted content, the incommensurability between these two conceptual schemes therefore refers to the standards that they use to determine meaning, and not

these meanings themselves (Ibid., 190). That is, although the experience of pain or pleasure refers to a purely physiological process in one scheme and a purely psychological state in the other, this experience itself is common to both; what the functionalist means can be understood by the folk psychologist and vice versa. Thus cognitive science and folk psychology are incommensurable and incompatible not in terms of what they experience but only in terms of the frameworks they use to organize this experience.

The possibility of creating a comparison between languages and worldviews has a vital importance in Gadamer's hermeneutics. We recall that Gadamer, and Habermas too for that matter, explicitly denies the presupposition of a world in itself (*Welt an sich*) as a neutral, transcendental framework for translating or comparing different conceptual schemes. Gadamer promotes Plato's thesis that there is no unmediated grasp of reality (e.g. *Phaed.* 99e). The world is always understood through language and discourse, but this does not necessitate the presupposition of a separate framework that contains the terms of intelligibility for our linguistically-structured world. Rather, Gadamer appropriates Humboldt's approach to language as representing a worldview. This approach presupposes the world as the common ontological ground or original content, to borrow Davidson's phrase, between world views. The world is a whole and each language is one possible presentation of it among many.¹⁴⁷ In learning a foreign language, for example, Gadamer says that one does not transpose meanings from one language to

¹⁴⁷ Wachterhauser traces Gadamer's position here through what it inherits from Kant and Hegel. On the one hand, Gadamer agrees with Hegel that there is no unbridgeable gap between Kant's noumenal reality-in-itself and a phenomenal reality-for-us. Wachterhauser writes, "The fact that our contact with reality is never unmediated but always through some *logos* does not change the fundamental fact that the *logoi* still refer to the one real world and have the power to disclose some aspect of that same world to us" (Wachterhauser 1999, 112). On the other hand, Gadamer agrees with Kant that the inherent finitude of human thought precludes any understanding of the "whole" that noumenal reality represents. "If noumenal reality is defined as 'the whole,' as it is by Hegel, Gadamer would agree with Kant against Hegel that such a grasp of reality is beyond us. But just because a grasp of the whole is beyond us does not mean that truth about the world is beyond us. Reality itself is in principle implicit in our different ways of speaking about it" (Ibid., 113). Gadamer's approach here extends from his understanding of the χωρισμός between sensible and intelligible reality in Plato: "The Ideas are implicit in language or one might say that noumenal reality—reality as an intelligible structure not constructed by our language—is implicit in phenomenal reality—reality as mediated by our language" (Ibid.; see also Grondin 2006, 478-479).

the other according to an objective system of linguistic rules but rather locates corresponding meanings between the two languages (TM, 438-443). Each language and worldview is thus described as a “shading” of the same world that they all share; each worldview, Gadamer says, “can understand and comprehend, from within itself, the ‘view’ of the world presented in another language” (TM, 445).

There is a close relationship between the incommensurability thesis and the hermeneutical principle of openness. For Davidson, the possibility of comparing two different conceptual schemes requires the assumption that, despite their incommensurability, what is asserted in one scheme is true at least for the members of that scheme independently of how the members of another may interpret it (Davidson 1984, 195-196). Davidson does not take this approach in order to explain how a potential disagreement can be resolved, but rather to show that the possibility of this disagreement presupposes a more fundamental relationship between the self and others, as the object of their disagreement must still be something that they have in common (Ibid., 197). Bernstein summarizes this point aptly:

Whether we are studying the history of science, or different styles, or alien societies, and seeking to elicit what is distinctive and unique about them, we can learn from such a study, we can come to a more sensitive and critical understanding of our own biases and prejudices. Here, too, we must avoid two extremes—the extreme of a type of romanticism that assumes that what is alien or past is necessarily superior, and the ethnocentrism of thinking that there is nothing more to the world than lies within our own “philosophy”—that is, our own well-entrenched beliefs, attitudes, standards, methods, and procedures.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Bernstein 1983, 91. For example, the view that Galileo, in his debate with the church about such standards, represents a rational and scientific position depends on a retroactive understanding of the church as irrational and unscientific. For Feyerabend and Rorty, a more accurate representation of this debate will understand that Cardinal Bellarmine, representing the church, presented a case that was worth valuing as potentially valid because at the time his position *was* considered valid (Ibid., 67.). It is therefore only according to contemporary standards of scientific rationality that it makes sense to say that Galileo should be considered correct and valid and Bellarmine incorrect and invalid. This position, however, belongs to the historical development of standards of scientific rationality. Thus to admit that these standards will undergo further development, Bernstein writes, “does not lead to epistemological skepticism but only to a realization of human fallibility and the finitude of human rationality” (Ibid., 69). Similarly, Wachterhauser argues that the recognition of the inherent finitude of human thought should not be understood as a

The incommensurability thesis demonstrates the possibility of developing a more comprehensive knowledge of the manifold points of comparison between one's own worldview and another. It reveals the inherent danger in remaining enclosed within one's own particular language, worldview, or conceptual scheme, as this development pertains not only to one's understanding of the other but also of oneself.

What this discussion shows is that although the standards for truth and meaning may be incommensurable across different conceptual schemes, the fact that these standards function with respect to the same, original content means that commensurability can be obtained with respect to the meanings that are developed according to these standards. In this respect Gadamer writes the following:

Of course, reaching an understanding does not necessarily mean agreeing with each other. On the contrary, where people are in general agreement, the reaching of an understanding is not necessary. Rather, reaching an understanding is always sought and sometimes achieved in reference to something quite specific about which full agreement does not exist. (GR, 376)

Gadamer, however, wants to discover how the commonality of meaning can mediate one's experience of the other in a way that obtains a substantive agreement. In other words, while an understanding does not necessarily mean reaching an agreement, ideally it does. Truth, for Gadamer, is not private; it is, above all, a shared understanding about the subject matter that unifies the self and other in a dialogue. Immediately following the quotation above, he insists that in light of a disagreement or incompatibility between views, "One should be able to resolve differing opinions about this experience and reach some kind of understanding through questions

promoting skepticism. "Even though we can never know the whole definitely, each *logos* intends the whole inasmuch as it is open to the world and other *logoi* and each tests itself only in this openness. Far from implying a general skepticism that despairs of the possibility of any truth whatsoever, skepticism about definitive knowledge of the whole stops short of denying real 'finite' truth. On the contrary, even though our access to the whole is incomplete and incompletionable, Gadamer never loses sight of the fact that a great deal of truth can be known about the world and our place in it precisely through the clash of *logoi*" (Wachterhauser 1999, 117-118).

and answers that examine the matter—in other words, through a critical conversation” (GR, 376). The separation between perspectives through agreeing to disagree, however “peaceful” this may be, is not philosophically viable, Gadamer says. Therefore, the possibility of coming to a shared understanding involves much more than simply an agreement to disagree in light of an avowed incompatibility between different standards of reasoning. It is obtained through the mutual and reciprocal participation in the unity of a concept such that each individual gains a more comprehensive knowledge of this subject matter (TM, 348) and is thus “taken up into a higher determination” of his self-understanding (PH, 54).

6.3: The truth of the word

6.3.1: Authenticity and the literary text

Gadamer asserts as a basic hermeneutical principle that the content of dialectical knowledge is never complete. The unitary and multiple existences of the things themselves demonstrate that one of the fundamental principles of human thought is its essential indeterminacy (DD, 154). Importantly, this indeterminacy does not diminish the human capacity for knowledge, but is rather what ultimately defines human thought as philosophical: “It appears that it is *the* human task to constantly be limiting the measureless with measure” (DD, 155).

Another basic feature of hermeneutics is that human thought, due to its inherent finitude, is always subordinate to the universal and infinite structure of being. Reflecting on his hermeneutical project, Gadamer says that the formulation “being that can be understood is language” (TM, 470) means that we experience and understand the “language” that being “speaks” (GR, 417). It is thus in terms of its function as the medium of the self-presentation of

being that language, Gadamer says, has the power to “speak itself.” In other words, in our use of language we can present meanings that do not necessarily fit entirely within established conventions of meaning, as language “manifests a new saying-power that often remains hidden in the usage of what is commonly accepted.”¹⁴⁹ Thus “every word is itself already an element of a new order of things and therefore is itself potentially this order in its entirety” (GR, 152). This function of language is basic to hermeneutical experience. It is always the case, Gadamer writes, that the hermeneutical object “says something to us” from out of an inexhaustible array of its potential meanings (GR, 160).

Yet this object—the text or its analogue—can protect itself from misinterpretations (TM, 270-271) by virtue of its autonomy from human thought. Therefore, despite the radical particularity of the hermeneutical event of understanding, the nature of being cannot be presented in language in any way whatsoever. In his 1983 essay “Text and Interpretation,” Gadamer identifies this expressive power of being with a paradigmatic form of the text. The “literary text,” he says, is the original (*ursprünglich*) and authentic (*eigentlich*) form of the text (GR, 181; GW II, 351). A text is “authentically there” (*eigentlich da*) when it “comes back into itself,” and by doing so the text is able to speak “from out of itself.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ GR, 152. Commenting again on his formulation, “Being that can be understood is language,” Gadamer writes that “what was implied by this was that what is can never be completely understood. This is implied insofar as everything that goes under the name of language always goes beyond whatever achieves the status of a proposition. That which is to be understood is that which comes into language, but of course it is always that which is taken as something, taken as something true. This is the hermeneutical dimension—a dimension in which Being ‘shows itself’” (GR, 162).

¹⁵⁰ GR, 181; GW II, 351. By comparison, Heidegger writes: “In each case Dasein *is* its possibility, and it ‘has’ this possibility, but not just as a property [*eigenschaftlich*], as something present-at-hand would. And because Dasein is in each case essentially its own possibility, it *can*, in its very Being, ‘choose’ itself and win itself; it can also lose itself and never win itself; or only ‘seem’ to do so. But only in so far as it is essentially something which can be *authentic* [*eigentlich*]*—that is, something of its own—can it have lost itself and not yet won itself*” (BT, 68; emphasis his).

In order to explain what “authenticity” means here, Gadamer compares what happens in the act of interpreting the literary text with what otherwise happens in interpretation, i.e. the attempt to mediate the difference between familiarity and strangeness. This latter mode of interpretation, Gadamer explains, is constituted by a text, a reader, and an interpreter. The interpreter acts as a mediator between the reader and the text; wherever the text does not present its own meaning clearly enough, the interpreter communicates this meaning to the reader in a way that the reader can understand. The job of the interpreter is thus to overcome the difference that separates reader and text, the achievement of which is the fusion of their respective horizons of understanding. In achieving this fusion, however, the horizon of the text “disappears” (GR, 180). The text is no longer “there” insofar as it becomes part of the “harmony in understanding” on the side of the reader. Literary texts, by contrast, do not disappear through our understanding of them, but rather “stand there confronting our understanding with normative claims, and stand continually before every new way the text can speak” (GR, 180). It is in this sense that the literary text remains original and authentic: it “exercises a normative function that does not refer back either to an original utterance or to the intention of the speaker but is something that seems to originate in itself” (GR, 181). The literary text thus offers a paradigmatic way of understanding the autonomous existence of being and its ability to speak itself.¹⁵¹

An essential feature of the literary word is that it reflects an ambiguity or polyvalence that Gadamer finds is inherent in language. In “The Expressive Power of Language,” Gadamer

¹⁵¹ Gadamer does not mean that the fusion of horizons and the other hermeneutical principles that are involved with it are somehow inauthentic. The actual contrast he is drawing in this essay is between the literary or authentic text and forms of “oppositional texts,” namely “antitexts” (*Antitexte*), “pseudotexts” (*Pseudotexte*), and “pretexts” (*Prätexte*; GR, 175-176; GW II, 347). These oppositional texts are all characterized by the fact that they actively obscure or conceal the actual meaning of the text. The interpreter’s job is to reveal this meaning, and so the fusion of horizons that Gadamer is describing here is not inauthentic. But since the interpreter speaks for the text, the fusion of horizons does not reveal precisely the phenomenon Gadamer wants to describe here, namely how the text, or being, speaks.

draws a parallel between the objectivity of scientific methodology and the demand for univocity in the use of language. Regarding the concept of “force” in Hegel, Herder, and Newton,

Gadamer writes:

A scientifically rooted concept of force has become so dissociated from the concept of force in the native tongue, with all the power of evocation force has there, that the word can be a source of misunderstanding, false over-simplifications, misleading superficiality, preservation of prejudices, and so on. In the everyday use of language as well as within the so-called humanities, what increases speech's wealth of association and extends its store of knowledge can lead to confusion when everything depends on the singularity of significations. (Gadamer 1992, 352)

Gadamer explains that, in response to an essay he had written on force, a colleague remarked that Newtonian force has nothing to do with its conceptualization in either Hegel's or Herder's work.

Gadamer's response, repeated in the above quotation, is that their incompatibility or incommensurability is just the point he was making. He was criticizing efforts to collapse the manifold nature of language into a univocal system, the result of which is to force compatibility or commensurability where in fact there is none.

Gadamer makes a similar criticism of the demand for univocity in “Text and Interpretation.” In being “there” authentically in the literary text, words attain what he calls their “full self-presence” (*Selbstpräsenz*; GR, 182; GW II, 352). Though Gadamer distinguishes here between ordinary discourse and literature, his implicit view with respect to the above criticism remains the same. By virtue of their self-presence, words present themselves as unities of meaning. In this respect Gadamer writes that “so far as the word issues forth from the play within its own unity and does not function merely as a means of conveying the meaning of the discourse as a whole, to that extent the multiplicity of meaning within the word's own naming power is allowed to unfold” (GR, 182). Not just the meaning of the word, he says, but also its possible

connotations, “shines forth in its full meaning [*in seiner Bedeutung erscheint*]” (GR, 182; GW II, 353).

6.3.2: Authenticity and wordplay

The ability of the literary word or text to sustain multiple meanings, even contradictory ones, is precisely what gives it such a special hermeneutical significance. Its authenticity precludes the possibility of fixing its meaning within a convention (GR, 181), and so reiterates the hermeneutical point that interpretation is always reinterpretation in light of changing circumstances. In this respect the polyvalence that belongs to authentic speech creates an opportunity for “wordplay” (GR, 184). It is clear from Gadamer’s engagement with certain pieces of poetry in the remainder of “Text and Interpretation” that the poetic form of the literary word especially demonstrates the ontological significance of wordplay. On the one hand, this play allows the reader to bring out hidden connotations which nonetheless remain subordinate to the original meaning of the text, i.e. whatever the author intends. In particular, the act of reading the text aloud makes room for these alternative meanings, as the differences in emphasis or intonation on the part of the speaker adds another dimension to meaning that may not be expressed otherwise. On the other hand, wordplay, Gadamer writes, can assert its own autonomy from this intention and in so doing elevate the text from out of its original situation. Although the originally intended meaning of the text is disturbed, this autonomy is ultimately productive for the interpretation of the meaning of the text as such. Interpretation is no longer critical but speculative, as now the reader has to contend with a variety of possible meanings, even ones that are opposed to each other, that reflect the nature of the subject matter itself beyond just what the author intended.

In light of this autonomy, Gadamer reiterates that meaning remains subordinate to the structure of the ideas themselves and the unity of discourse that they reflect. In other words, the play on words that is done merely for its own sake “shatters the unity of discourse;” independent meanings are “played off against each other,” thereby distracting the reader or listener from the subject matter of the discourse itself (GR, 184). Gadamer’s point is that the authenticity of the text depends upon the mutual and reciprocal relationship among the parts of discourse, such that the polyvalence of meaning can “shine forth.”¹⁵² That is, the hidden meanings of a text can be brought to the surface through an awareness of the possible alternative meanings of its words, but these possibilities depend upon the relational character of the words themselves and the ideas that they imply. We recall Socrates’ criticism in chapter two of Antisthenes’ logical atomism as entailing an asymmetry in knowledge between elemental and compound entities. In a similar respect, rather than lowering the reader into hidden depths of meaning, isolating the meaning of words through wordplay creates an asymmetry between certain parts of a text and the unity of discourse as a whole. Gadamer emphasizes, for instance, that when he speaks of the “presence” or “self-presentation” of the authentic word, he is not referring to the word in its presence-at-hand or the objectified certainty of its meaning.¹⁵³ The meaning of the discourse as a whole

¹⁵² The idea of “shining forth” is significant for Gadamer. He refers to Plato’s metaphysics of light and beauty in order to suggest how the meaning of being “shines forth” (*scheinen*) as a probable or evident (*wahrscheinliche*) meaning. The capacity for beauty to reveal itself characterizes the activity of self-presentation that Gadamer locates in Plato’s ideas and the things themselves. This activity is an essential feature of the event of being; both the manifestation of beauty in its appearances and the presentation of being have the “character of an event” (TM, 479). Importantly, beauty is not apprehended primarily with certainty. Rather, it manifests itself in images or appearances, i.e. as something “immediately evident” (*einleuchtend*, TM, 476; WM, 485). Thus the pure appearance of being in the event of understanding “has not been proved and is not absolutely certain, but it asserts itself by reason of its own merit within the realm of the possible [*Möglichen*] and probable [*Vermutlichen*]” (TM, 479; WM, 489). What becomes manifest in the event of being is not revealed as something certain but rather a possible truth about being that “shines forth” (*Wahr-Scheinliche*, TM, 479; WM, 488). Thus Gadamer writes that the “event-character” of the beautiful and the “event-structure” of understanding both entail from the ontological view that “being is language—i.e. self-presentation—as revealed to us by the hermeneutical experience of being” (TM, 481).

¹⁵³ GR, 186. In certain cases, especially in poetry, where meaning also depends on one’s tone or inflection, Gadamer illustrates that this issue becomes even more apparent. “Even the simple act of reading,” he writes, “in which one reads something to oneself remains dialogical in that in it one must bring the sound and the meaning into harmony

remains available to interpretation; but trying to discover meaning in the parts of this discourse becomes impossible if they are not interpreted in terms of their mutual and reciprocal involvement with its other parts.

Gadamer reiterates his position here in his 1995 essay, “Hermeneutics Tracking the Trace.” Against attempts to ossify meanings in linguistic conventions, he writes that “the common goal is always to break conventions of speaking and thinking and to provoke new horizons. [...] An individual word, for example, may leap into a quite different meaning. Through this, what is customary collapses—and precisely in this way new connections become visible” (GR, 385). There is, he says, a “wordless experience of the world” that emerges conceptually in this way: “When a new word pushes one toward a new thinking in this way,” he writes, “this is like an event of emergence [*Ereignis*], and in fact language often does this effortlessly, if it can find the words.”¹⁵⁴ In previous chapters we developed Gadamer’s understanding of the hermeneutical event as grounded in the unitary and multiple existences of the things themselves. The emergence of meaning that Gadamer is describing here reflects the same dialectical relationship between unity and multiplicity: the parts of the text work together to form a coherent, unified structure; and by anticipating the completeness of this structure, we can

as much as possible” (GR, 187). That one cannot in his view merely list the elements of discourse, so to speak, is clear. Gadamer continues: “We are all familiar with a reciting practice we call *Aufsagen* [simply saying] that actually corresponds to spelling out what we read. Again, this is not really speaking but merely arranging a series of fragments of meaning one after another. In Germany, this happens when children learn lines of poetry by heart and recite them to the joy of the parents. In contrast, a person truly skilled in recitation, or a great artist, will render a linguistic gestalt fully present, like the actor who must play his role as if the words had been newly found at that very moment. This cannot be a mere series of pieces of discourse; rather it must be a whole, made up of meaning and sound, which “stands” in itself” (GR, 187; translator’s insertion).

¹⁵⁴ GR, 386; translator’s insertion. This claim presents an interesting reflection on Gadamer’s concept of the historically effected consciousness. Commenting on this notion, he writes, “To be quite honest, I must admit that the term *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* [historically influenced consciousness] is only an emergency expression (I lacked the proper words) that tries to emphasize the [historical] temporality of being. What I mean is far clearer when I talk about *Sprachlichkeit* [linguisticity], a term in which the Christian tradition of the *verbum interius* [inner word] shines through” (GR, 384; translator’s insertions). On Gadamer’s understanding of the hermeneutical significance of the Christian doctrine of incarnation and emanation, see Carpenter 1994, Grondin 1994 & 2000, and Risser 1994.

proceed to interpret the meaning of the text through the relationship among its parts in light of their unity. A text which is a unified whole still depends, however, on the context in which it is read in order to entertain any meaning, as it requires a “single clear meaning out of several possibilities” in order to be really understood (GR, 394-395). This meaning changes depending on the context, but still remains singular within each act of reading and interpretation.

For Gadamer, the truth that belongs to the word is thus that each word represents a single, unified essence that can sustain multiple meanings depending on the relational context in which it appears alongside other words. The notion of the “trace” that one follows in the interpretation of a text is the path that the reader takes in navigating the plurality of possible meanings that appear to the reader in the act of reading.¹⁵⁵ Gadamer refers here to the poet Paul Celan, for whom “poetic language is ‘vielstellig’ [having many places] and leaves many paths open.” Celan, however, “demanded from the readers of his poems a ‘right’ understanding. For this he advised, ‘Just read it over and over again!’ (GR, 388; translator’s insertion).

As above, however, the openness that belongs to this emergent event is not a total openness; the autonomy of the things themselves allows them to resist misinterpretations of their meaning. In other words, there are conditions for the interpretation of meaning that extend beyond an agreement about what this meaning is, even if the determination of this meaning is unique to each specific situation in which interpretation takes place. Thus Gadamer asks the following questions: “In view of the multiplicity of relationships between words and

¹⁵⁵ The concept of the “trace” is something that Gadamer finds in Derrida; this essay, “Hermeneutics Tracking the Trace,” is one of several works by Gadamer that engages with Derrida and deconstruction. On the concept of the trace Gadamer writes the following: “Only for a person who is on his way and in search of a right path, does the trace stand in the context of seeking and detecting [*des Spurens*], only then does picking up that trace mark his beginning. With it one finds a first direction, something is disclosed. But where this trace will lead is still open. One allows it to lead. [...]Of course, where this path will lead can still remain completely uncertain. For when one chooses a path and finally chooses it, that path can still be the wrong one. Then one does not get where one really wanted to be. It is then that one is “advised” [*geraten*] of the right path” (GR, 391; translator’s insertions).

relationships among things being discussed, are there really no criteria for us to use? Perhaps the logical sequence in a text leads us into error? What is the right path?" (GR, 398). The "trace" that one follows in reading a text can take the reader in many different and equally reasonable directions, but there is a discernible difference between taking the right and wrong path (sc. GR, 392). Ultimately the authenticity of hermeneutical experience requires its justification in light of the meaning that "shines forth" from the things themselves, and so any valid interpretation of the text must appropriately attend to the necessary structure in which it is grounded.

6.3: Sophistry and inauthentic modes of experience

Insofar as hermeneutics describes not just the experience of reading and interpreting a text, but more broadly the experience of the other, the conditions under which a dialogue effectively guarantees truth are relevant for describing the function of language and reason within social and political institutions. In his commentary on the development of scientific and social paradigms, Bernstein emphasizes that, more than anything else, there is a need to effectively mediate between objective and relative standards of truth. He demonstrates the inherent productivity of the incommensurability thesis in this respect, namely that it rejects the need for a broader, neutral framework in order to compare different conceptual schemes but without reducing thought to conceptual relativity. As we saw, the salient feature of the incommensurability thesis is that, like hermeneutics, it creates the demand for openness to alternative points of view expressed in different languages, worldviews, or paradigms. This openness is what allows for a comparison, at the very least, between incommensurate and

incompatible meanings and thus the development not only of scientific and social processes, but also the self-understanding of individuals who participate in these processes.¹⁵⁶

The possibility of achieving commensurability and compatibility within a shared understanding must therefore enable, and not hinder, creative and imaginative freedom within social processes. In this respect, Gadamer indicates that Habermas' critique of ideology and program of psychoanalysis actually gain a certain degree of purchase within hermeneutics. The critique of ideology, Gadamer writes, "has to introduce rational discourse as a link which is supposed to make it possible to reach understandings in a compulsion-free way. The same holds for the therapeutic process in psychoanalysis" (GR, 68). He maintains, of course, that ultimately Habermas' approach is still ideological as it attempts to locate the conditions for meaningful communication within an ideal speech situation (GR, 68). As we saw in chapter three, the essential finitude of human thought and the negativity of experience illustrate why this presupposition is misguided. For Gadamer, the fore-knowledge involved in hermeneutical experience is decidedly *not* the same thing as the "system of knowledge" that psychoanalysis and the critique of ideology employ (GR, 69). Hermeneutics shows that fore-knowledge, which is a necessary precondition for interpretation, is always brought into play and so always put at risk and questioned. Still, Habermas' critique of ideology at least reflects the hermeneutical demand

¹⁵⁶ Bernstein highlights the importance of this feature within number of contributions to the history and philosophy of science. In moving away from rigid methodology or standards of rationality, the incommensurability thesis stresses the role of practical reasoning with respect to interpretation and the articulation of meaning. For Kuhn, for example, the tacit knowledge that an expert possesses "may be more important for understanding [this field] as it is practiced than what can be explicitly formulated into propositions and rules" (Bernstein 1983, 57). Bernstein quotes Alasdair MacIntyre, who makes a similar emphasis on the role of practical knowledge: "Objective rationality is therefore to be found no in rule-following, but in rule-transcending, in knowing how and when to put rules and principles to work and when not to." MacIntyre expresses this view in his article, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science," but the section which Bernstein quotes, part of which I have reproduced here, is from the original manuscript for this article which does not include this specific section (Ibid., 242 n. 27). As well, in Feyerabend's view "we are threatened by closure, fixed method, and social rigidity, all of which are enemies of life, spontaneity, creativity, imagination, and individual freedom," the appropriate, critical response to which is to use "any rhetorical means available to undermine and ridicule those who think that there are or ought to be fixed rational criteria in scientific inquiry (or any other domain of life)" (Ibid., 62).

to foster openness and creative freedom in a way that is “compulsion-free” and not confined to closed forms of consciousness.

In this respect, one of the more important insights of the incommensurability thesis is that, although the standards for truth and meaning within one conceptual scheme may be incommensurable and incompatible with another, the particular truth-claims that are developed within different schemes are commensurate and comparable insofar as they are interpretations of the same original content. We suggested, for example, that the principles of a purely physicalist theory of cognition are incommensurate and incomparable with the principles of a purely mentalist theory, but that their descriptions of experiences such as pain and pleasure are commensurate and comparable, as there is something fundamental about these experiences that precedes their organization within a given conceptual scheme. This comparison is thus performed as an act of translation: language, as the medium of the universal, ontological structures of reality, mediates between the contingency of these descriptions and the necessary, shared ground that they presuppose.

Importantly, in chapter two, elaborating this function of language through an analysis of the grammatical structure of the λόγος revealed that truth and falsehood are properties that emerge in language as reflections of the ontological capacity of ideas to relate to each other. We recall that Gadamer argues that the statement “Theaetetus flies” is false primarily because it articulates an ontological impossibility, i.e. the combination of the ideas that these words imply. That this statement is false because it does not correctly correspond to a present state of affairs is certainly the case, but this property of falsehood is a secondary, empirical matter in Gadamer’s view.

The salient point being made here is that there is nothing inherent in the function of language as a medium between ideas and appearances that necessarily precludes us from making false assertions, regardless of whether or not this is done intentionally. In this respect, Plato's characterization of sophistical eristic reveals a legitimate threat to the incommensurability thesis and the conditions for social reason. The sophist emerges as a philosophical antithesis to Socrates in two respects. First, whereas Socrates' elenchus is meant to initiate his interlocutors into a search for truth of the ideas themselves, the sophist claims instead that each individual person, and not the ideas, is the measure of truth. Second, whereas Socrates' identity as the wisest Athenian rests upon his claim to know nothing, the sophist claims to have knowledge of everything by virtue of which he professes to be able to defend or debunk any claim. For this reason the sophist insists that truth is relative. Yet in order to justify his profession, he claims to know what would be best for anyone to believe. In this way the sophist threatens to undermine the conditions for social reason by distorting the necessary ground that unites the partners in a dialogue. If truth is relative, each person is the measure of what is true and false for themselves. It is thus meaningless to speak about commensurability and compatibility, as every articulation of the meaning of being is necessarily true. But if truth is non-relative, the sophist takes on the role of the measure of the meaning of being by virtue of his special claim to knowledge about the nature of being. That is, rather than directly participating in the active, self-presentation of the things themselves, the partners in a dialogue have only indirect access as the meaning of being is determined in the first place by the sophist.

The threats to effective social discourse that the sophist represents are relevant to the contemporary setting of Gadamer's hermeneutics. Gadamer voices his concern with our growing dependence on technology in order to receive and interpret information. In his view, this

dependence reinforces a growing trend toward having our experience of the world mediated indirectly, such that whoever controls our access to this information also determines in advance how it is presented to the public. Gadamer writes about this phenomenon largely in the 1970's, and it is readily apparent today. It is no great secret that media outlets, for example, can have an overt bias toward one political ideology or another. Perhaps less obvious is the tailoring of electronic access to information through search engines and social media platforms. Algorithms predict the content that each person will want to see based on previous activity, and so rather than confronting opinions contrary to their own, users experience a growing confirmation bias (Pariser 2011). Negatively, the counterthrust against the growing force of ideology and conformity within public discourse develops a kind of radical skepticism with respect to whatever is presented as an objective or fact-based claim. Recently, the relation between contingent and necessary experience has become contested by the claim that a belief or opinion sufficiently demonstrates genuine insight into the nature of things and ought to be regarded as such.¹⁵⁷ The trend toward a technological mediation of the world on the one hand, and growing skepticism about the efficacy and validity of expertise on the other, distorts the nature of our experience of the world with others and so undermines the possibility of a genuine, shared understanding. We will take up each of these concerns in turn in the proceeding sections.

6.3.1: Gadamer's critique of technology

Gadamer observes that as Western societies develop more and more through technological growth, the achievements of technology also introduce a problem with how our

¹⁵⁷ This is not to say that a belief or opinion cannot reflect the non-relative ground of an experience, only that there is a problem with the presumption that one's opinion necessarily does this. In a CNN interview during the 2016 Republican National Convention, Newt Gingrich made this point with respect to the perceived rate of violent crime in the United States. Despite FBI statistics showing a decline in the rate of violent crime over the past two decades or more, Gingrich insisted that many American citizens believe differently and that therefore this belief ought to be reflected in policy (Siegal 2016).

experience of the world with others is mediated.¹⁵⁸ His hermeneutical project attempts to uncover the conditions under which human understanding is possible as a “fundamental endowment of man, one that sustains his communal life with others and that, above all, takes place by way of language and partnership of conversation” (GR, 158). Gadamer’s identification of hermeneutics as *πρόξις* is meant in part to reflect the fact that theoretical contemplation of the concepts and principles that maintain a normative framework of social reason is always “embedded within the practice of conditioned and lived life and is borne along by it” (RAS, 58-59). In this respect, it would seem that our inherent faculties of reasoning and sense of language should be sufficient to satisfy the conditions for a genuine, hermeneutical experience of the other. Gadamer suggests, however, that there is a growing dependence on technology as a substitute for the medium of our experience with others, and which thereby undermines the creative freedom inherent in practical reason. He finds that there is a perceivable movement toward an ideal, technocratic society in which “a mastery of society by reason and by more rational social relationships brought about by intentional planning” is becoming more and more prevalent at the expense of the openness toward new experiences that belongs naturally to understanding (RAS, 72).

One effect of this trend toward a technocratic ideal is the “technologizing of the formation of public opinion” (RAS, 73). The idea of a global community is relatively new in human history. Even so, by now the use of various forms of communications technology and the possibilities that they have created for engaging with others on a global scale are more or less

¹⁵⁸ Marc J. Lafountain addresses this issue in his essay, “Play and Ethics in *Culturus Interruptus*: Gadamer’s Hermeneutics in Postmodernity” In chapter one we discussed briefly Gadamer’s notion that interpretation begins with a “provocation” from the text to the reader. Lafountain argues that certain forms of technology disrupt the relation between the hermeneutical object and the interpreter, such that any provocation is only experienced indirectly and can be put on hold, so to speak. The back and forth movement of play, which Gadamer says we are always already playing, is thus interrupted, and our experience of the other within this movement is destabilized (Lafountain 1995, 210-218).

given.¹⁵⁹ The problem Gadamer sees is that, as the amount of information increases and the possibility of accessing this information becomes more ubiquitous, we must inevitably become more selective in what we decide is worth our attention. In 1976 he writes the following:

The modern technology of information has made available possibilities that make necessary the selection of information to a heretofore unimaginable extent. Any selection, however, means acting in the name of everyone else; that cannot be otherwise. Whoever does the selecting withholds something. [...] It is inevitable, then, that the modern technology of communication leads to a more powerful manipulation of our minds. One can intentionally steer public opinion in certain directions and exercise influence on behalf of certain decisions. (RAS, 73)

Gadamer has in mind specifically the influence that news media can have on the formation of public opinion, and hence the efficacy of social reason. The fact that the content that informs public opinion is selected means that it is also biased toward whoever makes the selection. Of course, one of the key principles in Gadamer's hermeneutics is that understanding is always based on an initial bias or prejudice. The issue here is that hermeneutical consciousness becomes only indirectly related to its object. One is no longer a participant in presenting the meaning of the things themselves but reduced to a passive observer. Thus there is no longer a partnership in coming to a shared understanding as the process of question and answer is undermined. As an effect of this growing lack of control in developing one's self-understanding, Gadamer suggests that there is an observable increase in apathy toward public affairs which then reinforces the degree of control and influence over public reason (RAS, 73).

This form of communication has an analogy in a form of counter-text that Gadamer calls a "pretext." The "literary" or genuine form of a text presents its meaning without holding

¹⁵⁹ There has been a consistent upward trend in the manufacturing and sale of telecommunications equipment in the past decade. For example, Apple sold approximately 1.4 million iPhones in 2007 when the device was first released. In 2014, nearly 170 million units were sold worldwide, totaling nearly 600 million sales from 2007 to 2014 (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/263401/global-apple-iphone-sales-since-3rd-quarter-2007/>, accessed January 11, 2017). Global revenue from telecommunications equipment was approximately 196 billion euros in 2005, and an estimated 439 billion euros in 2016 (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/268631/worldwide-revenue-from-telecommunications-equipment-since-2005>, accessed January 11, 2017).

anything back. By contrast, a pretext presents only a surface meaning. The actual meaning of a pretext remains concealed beneath this overt appearance. Gadamer uses the concept of the pretext to identify modes of communication that convey a hidden ideology, which he suggests is a prevalent issue within the media. “The very concept of ideology,” he writes, “tells us that there is something in the media that shape public opinion that is not really reliable information, but has a hidden guiding interest for which the information distributed serves only as a pretext.”¹⁶⁰ With respect to pretexts, interpretation must therefore function in order “to see through the wall of pretense and mediate what is truly coming to expression within the text” (GR, 177). As above, the problem Gadamer is identifying is that hermeneutical consciousness now has a barrier between itself and its object, i.e. the true meaning of the things that are presented to it. One does not engage directly in coming to a shared understanding but merely observes what is presented, and because the dialogical framework of understanding is undermined it is harder to overcome the hidden bias within this presentation.

A further negative consequence of the technological influence of public opinion is that the ability to see past hidden prejudices and reveal the true meaning of things becomes more of an adaptive function of human reason rather than a creative function. An interpreter becomes necessary to clarify the meaning of the text when the text or its analogue “is not able to do what it is supposed to do, namely, be heard and understood on its own” (GR, 180). Positively, the interpreter “disappears” when “full harmony in understanding is achieved” between the reader and the text (GR, 180). In the realm of public discourse that Gadamer is describing, however, the possibility of achieving this harmony is kept at a distance. “The society of experts,” he writes, “is

¹⁶⁰ GR, 178. Gadamer refers to Habermas’ critique of ideology as a method for getting behind the surface presentation of a pretext, but again points out the risk of this critique becoming its own form of ideology, i.e. based on the presumption that all understanding must work this way.

simultaneously a society of functionaries as well, for it is constitutive of the notion of the functionary that he be completely concentrated upon the administration of his function” (RAS, 74). Insofar as a social apparatus is made to depend upon this function, the expert thus emerges as a kind of interpreter who does not, and indeed cannot disappear as a result of his proper function within this apparatus. As a result, the efficacy of human reason depends more and more on one’s ability to adapt oneself within a predetermined social or political order rather than one’s creative freedom to explore and develop with others the nature of this order.

Gadamer’s critique of technology has an observable basis in his 1942 essay on Plato’s *Republic*, “Plato’s Educational State.” Gadamer argues that Plato’s intention in writing the *Republic* is revealed in light of his reaction to the changing political atmosphere in Athens. In the text itself, Socrates gives a rather grim description of the degeneration of oligarchy into democracy. As the gap between rich and poor increases, and as the number of wealthy families decreases, it becomes inevitable that the lower class will revolt. Anyone who has not been killed or exiled is then given an equal share in the new democratic state (*Rep.* 556e-557a). This newfound equality, however, is not necessarily compatible with non-subjective principles that determine one’s relationship to others. Thus the democratic citizen is free to do whatever he wants, but this freedom naturally gives way to excess (*Rep.* 561b-d). After Athens’ defeat in the Peloponnesian War, an oligarchic regime was established in place of its democratic institutions. In his *Letters*, Plato explains that as a youth he was initially supportive of this oligarchy, whose members included some of his relatives. The oligarchs, however, revealed themselves more as tyrants, causing the former democratic state to look ideal by comparison (*Ep. VII*, 324b-325c). Gadamer suggests that these events explain Plato’s decision to abandon politics and instead

convince others to turn toward philosophy and to develop a state that is based primarily upon a philosophical education (DD, 75-76).

What a philosophical education ultimately means is the cultivation of the “just political attitude [δικαιοσύνη] of its citizens” (DD, 92). The question of what justice is in this respect must therefore address not only the order of a just state that fosters this attitude but also the just order of the soul that manifests it (DD, 83). Gadamer argues the just organization of the state is therefore conditioned by something that its various classes and their corresponding virtues presuppose, viz. *idiopragein*, the idea that each person does what they are best suited for.¹⁶¹ The proper function of this virtue, however, does not depend upon each individual being adapted within the prior order of the state. Rather, the possibility of a unified state depends upon the proper function of *idiopragein*: “Only insofar as the individual is oriented away from his own class and committed to the political order relating these classes as a whole, is the state possible” (DD, 84). The parts and the whole are related to each other reciprocally in this way, and so the inward order of the soul is reflected outward in an analogous structure belonging to the state itself.

In his critique of technology, Gadamer suggests that as society moves toward a technocratic ideal, it becomes inevitable that social processes will become constituted more and more by our ability to adapt ourselves to technology. He argues, however, that the “greatest danger under which our civilization stands” is the possibility that this adaptive quality will be given priority over the natural, human capacity for practical reasoning and the creative freedom that this capacity enjoys (RAS, 73). The growing dependence on technology to mediate our experience of the world with others, he says, threatens our individual identity. In light of the

¹⁶¹ DD, 84. Gadamer uses this term, whereas the sections of the *Republic* to which he refers has τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττειν (Rep. 433b, 434c).

inevitability of a more technocratic state, then, Gadamer's concern does not appear to be with the increasing presence of technology *per se*, but rather with the possibility that the dependency on technology for the proper order and function of social and political processes will diminish the role of practical knowledge and creativity in the development of these processes.

Gadamer reveals a similar concern in his reading of the *Republic*. He argues that for Plato the principle of *idiopragein* is not meant to render political justice into a mere division of labour. Identifying justice with technical skill or proficiency does not constitute justice at all, Gadamer writes, but rather a disruption of the whole structure of governance that Plato witnessed in the decline of the Athenian democracy (DD, 85). The principle of *idiopragein* ought to integrate citizens into the operation of the state in a way that achieves harmony between individuals and the whole to which they belong, such that each individual has a desire to perform actions that maintain not only the internal order of his soul but also by extension the external order of the state. In this respect, Gadamer finds that the constitution of oneself as an "internally well-ordered soul is the true measure of *Dasein*'s self-understanding, i.e., of σοφία," whereas the "diminution and darkening of this inner capacity to govern oneself" leads to the destruction of this order through ἀμαθία.¹⁶² Prioritizing the state's outward unity threatens this capacity and thus the individuality of its citizens. The inner unity of the soul is therefore the "measure and origin" of the outward unity of the state, and not the other way around (DD, 86).

Gadamer's thoughts here extend from his awareness of the tension between attempts to understand the world and attempts to control it. The increasing dependence on forms of technology to mediate our experience of the world with others represents for him a problematic

¹⁶² DD, 86. The translator notes here that, in light of Gadamer's reference to *Dasein*, he is referring to σοφία in the Heideggerian sense as "a relationship of the self to itself in self-understanding," and likewise ἀμαθία as the lack of such self-understanding that is characteristic of a person who turns "away from himself in 'curiosity'" (DD, 86, n. 4).

shift in the wrong direction, namely the push toward a technological mastery over the necessary forces that otherwise constitute the terms of our relation to the world and others. For him, this insight was first realized by Greek philosophers who saw the λόγος as a way to understand, rather than manipulate or control, φύσις:

Thus in its confrontation with modern science we can see that Greek philosophy stands as almost the very opposite of modern science, and not its forerunner and the blazer of the path of theoretical ability to control [technology]. It is the Greeks who made us aware of the contrast between the world we can come to *understand* and live in and the world insofar as we are able to *control* it. (GR, 269; emphasis his)

In chapter three we discussed Socrates' demand in the *Phaedrus* for a form of dialectical rhetoric that can navigate the inherent ambiguity that belongs to language prior to its situation in a particular context. Part of what we would call sophistry today, Gadamer says, is the use of such rhetorical devices for "demagogical, populist purposes" (GR, 421). In this respect the sophist, insofar as he claims to possess knowledge of everything (*Soph.* 233c), is revealed as an expert, but one whose expertise has to do with exhibiting a kind of control over his fellow citizens. He can manipulate their beliefs with his own form of τέχνη (*Soph.* 234b), and convince others that whatever principle he himself determines to be good is in fact righteous and honourable (sc. *Theaet.* 167c-d).

The primary question at hand with respect to the organization of the state is therefore who is doing the organizing. In his commentary on the *Republic*, Gadamer explains that it is necessary that political leaders be philosophers, as the philosopher is uniquely the person who is able to see "true being in itself, the idea, the paradigm, as opposed to that which only participates in it, the adulterated and turbid" (DD, 91). By virtue of their education in philosophy, then, the rulers of the state recognize that the power they have does not actually belong to them, as it must only be used in order to maintain the proper order of the state as a whole (DD, 91). In this way,

Gadamer says, Plato presents philosophy as a cure for the unhealthy state of affairs in which he is actually living. By contrast, Gadamer suggests that the consequence of organizing the state around a technocratic ideal is that social and political processes will become guided by experts who possess the requisite skills and knowledge to calculate and predict their outcome:

This is the ideal of a technocratic society, in which one has recourse to the expert and looks to him for the discharging of the practical, political, and economic decisions one needs to make. Now the expert is an indispensable figure in the technical mastery of processes. He has replaced the old-time craftsman. But this expert is also supposed to substitute for practical and political experience.¹⁶³

The expert here becomes the arbiter of the conditions of our experience of the world with others. The problem, however, is not with expertise *per se*. It is obviously reasonable to trust the word of a doctor or a lawyer in medical or legal affairs. Gadamer insists as a hermeneutical principle that it is entirely reasonable to rely upon an authoritative interpretation of a text (TM, 281). The problem that Gadamer is identifying is rather the possibility that the conditions for productive social discourse can become altered or distorted. In the technocratic ideal he is describing, the power of self-presentation that belongs to the things themselves is revealed indirectly and inauthentically. In this way, that which sustains and develops a community of shared interests is no longer practice and creativity, but rather adaptability within a technocratic state. This degeneration of social reason and practical wisdom into a technique for adapting oneself to serve a particular function instigates, Gadamer says, a “general decline into social irrationality” (RAS, 74).

One could argue that the philosopher king in the *Republic* also represents the ideal head of a technocratic state. Only the philosopher, Gadamer writes, is able to truly distinguish

¹⁶³ RAS, 72. Herder identifies a very similar concern in some of his ethical works. He suggests that the codification of human rights into law will increase their complexity and thereby lead to the emergence of a class of legal experts. These figures are in a position to manipulate the law for their own end rather than to serve the general populace and its natural sense of morality (Forster 2017, 228-229).

between appearance and truth and thereby engage in real political life (DD, 52). In his view, however, the point of Plato's educational program in the *Republic* is to develop humanity's natural capacity for reason. This capacity is necessarily political and philosophical, and grounded in the hermeneutical priority of the question.¹⁶⁴ He suggests that the ideal head of the state that would rely on technocratic control over the populace, including other experts, is represented by the figure of the statesman, and not the philosopher.¹⁶⁵ The *Republic* in his view is Plato's portrayal of a utopian society in which the figure of the philosopher king serves a dual function. Plato refers to this ideal ruler in order to criticize those politicians whose ignorance brought ruin to Athens (Gadamer 1966, 378). He also uses it in order to reveal the fundamental political and philosophical potential that belongs to each and every member of a community, and how this potential can be harmonized with humanity's equally fundamental drive for self-preservation and independence (Ibid., 379; DD, 53-58). Thus in contrast to the sophistic, technocratic organization of the state, the philosophical ideal is one in which each person recognizes that the development of self-understanding and thus social reason is only truly possible when it is pursued freely with others.

¹⁶⁴ Gadamer writes the following: "In the background of this work on the state is a real educational state, the community of Plato's academy. The *Republic* exemplifies the purpose of that academy. This community of students applying themselves rigorously to mathematics and dialectic is no apolitical society of scholars. Instead, the work done here is intended to lead to the result which remained unattainable for the current sophistic paideia, with its encyclopedic instruction and arbitrary moralistic reformulations of the educational content of ancient poetry. It is intended to lead to a new discovery of justice in one's own soul and thus to *the shaping of the political human being*. This education, however, the actual education to participation in the state, is anything but a total manipulation of the soul, a rigorous leading of it to a predetermined goal. Instead, precisely in extending its questioning behind the supposedly valid traditional moral ideas, it is in itself the new experience of justice. Thus this education is not authoritative instruction based on an ideal organization at all; rather it lives from questioning alone" (DD, 52; emphasis his).

¹⁶⁵ "What pertains to the nature and appearance of the perfectible object is wholly dependent on the use for which it is intended. But, regarding the utility of the object, neither the knowledge nor the skill of the craftsman is master. The faculties of the craftsman do not guarantee that the object will be used according to its requirements, or, more decisively, that it will be used for something which is right. It appears that an additional expertise is required to determine its correct utilization, that is, the application of the means to the right ends. And since our whole consumer world is obviously a sacerdotal mixture of such means-ends relationships, the idea of a superior *techne* is appealing—a special expertise competent to order all other faculties, a kind of regal expertise: the political *techne*" (Gadamer 1966, 578).

6.3.2: The possibility of falsehood

In his essay, “Plato’s Unwritten Dialectic,” Gadamer argues that Plato’s focus on the dihaietrical separation of a genus into its various species is not meant to develop a unified system of knowledge. Plato’s concern, he says, is with the fact that the principles of the One and the Many, viz. that the unity of an idea is constituted by the fitting relationship among other ideas, are what make discourse as such possible. In this way, Plato’s “doctrine” of ideas turns out to be “a general theory of relationship from which it can be convincingly deduced that dialectic is unending and infinite” (DD, 152). For Plato, then, language “always requires that one idea be ‘there’ together with another. Insight into one idea per se does not yet constitute knowledge. Only when the idea is ‘alluded’ to in respect to another does it display itself *as* something” (DD, 152).

Gadamer’s insight into the nature of this dialectical activity comes from Heidegger’s interpretation of the synthetic (σύνθεσις) structure of the apophantic λόγος. According to Heidegger’s definition of truth (ἀλήθεια) as disclosure or unconcealment, an assertion is true when it reveals entities (ἀπόφανσις) as they are in themselves; beings are revealed in their Being, and so the “Being-true” of an assertion is located in its capacity for “Being-uncovering” (*Entdeckend-sein*; BT, 261), for “taking entities out of their hiddenness and letting them be seen in their unhiddenness” (BT, 263). The “Being-false” (ψεύδεσθαι) of an assertion thus has the sense of “covering up” (*verdecken*). It “puts something in front of something (in such a way as to let it be seen) and thereby passes it off *as* something which it is *not*” (BT, 57; slightly modified with original emphasis).

This form of speech has the structure of a σύνθεσις, not in the sense of linking together mental representations which must then be shown to correspond to something external, but rather

in a way that reveals entities as they exist together with or as something else (BT, 56). In his *Sophist* lectures, Heidegger argues that the synthetic structure of the apophantic λόγος that is developed in the Greek concept of truth is what creates the possibility of both true and false speech:

I posit the one [perception; νόημα] together with the other, “as if they were one.”¹⁶⁶ I posit table together with black, so that they are seen as one. [...] The grasping, in the sense of the letting something be seen by means of λόγος, thus has the structure of σύνθεσις. And only where there is such a σύνθεσις, only where the character of the “as” occurs, is there falsity. The distorting of something is possible only in this way, that something else (grey) which presumably could show the being (the table) is posited in place of it. Falsity, i.e., to assert something as what it is not, occurs only where there is a σύνθεσις. (Heidegger 1997, 126)

For Heidegger, truth and falsehood have a common linguistic origin (*gleichursprünglich*), but are not inherent properties of language. Language as such signifies entities, he explains, but not necessarily in a way that reveals them as they are in themselves. Therefore, the primary sense of speech is “at first neither true nor false (Heidegger 1997, 124; BT, 56). In Heidegger’s view, the difference for Plato between true speech (λόγος ἀληθής) and false speech (λόγος ψευδής) is therefore that in the former discloses the nature of an entity together with something that it is, while in the latter one exhibits an entity together with something other than what it is.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Quoting Aristotle, *De Anima* 430a27 ff.

¹⁶⁷ Heidegger 1997, 418. Heidegger criticizes Plato for failing to recognize what he argues is the more primary sense of truth and falsehood that belongs to Being and which precedes the kind of truth and falsehood that belongs to the synthetic structure of language. In *Being and Time* Heidegger claims that prior to the disclosure in language of one entity with another is the “sheer sensory perception [αἴσθησις] of something,” and that insofar as this perception aims at its ἴδιον (“those entities which are genuinely accessible only *through* it and *for* it”) it is always true (BT, 57). Therefore, truth and falsehood are not properties of language *per se*. Rather, Heidegger finds that the kind of truth and falsehood that belong to language are located in a more prior phenomenon of truth, namely *Dasein*’s act of uncovering Being as a mode of its Being-in-the-world (BT, 263). Gadamer follows Heidegger in this criticism to a certain extent. He claims that Plato’s focus on the logical content of non-being as otherness obscures the real, ontological meaning of falsehood as the false appearance of something (DD, 153). Gadamer’s approach to language in his hermeneutics is, however, different than in Heidegger’s phenomenology. This difference leads Gadamer to produce a more charitable interpretation of what Plato is doing, bringing Plato into close proximity with his hermeneutical project. Whereas Heidegger suggests that the experience of truth and falsehood as disclosure and concealment are prior to language, Gadamer asserts that “being that can be understood is language” (TM, 470). Commenting on this formulation Gadamer says that above all it means that “Being speaks,” and that “only via language can being be understood” (GR, 417). Language is a “form of life” and it is therefore in and through

Plato tends to portray the sophist as someone who challenges this point, specifically with respect to the possibility of speaking falsely. According to the Eleatic Stranger, the sophist denies that opinion and speech, viz. claims about existing things (λόγος τινός), participate in non-being. The sophist therefore denies that falsehood exists (*Soph.* 260d-e). The sophist claims, in other words, that language only reveals entities as they are, such that every assertion is necessarily true (*Soph.* 261c). A nearly identical claim is made in the *Euthydemus*. There, Euthydemus argues that if every statement is about something that exists, one can speak only about what is. On the agreement that to speak truly is to speak about what is, he concludes that false speech is impossible (*Euth.* 283e-284c). As Gonzalez explains, to speak falsely here is to speak about what is not, which means to say nothing and thus not speak at all.¹⁶⁸

The more serious threat that Plato identifies here is that, in conjunction with his claim to have knowledge of everything, the sophist's denial of the possibility of false speech allows him to take over the power of self-presentation that belongs to the ideas. Consequently, the measure of truth is located not with the unity of the idea itself, but rather in each of its manifold appearances to thought. Protagoras' thesis, that man is the measure of being and non-being, such that truth (ἀλήθεια) is for each person whatever it appears to be (φαίνεσθαι), represents this position *par excellence*. Under this thesis truth is completely relative and falsehood impossible:

language that *Dasein* uncovers truth (GR, 371). It is therefore conceivable, Gadamer writes, "that the dimension of self-manifesting Being, the Being of *aletheia* that articulates itself in the *logos*, could be recognized in the dialectic of Ideas (Gadamer 1994a, 160). We saw in chapter two that what makes the λόγοι "Theaetetus sits" and "Theaetetus flies" true or false is primarily whether or not they manifest an appropriate relation among the ideas that their words imply, and that it is only in a secondary sense that their truth or falsehood depends on their correspondence to an external state of affairs.

¹⁶⁸ Gonzalez 1998, 107. Consequently, if there is only true speech then contradiction (ἀντιλέγειν) becomes impossible (*Euth.* 285e-286b). If two people are speaking about the same thing, then they are saying the same thing. If they are speaking about different things they are merely talking past one another and not actually contradicting each other. If, moreover, one person is speaking of what is not, he says nothing and so there is nothing to contradict (Gonzalez 1998, 108). The sophist, of course, claims to be an expert in teaching the art of disputation (ἀντιλογικός). Socrates points out, then, that denying the possibility of false speech and thus contradiction also denies the possibility of refutation (*Euth.* 287a-c).

presenting Protagoras' position, Socrates says that on this approach "no one ever made anyone think truly [ἀληθῆ δοξάζειν] who previously thought falsely, since it is impossible to think that which is not [μὴ ὄντα] or to think any other things than those which one feels [πάσχειν]" (*Theaet.* 167a; Fowler's translation). However, in order to justify his profession as a sophist and his entitlement to collect tuition from his students, Protagoras argues that it is possible that what anyone believes to be true can be improved, even if truth remains relative to each person:

For I claim that whatever seems right and honourable to a state really is right and honourable to it, so long as it believes it to be so; but the wise man [σοφός] causes the good, instead of that which is evil to them in each instance, to be and seem right and honourable. (*Theaet.* 167c; Fowler's translation)

The sophist treats the other as a means to an end, namely the demonstration of superior insight into the nature of things. In doing so he excludes the subjective role of the other as mutually contributing to the development of the subject under consideration, namely what is actually good, right, or honourable.

In the subsequent discussion, Socrates offers a refutation of Protagoras' position. An elaboration of the particular logical details of Socrates' criticisms and whether or not he successfully refutes Protagoras extends beyond the scope of the current discussion. The salient point for our purposes is located near the conclusion of Socrates argument against Protagoras' thesis. He says the following to Theodorus:

Regarding the good, nobody has the courage to go on and contend that whatever laws a state passes thinking them advantageous to it are really advantageous as long as they remain in force, unless what he means is merely the name "advantageous"; and that would be making a joke of our argument. For he must not mean merely the name, but the thing named must be the object of his attention. But the state, in making laws, aims, of course, at advantage, whatever the name it gives it, and makes all its laws as advantageous as possible to itself, to the extent of its belief and ability; or has it in making laws anything else in view?¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ *Theaet.* 177d-e. Fowler's translation, slightly modified. Theodorus' replies, which just consent to what Socrates says, have been removed for the sake of brevity.

Socrates' issue with Protagoras' relativistic theory of knowledge is that it renders language completely conventional, such that what is advantageous for the state is just whatever thing it names as such. In other words, there is neither any question about the essential nature of the thing itself, nor about whether or not one's assertion genuinely reflects this content. The sophist merely imitates beings (μιμητὴς ὧν τῶν ὄντων). Consequently, the meanings of beings no longer present themselves to thought; their meanings as communicated in language are just whatever the sophist makes them out to be.

6.4: The philosophical orientation toward the things themselves

6.4.1: The experience of the Thou

Gadamer is well-aware of the fact that our endeavor to come to a shared understanding is not always successful. While he tends to pass over the possibility that a consensus will not come to fruition, a charitable approach to Gadamer's work, in particular *Truth and Method*, will not find that his inattention to this issue indicates his inability to deal with it. Gadamer is interested primarily with elaborating the conditions under which understanding as such becomes possible; and so his account of the principles of philosophical hermeneutics implies that degenerate forms of understanding are just those which fail to meet one or more of these conditions. Despite his brevity on this issue, it is important to consider how Gadamer clarifies the distinction between genuine and degenerate communication. Becoming aware of this distinction will provide context for a more direct and robust articulation of the problem that sophistry poses to philosophical hermeneutics.

A genuine conversation for Gadamer is one in which the partners in a discussion share a mutual concern for uncovering the truth of the subject matter (*die Sache*). In other words, they remain subordinate to this subject, just as the meanings that shine forth (*erscheinen*) in the literary text remain subordinate to the being of the text. As it proceeds from the finite, historical situation of the interlocutors, the hermeneutical experience of the other therefore presupposes the fallibility that is basic to human thought. One thing that has been emphasized throughout this dissertation is that individual claims to truth about this subject matter are, in the first place, evident or possible interpretations of its meaning. A genuine conversation therefore depends upon the mutual interest of the interlocutors to consider the possible truth of what the other says.¹⁷⁰ By coming to a consensus in this way, the interlocutors become unified in their discourse; the thing itself “comes into language” (TM, 371) as an event that happens to the interlocutors (TM, 385). As Warnke explains, the point here is that this unity does not describe the imposition of one point of view on another or the submission of one interlocutor to a superior argument. The point is rather that a genuine understanding “represents a new understanding of the subject-matter” for all parties involved in the conversation, and not just one point of view that is advanced over the others (Warnke 1987, 100-101). The nature of the subject matter always has this priority.

Degenerate communication is therefore indicative of a disposition toward the other that undermines the possibility of coming to a genuine, shared understanding. The interlocutors fail

¹⁷⁰ In an address given at Bamberg University in 1994, Gadamer says the following: “It is essential, therefore, to recognize all the varied forms of human life and the expressions of their particular worldviews. In doing so, we find ourselves in the realm of hermeneutics. This I call the art of understanding. But what is understanding, really? Understanding, whatever else it may mean, does not entail that one agrees with whatever or whomever one “understands.” Such a meeting of the minds in understanding would be utopian. Understanding means that I am able to weigh and consider fairly *what the other person thinks!* It means that one recognizes that the other person could be right in what he or she says or actually wants to say. Understanding, therefore, is not simply mastering something that stands opposite you, whether it is the other person or the whole objective world in general” (GR, 117; emphasis original).

to reach an agreement that is grounded in a common subject matter. In this sense, their assertions about the meaning of this subject remain incommensurate. It would be misleading to suppose, however, that the incommensurability thesis reveals that all unsuccessful attempts to mediate between rival conceptual schemes, theories, or meanings are necessarily degenerate. Reflecting on the development of his hermeneutic theory, Gadamer writes the following:

When one follows the approach oriented to [my] hermeneutics, every effort at grasping a meaning is in principle directed toward a possible consensus, a possible agreement in understanding; indeed, it must already rest on a general agreement in understanding that is binding, if it is to come about that one understands and is understood. This is not some dogmatic assumption but a simple phenomenological description of coming to an understanding. When there is no common ground linking two parties together, no conversation can succeed. (GR, 68)

Degenerate communication therefore reveals the intention of one or both interlocutors to avoid a genuine agreement. If different articulations of meaning are incommensurate because they belong to truly incompatible schemes or worlds, each interlocutor can still act towards the other with good will. In other words, even if the best outcome of their conversation is that they agree to disagree, they can still uphold the hermeneutical principles that are otherwise involved in understanding, namely the demand for openness to the experience of the other and the recognition that the claim of another person is at least potentially valid and can hold true under different circumstances.

In *Truth and Method* Gadamer identifies three modes of experience of the other in a dialogical setting. The first two are deficient as they do not properly satisfy the conditions under which a shared understanding becomes possible.¹⁷¹ First, there is an experience of the other that becomes an empirical basis for making predictions about the other's behavior. This approach to the other treats the other person, Gadamer explains, purely as a means to an end and not an end

¹⁷¹ These modes of experience were also discussed briefly in chapter one.

in themselves. In the context of hermeneutics, the equivalent of this experience is the methodological objectification of a subject matter and thereby the systematic exclusion of any subjective determination of its content (TM, 352-353). This approach therefore de-prioritizes the subject matter as something in which the interlocutors participate mutually. In chapter three we saw that the interpreter of history belongs to history in a fundamental way. The dogmatic objectivism that occurs in critical sciences overlooks the fact that the consciousness of the interpreter contributes to the development of its object as part of its effective history and the event of understanding (PH, 28). By excluding the role of subjective determinism in the development of a concept, both the self and the other become separated from tradition and from their consciousness of its effects which constitutes their historical self-understanding. (TM, 353).

Gadamer's description of this experience of the other has a close correlation with another, earlier description of inauthenticity (*Uneigentlichsein*; GW V, 33) in speech. In *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, he explains that there is a form of assertion that "establishes itself through having disposition over the strongest logos," which is to say, an account that is impossible to contradict (PDE, 46). Rather than being interested in relating the substantive content of the subject matter itself, this form of discourse is used to obtain power or control over the interlocutor. Gadamer is referring here to the form of sophistry that is typically represented in Plato's dialogues, viz. as extending from the claim to know how to make any strong argument appear weak and any weak argument appear strong by manipulating "possibilities that are inherent in discourse itself" (PDE, 47). The person with this knowledge, Gadamer writes, "is ready to answer *any* question, and believes in advance, before knowing what question will be asked, that he commands the power of speech in such a way that he will be able to cut short any contradiction" (PDE, 47; slightly modified). In effect, the sophist can claim to know everything.

This claim to knowledge, however, is only revealed through the act of refuting his interlocutor, no matter what claim the interlocutor makes. Just like the above experience, then, the sophist treats the other as a means to an end and in doing so excludes the subjective role of the other as mutually contributing to the development of the subject under consideration.

The counterpart to this mode of inauthentic speech is refutation that is done for its own sake. Rather than laying claim to the stronger position in a debate, one seeks instead to demonstrate the weakness of the other. As a counterpart to the form of sophistry above, the ability to refute any position also extends from the claim to have knowledge of everything. One's purpose here is not to make one's interlocutor aware of a deficiency in knowledge, such that they develop a greater understanding of the matter at hand, but rather to "silence" them. In doing so, one prohibits a "genuine co-relationship" with respect to a shared subject matter from occurring (PDE, 50).

Both forms of inauthentic speech take advantage of the "possibilities that are inherent in discourse," i.e. the fact that words can have different meanings in different contexts. In order to do this, however, degenerate communication must operate without any actual regard for context. The sophist prohibits his interlocutor from taking into account the fact that context may call for one meaning to come forth, whereas in another context this meaning would be inappropriate. The respondent is asked a closed question, and thus is restricted to a specific answer that is predicted in advance, allowing the sophist to mount an effective refutation.¹⁷²

¹⁷² We discussed this kind of speech in an earlier chapter in the context of the *Euthydemus*. There, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus each ask Clinias questions which can only be answered with one of two mutually exclusive options, each of which they are prepared in advance to refute. Each proposition is given different, contradictory meanings. One proposition is true in one context but false in another; but what makes this possible is not allowed to be discussed (Gonzalez 1998, 98). Similarly, Gadamer writes that in both forms of inauthentic speech the function of language "is not primarily to make the facts of the matter visible in their being and to confirm this through the other person but rather to develop in speech, independently of the access that it creates to the facts of the matter, the

The second experience of the other treats the other as a person, that is, not merely as a means to an end. This experience remains, however, a form of self-relatedness. In making a claim to the other, one presumes to know in advance the counterclaim of the other and thus to understand the other better than the other understands himself (TM, 353). This form of experience describes the encounter that one has with the other through historical consciousness. Historical consciousness claims to transcend the contingency of its own historical situation and therefore to understand its object free from any prejudice or bias. Not unlike the second form of inauthentic speech that Gadamer describes, the efficacy of this experience comes from its disregard for context. By not recognizing one's own prejudices, however, one remains dominated by them and perpetuates the claims that entail from them without questioning whether or not such claims are valid. As with the first form of experience, the objectivity of historical consciousness ignores the fact that the interpretation of an historical object in part constitutes the meaning of this object. As Gadamer puts it, "To be situated within a tradition does not limit the freedom of knowledge but makes it possible" (TM, 354).

The most genuine form of experience consists in recognizing the basic fact that one is situated historically within tradition, and that understanding is always preceded by a prejudice or bias. Coming to a shared understanding thereby requires experiencing the other truly as an Other, i.e. as another self with a claim that is at least as potentially valid as one's own, regardless of whether or not there is any initial agreement between the interlocutors. In this respect, Gadamer writes that genuine openness to the other involves "recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so" (TM, 355). It is only by

possibility precisely of excluding the other person in the function (which belongs to him in the process of coming to an agreement) of fellow speaker and fellow knower" (PDE, 45-46).

presuming the potential validity of the other's claim that a genuine, shared understanding is possible.

The same principle behind the polyvalence of the authentic text is thus operative in the hermeneutical experience of the other. What distinguishes the third and most genuine form of communication from the other two is that the self and other are related both mutually and reciprocally toward a common idea in light of which they are "transformed," so to speak. In the first experience of the other, one denies their mutual relation as participants in a concept; and in the second, one denies their reciprocal relation as constituting the scope of the other's horizon of understanding. In genuine experience, the interlocutors presuppose a subject matter as the common ground of their discourse, to which they subordinate themselves as participants in light of its ontological capacity for self-presentation. Because each interlocutor sees the other as truly other, neither presumes a greater degree of insight than the other. They are on equal footing, and so they accept the claim of the other as an equally possible articulation of the meaning of the subject matter.¹⁷³ In contrast to the demand for univocity in meaning, accepting the claim of the other as part of what constitutes tradition means that each interlocutor can properly identify such a claim as contributing to the development of his own self-understanding.

The success of a genuine conversation therefore depends upon locating commensurability and compatibility between the points of view that the interlocutors present in light of the idea that unifies them. Their agreement is the achievement of event of understanding that Gadamer identifies as the "coming-into-language of the thing itself" (*Zur-Sprache-kommen der Sache selbst*; TM, 371; WM, 384). In contrast to the sophisticated and inauthentic modes of experiencing the other in this setting, the real achievement of this event is that the "coming into language" of

¹⁷³ This is not to say that one interlocutor cannot be more experienced than the other, only that his natural capacity for philosophical reflection is fundamentally the same.

the things themselves happens through the mutual and reciprocal activity of the interlocutors in presenting these things, and not the subordination of one partner to the other, or the imposition of an ideological barrier that impedes this activity.

6.4.2: Solidarity and goodwill toward the other

One of the main philosophical discoveries in the *Sophist* is the existence of non-being as a principle of otherness or difference. In contrast to the Parmenidean edict that non-being does not exist, Plato illustrates that non-being does not refer to the opposite of being, i.e. the negation of existence, but what is other than what is. What is not large, for example, is not necessarily small, but any magnitude or quantity that would not be considered large in some context.¹⁷⁴ As discussed in the second chapter, however, the possibility of speaking non-being also admits falsehood into speech and thought. Later in this dialogue it is said that if non-being had no connection with language all speech would be necessarily true, as it would be possible to speak only in terms of what is as it is (*Soph.* 260c). Thus the presence of non-being in language does not just validate statements of difference, but also permits one to speak about things that are as they are not (*Soph.* 263b).

In articulating the meaning of being, it matters therefore whether one's intention is to reveal things as they are or as they are not. In other words, there is a difference between trying to get at a genuine, shared understanding of things beyond one's own experience of them, and saying whatever is necessary in order to convince others that one has a better understanding of things. There is a form of assertion that "establishes itself through having disposition over the strongest logos," which is to say, an account that is impossible to contradict (PDE, 46). Rather

¹⁷⁴ *Soph.* 257b. In his essays, "Plato and the Copula: *Sophist* 251-259" and "SYMPLOKH EIDŌN," J. A. Ackrill elaborates Plato's distinction between different uses of the copula in Greek (Ackrill 1971a, 1971b).

than being interested in relating the substantive content of the subject matter itself, this form of discourse is used to obtain power or control over the interlocutor by manipulating “possibilities that are inherent in discourse itself” (PDE, 47). For Plato and Gadamer, this is the difference between the intention of the philosopher and that of the sophist, where the latter claims to know how to make any position seem weaker or stronger in order to win an argument, and the former, having real knowledge (even if this means knowing that he does not know something), seeks to know better (GW VII, 365).

In light of the preceding discussion, we may therefore ask the following question: if social and political institutions can be improved through a convincing appeal to a non-subjective principle, and if this principle really is in peoples’ best interest to follow, could it really be the case that the sophist alone has a unique or specialized insight into the conditions of social reason? The fact remains that the members of a community must have good reasons to adopt one principle over another. In other words, the sophist’s appeal presupposes common capacities for reasoning and experience that belong to each individual person through which they can recognize the potential truth of various principles and which allows them to enter into a fair and equitable discussion about their validity and efficacy within social processes. For the sophist to claim that he exceeds these capacities is to claim expertise in a region of thought that is prior to expertise, namely the innate, human capacity for reflecting upon the meaning of being that presents itself to thought.

In his critique of Protagoras’ position, Socrates illustrates that the expert knowledge that the sophist claims to possess implies the existence of false opinions. We are able to make predictions about future events, in light of which these predictions will be revealed as either true or false (*Theaet.* 178b-179a). This revelation does not depend on the nature of the prediction, but

the nature of the reality that unfolds. In other words, the measure of the validity of a truth-claim cannot be relative to each individual person. Earlier we used Gadamer's conceptualization of the literary text to explain how interpreting the content of the hermeneutical object is ultimately measured against the meaning that it maintains autonomously of our interpretation of it. In the previous chapter, we outlined Gadamer's understanding of the speculative function of language to mediate between this autonomous structure and the contingent circumstances in which it presents itself.

A genuine conversation depends on the fact that its participants accept that they are guided by hidden prejudices that can obscure the meaning of things that the other has experienced. "When we do not listen with such clear good will that the other recognizes in you his view of what he means," Gadamer says, "then we are merely sophists. [...] The sophist does not want to understand what you are saying but rather maintains that he is right" (GR, 416). The agreement that this conversation can obtain thus depends upon maintaining a sense of solidarity and goodwill with respect to how we interpret our shared reality alongside others. Wachterhauser summarizes this point aptly:

What this implies is that when conflict arises in these fields of inquiry between competing spheres of discourse what the exponents of these *logoi* must do is try to reidentify the good or goods that are commonly sought by each group. Conflict resolution can often only come about when each party is willing to examine itself in this fundamental way by making its agenda as explicit as possible and thereby opening itself up to critique and exchange in light of goods that are shared by both parties in the dispute. (Wachterhauser 1999, 120)

Solidarity in this sense means performing the Socratic "turning toward the idea" (*Wendung zur Idee*) that underscores the ontological ground of Gadamer's hermeneutics. Such a shared commitment to truth is thus not a question of "whose theory is superior in itself," as any criteria that mediate between the validity of various assertions belong to the horizon of the discussion

(Ibid.). Someone who, in light of the demonstration that their opinion is false, disagrees about the meaning of shared concepts is therefore not actually interested in developing greater insight into the nature of things, either with respect to their own self-understanding or others.

The current political climate in North America arguably suffers from a refusal to accept the terms of this solidarity and good will. In some cases, this refusal is evident in order to promote a partisan agenda. Between 2006 and 2015, Canadian scientists were restricted from publishing the results of their research, and in some cases denied permission to discuss their findings directly with the public. Lesley Ogden suggests that partly in order to maintain its commitment to bolstering the economy, the Conservative government eased environmental regulations as a way to increase the extraction of natural resources. Consequently, research was restricted that may have revealed negative effects of these developments (Ogden 2016). Similarly, in January 2017 the Trump administration instituted a media blackout against the Environmental Protection Agency (Beisecker and Flesher, 2017). At the same time, any mention of climate change was removed from the White House website, ostensibly as a reflection of a Republican mandate to deregulate the federal government (Beeler 2017). Other more egregious examples of this refusal to accept terms of good will in public discourse are the claim that former US president Barack Obama had been ineligible to hold the office of the president because he is not actually a US citizen, and the bizarre claim that there are “alternative” facts.

Our discussion of the incommensurability thesis at the start of this chapter demonstrates two relevant details. First, where there is a genuine attempt to reach an understanding about a common subject matter, a dialogue can successfully mediate differences in opinion. What makes this experience “genuine” is that the interlocutors are properly oriented as participants within the activity of self-presentation that belongs to the things themselves. The nature of this experience

was discussed largely in the previous chapter. It is in this respect that a dialogue creates the space within which there can be a mutual and equitable consideration of various possibilities of meaning that belong to the subject matter that the interlocutors have in common. By locating this common ground their subjective experiences are shown to be both comparable and commensurable. As Gadamer writes, “One should be able to resolve differing opinions about this experience and reach some kind of understanding through questions and answers that examine the matter—in other words, through a critical conversation” (GR, 376). In a similar respect, using Ricoeur’s approach to translation, Domenico Jervolino identifies the conditions for “linguistic hospitality” that implies a kind of responsibility toward others and develops a sense of solidarity in light of shared concepts. Jervolino finds that Ricoeur’s approach to language and community highlights a natural faculty of human reason that engenders a kind of self-governance guided by this sense of solidarity, and which is opposed to the constraining force of ideology (Jervolino 2006, 233-234). Similarly, Darren Walhof argues that for Gadamer, the principles of solidarity that unite us around common interests tend to be particular, rather than general, insofar as they are relevant to specific historical issues and cultural contexts (Walhof 2006, 572-575).

Second, the incommensurability thesis implies that the range of potential meanings that belong to an idea or concept is not unlimited. The power of self-presentation that belongs to the things themselves both opens them to the interpretation of their meaning and resists misinterpretations of their meaning. Meaning, Gadamer writes, cannot be understood arbitrarily; the “fluid multiplicity of possibilities” of meaning that the hermeneutical object can sustain is not indefinite (TM, 271), even if the dialectical process of inquiry into this meaning is. We recall from the second chapter that there is a sense of falsehood in language that is primarily a reflection of an ontological impossibility, i.e. the inability of certain ideas to exist in common.

Thus in our discussion about the conditions for social reason, a significant problem is the possibility of speaking falsely about things but denying that such falsehood really occurs. Yet by locating the power of presentation and the measure of meaning in each individual person, the sophist justifies the demand to take such things seriously, that is, as though an assertion made on these terms may be genuinely possible and therefore worth consideration. The counterpoint of this position, that the sophist somehow enjoys a specialized insight into the nature of things, allows him to usurp the autonomy of the ideas and substitute his own determination about their meaning. This is just what was meant when we discussed the sophist as an imitator of reality, as it is with respect to such an image that the meaning of a subject matter can be articulated in a way that does not belong to its own possibilities for being or self-presentation.

Thus the speculative relation between being and appearance, or between the finitude of speech and the infinity of the unsaid, locates a radical openness to hermeneutical consciousness, but it does not imply that understanding occurs in any way whatsoever. The novelty of understanding and experience is essential to Gadamer's hermeneutics (e.g. TM, 296), but this is not an unregulated process. In *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, for instance, Gadamer elaborates the shared ground of understanding as necessary reason or cause of something being the way it is, in light of which an entity becomes intelligible and its meaning communicable to another (PDE, 28). As the medium of this communication, language is characterized by its lack of constraint within either a subjective or objective determination: "The work issues a challenge which expects to be met. It requires an answer—an answer that can only be given by someone who accepted the challenge. And that answer must be his own, and given actively. The participant belongs to the play" (RB, 26). Interpretation is always unfolding "only in the way called for" by

the things themselves (TM, 467); yet the inherent finitude of thought necessitates that every response to this address be brought into question.

Socrates helpfully illustrates that when a person who prefers eristic over philosophical discourse engages in a genuinely critical conversation, they show themselves either to be embroiled in self-contradiction or to be making frivolous assertions. In his commentary on Plato's *Euthydemus*, Francisco Gonzalez summarizes what Socrates shows will happen when the sophist engages with another philosophically:

There are two ways of dealing effectively with the eristic: one either engages him in a dialectical discussion where he must refute himself in making meaningful utterances, or one confines eristic to eristic, that is, destroys its illusion of seriousness, so that it is rendered a harmless game. In short, if the eristic is caught being serious, he is doomed; if he refrains from being serious, he is harmless. (Gonzalez 1998, 127)

Thus by refusing to engage Euthydemus and Dionysodorus on their terms, which would only lend eristic an undeserved legitimacy, Socrates instead “places the eristics in a situation where they must either become involved in a serious discussion and thus give up their eristic or retreat to harmless puerility” (Ibid.).

Gadamer wants to make the same point as Socrates when he says that we must listen to the other with good will. Discussing the role of practical reasoning in social and political processes, he writes that practice refers to the freedom each person has for self-determination, but that this freedom necessarily involves others and “codetermines [their] communal concerns” (RAS, 82). Practice, then, “is conducting oneself and acting in solidarity;” and solidarity, in turn, “is the decisive condition and basis of all social reason” (RAS, 87). For the same reason that one cannot act howsoever one chooses, i.e. without regard for others, one cannot speak however one wants about subjects that are essentially communal. With this in mind, Lauren Barthold shows convincingly that there is thus an inherent justificatory demand in Gadamer's hermeneutics. She

writes that “the *logos* of dialogue is a speech that demands accountability both to oneself (to the extent that “only in the *logos* is Dasein itself” [PDE, 64]) as well as to others” (Barthold 2010, 15). It is therefore only by responding to the “justificatory demands of a dialogical partner” that a shared understanding of the subject matter is really possible. For Gadamer, then, the particular virtue of a Socratic dialogue is that “more than eristic reasoning, [it] is able to reach true, as opposed to distorted, understanding” (Ibid., 15). The dialogical form of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics possesses the same virtue, in light of which it guarantees truth.

6.5: Conclusion

The argument we have presented in this chapter is that Gadamer identifies philosophical hermeneutics as a practical activity in order to draw out the distinction between authentic and inauthentic experience. In closing, it might be helpful to reflect briefly on the difference that Gadamer sees between understanding and misunderstanding on the one hand, and the difference between philosophical and sophistical discourse on the other.

The problem of misunderstanding does not escape Gadamer’s notice. He makes explicit reference to this problem in several essays and other works.¹⁷⁵ This problem tends to be passed over, however, as an entirely natural, albeit unfortunate, aspect of human reasoning. Certainly part of the reason why Gadamer does not pay more attention to the problem of misunderstanding is that determining the scope and function of hermeneutic understanding is itself highly problematic. In the first chapter we elaborated a number of different ways that Gadamer utilizes

¹⁷⁵ The possibility of discriminating between correct and incorrect interpretations of a text is a guiding question in Chapter 4 of *Truth and Method*, on the theoretical elements of hermeneutical experience (TM 270-273). To name just a few other instances: in “Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem,” Gadamer writes that understanding and misunderstanding are both naturally concomitant in the self’s relation to the other (PH, 7); and in “Hermeneutics Tracking the Trace,” Gadamer emphasizes Paul Celan’s demand to obtain the correct understanding of a text relative to the context in which it is read (GR, 388).

the concept of truth within a hermeneutical context, each of which highlights one aspect of a much larger phenomenon that Gadamer is describing. Furthermore, the fact remains that insofar as misunderstanding is the product of a genuine attempt to uncover the nature of things, it is something that can be corrected over time through the hermeneutical activity of questioning and inquiring. Thus in the third chapter we argued that the conditions under which valid and invalid interpretations can be distinguished are themselves historically mediated and therefore available to the historically effected consciousness.

By contrast, sophistry reveals a different intention behind the reasons for making an assertion about the meaning of being. “The question,” Gadamer writes, “is whether someone, being knowledgeable or ignorant, feigns the semblance of knowledge [*Anschein des Wissens*]” (GW VII, 365). The goal is not to come to a more comprehensive understanding about the nature of things with others, but to give the impression that one possesses superior wisdom without necessarily knowing anything. The real significance of the problem that philosophy faces here is that, depending on the level of sophistication with which the sophist presents his image of being, the content of his argument could appear identical to that of the philosopher. Gadamer claims for this reason that the only substantial difference between the sophist and the philosopher is the intention behind their arguments, and whether or not they demonstrate a real concern for the truth.

Our practical involvement in the world with other that hermeneutics describes is therefore directed at achieving a consensus between the contingency of individual, historical experience and the necessary ground of this experience by mediating between necessity and contingency.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Karl Simms is incorrect in my view to argue that Gadamer criticizes “scientific” speech that does not attend to the particular context or situation of each other, and that such speech is in fact degenerate (Simms 2015, 45). Rather, the principles of unity and multiplicity demand that the interlocutors see past their contingent circumstances in their

In this respect Aristotle's ethical philosophy becomes especially relevant to the hermeneutical commitment toward solidarity and goodwill in understanding. Aristotle's approach to ethics provides a model of the problem of hermeneutics, specifically the role of application in understanding (TM, 320-321). Importantly, what Aristotle shows is that ethical knowledge is not simply a matter of relating a universal concept to a particular situation. Gadamer argues that viewing moral phenomena in this way entails a false objectification of moral consciousness. Just as the historian is necessarily part of, and therefore inalienable from, the history he interprets, so too the moral agent is responsive to and constitutive of ethical norms. He does not passively observe a situation, Gadamer writes, but is confronted with something that he must do (TM, 312).

Understanding is therefore an event in which the common identity of the text or its analogue is manifested in the particular historical circumstances in which it is understood (TM, 308; WM, 314). Accordingly, properly understanding the text requires that it must be understood "at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way" (TM, 307). As the mode of reasoning about the correct time and place to perform an action, *φρόνησις* thus reflects the interpreter's awareness of his particular, historical situation to which he applies the meaning of the text. The essential nature of the subject matter of the text therefore transcends the perspective of the interpreter (and the author, for that matter), but its meaning relative to the interpreter becomes apparent through his application of it to his situation.

In Gadamer's view, the natural capacity for moral reflection that Aristotle describes runs parallel with our natural capacity for hermeneutical reflection. For Aristotle, there is no such

dialogue with each other. In other words, they must appreciate the common content that unifies them in a dialogue. This means that they do not forego their own particular situations for what is only based in necessity, but neither do they approach the subject matter as corresponding only to its meaning in the particular moment of application. Doing so gives priority either to the autonomy of things or to the subjective will, and thus overlooks their prior unity (PH, 69-81).

thing as an expert ethicist in the same way that there are expert craftsmen who have perfected their craft. While that which constitutes a good life is debatable, the fact remains that not only is everyone naturally suited to obtain this end as they see fit (*Nic. Eth.*, I.7), but also that, like the content of practical reasoning, the development of a moral disposition undergoes constant change. Similarly, hermeneutical reflection does not describe a specialized skill that only select individuals can master (RAS, 122), but rather a natural capacity that everyone possesses to make themselves understood to others (RAS, 93). The central issue in all understanding, Gadamer says, is thus the ability of the reader to develop a meaningful relationship between himself and the text such that what is said in the past becomes relevant to, and so engages with, a conversation in the present.

The ubiquity of hermeneutical reflection, and the essential fact that this reflection necessitates the inclusion of others, shows that it must always adhere to a minimal justificatory demand. The transcendence of the things themselves, whose meanings are transmitted historically via tradition (chapter three), and in which we participate in order to manifest these meanings within our own historical situation (chapter four), necessitates that they serve as the ultimate measure for truth and the validity of any truth-claim within Gadamer's hermeneutics. Gadamer's concept of the "literary text" that we discussed in this chapter, and the ability of meanings to "shine forth" through wordplay, presupposes the same transcendental structure of the hermeneutical object. It is therefore in light of this demand that sophisticated or inauthentic modes of experience can be recognized, as they do not adhere to the essential unity of the concept that unites the self and other in meaningful discourse.

7. Conclusion

In bringing this project to a close, it will be helpful to repeat the general claims around which it has been organized. These were: one, that the hermeneutical object maintains both a unitary and multiple existence; two, that the unity and plurality of the hermeneutical object presuppose their speculative unity within a single, ontological framework; and three, that language functions as the medium between the unitary and multiple existences of the hermeneutical object following their logical separation. It has been on the basis of Gadamer's sustained focus on the principles of his hermeneutical ontology and Plato's ontology of ideas, and the hypothesis that the former has a substantial basis in the latter, that we have substantiated these claims.

Concerning the first claim, the notion that the hermeneutical object maintains both a unitary and multiple existence underscores the fact that, within the dialectical framework that sustains hermeneutical reflection, articulating the meaning of being happens with respect to a shared subject matter whose identity becomes meaningful in different ways with respect to different historical situations and contexts. It is in this respect that the event structure of understanding—the “coming into being of meaning” (*Sinn-geschehens*), the “event of language” (*sprachlichen Geschehen*), or the “event of speech” (*Geschehen der Rede*)—applies to each particular set of historical circumstances in which understanding occurs, and is simultaneously an “an event that happens to one” (*das ein Geschehen ist*) through the activity of the hermeneutical object over and above the interpretation of its content.

This dual nature of the event of understanding means, as we argued in the first chapter, that articulating the meaning of being always begins, for Gadamer, as a “possible truth.” The essential finitude of human understanding means that any assertion about the nature of things is

necessarily partial and therefore questionable in light of the coherent unity of the hermeneutical object. For the same reason, we illustrated that the locus of truth in Gadamer's hermeneutics cannot be either a set of non-subjective criteria belonging to the hermeneutical object that can distinguish between valid and invalid interpretations of its content, or the individualistic determination of the meaning of this object relative to one's own historical situation. We demonstrated that the monistic and pluralistic definitions of meaning are epistemological concerns that overlook the prior, ontological determination that the hermeneutical event of understanding encompasses both of these aspects. Gadamer therefore develops a hermeneutical ontology of identity and difference in order to explain how the hermeneutical object maintains its essential identity over and above the various interpretations of its content, and at the same time can sustain the plurality of these interpretations that occur within various historical and cultural contexts and which thereby constitute our shared understanding of it.

Concerning the second claim, we saw that the logical separation between the unitary and multiple existences of the hermeneutical object presupposes a prior unity between these aspects within a single, ontological framework, and that it is with respect to this presupposition that Gadamer locates the importance of the ontological question of the participation of the Many in the One. In the second chapter we illustrated that Gadamer identifies Plato's ontology of ideas as one of the primary philosophical origins of these principles, as seen particularly in Plato's engagement with the problems of participation in the *Parmenides*. For Gadamer, this dialogue presents the reader with two core theses that underscore Plato's theory of ideas: one, that the ideas are not discrete entities that exist in total separation from each other but rather exist in a complex web of relations; and two, that the ideas do not occupy a transcendent realm apart from the sensible world but are rather immanent in sensible things. In light of these theses we argued

that Plato creates a logical distinction between ideas and their appearances, as it is clear that these things occupy different modes of existence, but that this distinction also presupposes their conceptual unity. It is in this respect that Gadamer maintains over the course of his philosophical engagement with Plato that the ideas do not exist in a separate realm from their appearances.

Gadamer likewise maintains that there is no “world in itself” (*Welt an sich*) that exists separately from our hermeneutical involvement in the world with others. In the third chapter we argued that in response to Habermas’ criticism that language and tradition are forms of ideology that distort understanding, Gadamer successfully defends the universality of hermeneutical reflection by identifying historicity as an ontological precondition for understanding. We saw that for Gadamer the conditions under which meaningful discourse is possible are themselves historically mediated and thus are apprehended as well by the historically effected consciousness. In this respect we also elaborated Gadamer’s appropriation of Humboldt’s notion of a “worldview.” Each form of language presents its own worldview and can be translated into another due to the fact that each worldview is developed from the same original framework. Thus each form of language can be translated into another without having to presuppose a broader, neutral framework that contains the formal rules for performing a translation. As with Plato’s ideas, the traditional structures that constitute our shared reality are therefore immanent in our experience of them in the world and are available to be interpreted historically and linguistically.

Furthermore, in chapter four we saw that Gadamer’s identification of the theoretical and practical components of hermeneutics reflects a single-world ontology. Using Gadamer’s concept of play and his description of the work of art, it was demonstrated that on the one hand, the “true being” or “original essence” of the hermeneutical object is nothing other than its

capacity for self-presentation; on the other hand, however, it was shown that the being or essence of play depends upon its presentation within a given historical setting in order to have meaning. In this respect, Gadamer identifies the “theoretical” component of hermeneutical consciousness not in contrast to practice, but as a form of participation within the ideas that we have in common, such that the meaning of a festival, for example, is both relative to the particular time and place in which it is celebrated, and at the same time transcends the contingency of this celebration.

Elaborating the third claim began by developing Gadamer’s understanding of the *arithmos* structure of the λόγος and its bearing on the participation thesis. Gadamer argues that knowledge for Plato does not consist in knowing that there is an eidetic reality that persists behind the manifold of changing appearances, but rather in knowing “how it is possible in the first place that one can be many and many, one” (DD, 147). It is in this respect that Plato’s concept of number (ἀριθμός) emerges as the logical paradigm for expressing the dialectical relationship between the One and the Many, and ultimately the ideas and their appearances. In chapter two we elaborated Gadamer’s understanding that each number is “the unity of a multiplicity bound together” (DD, 147). Its value, he says, is just how many units are counted up in order to reach that number, yet the number itself cannot be reduced to its units. It has attributes, e.g. even or odd, that cannot be predicated of any unit (DD, 132). Each number is therefore both a “whole” that is constituted by nothing other than its parts and also a “sum” that exists over and above these parts.

For Gadamer, the logical relationship between the One and the Many is the mathematical precursor for true, dialectical knowledge of the ideas. Mathematically each number is a definite “so-many,” while ontologically the ideas cannot be known with such precision. The particular

circumstances in which the ideas are manifested are constantly changing. Thus the principle of the Many represents, in Gadamer's view, the fact that our dialectical inquiry into the nature of things is fundamentally unending, as the essential historicity of our apprehension of the ideas means that the manifold that each idea sustains is infinite and unlimited in its scope. This principle is qualified, however, by the fact that the ideas are not open to any appearance whatsoever, but only those appearances that the ideas themselves permit. Similarly, Gadamer repeatedly makes the point that the hermeneutical object is not open to any interpretation, but only those that the content of the text or its analogue allows. Dialectic therefore functions in order to mediate between the different articulations of meaning and the unity of the idea that sustains them according to the possibilities for self-presentation that belong to the ideas themselves.

Throughout this dissertation we have therefore elaborated the function of language as the medium between the contingency of our historical experience and the necessary ground of this experience in the essential principles that constitute our shared reality. In his interpretation of the grammatical analysis of the λόγος in Plato's *Sophist*, we saw that for Gadamer language implies an eidetic structure, in light of which the participation of sensible appearances in intelligible ideas is conclusively demonstrated (GW VII, 364). In chapter three, we saw that Gadamer's defense of the universality of hermeneutical reflection takes place within a discussion of Plato's concept of philosophical rhetoric. We demonstrated that the significance of this concept for Gadamer is that it reflects our understanding of the evident or probable structure of things, which is also where the hermeneutical phenomenon begins to take shape. Plato's philosophical rhetoric is therefore uniquely equipped to reflect the essential openness and finitude of hermeneutical experience, and at the same time orients this experience toward the necessary ground of this

experience. In chapter four, we then developed the speculative structure of language, which reflects the universality of language as the medium of Gadamer's hermeneutical ontology. For Gadamer, the Hegelian form of speculative judgment demonstrates how language bridges the contingent circumstances in which each event of understanding is manifested with the necessary principles of our common reality according to which this event has a meaning that can be shared. Finally, in chapter five, we revealed the justificatory demand that is inherent in philosophical language. We argued that it is by meeting this demand that the philosophical commitment to come to a genuine, shared understanding promotes the ideas of solidarity and goodwill that are, for Gadamer, at the heart of our practical interests, and which furthermore can reveal closed forms of consciousness that threaten to undermine this commitment.

It is important to ask, however, about the distance that still exists between Plato and Gadamer. In the introduction to this dissertation we explained that the point of our discussion is not to show either that Gadamer's hermeneutics is wholly Platonic, or that Gadamer's involvement with Plato is reducible to just the principles that have sustained our focus here. There is, for one thing, a significant point of difference between Plato and Gadamer concerning aesthetic experience and the speculative nature of the event of understanding in hermeneutics. For Gadamer, imitation describes an experience of the work of art that contributes to our understanding of the reality of the subject matter being imitated. It is in being imitated, he says, that this subject matter becomes present and is thus available for interpretation (TM, 113). In this way, imitation does not merely present a copy of a subject matter, but represents the original essence of this subject in a way that is relevant to a particular, historical situation. For Plato, in contrast, artistic imitation is further removed from the reality that is presented in thought and

language.¹⁷⁷ In this respect, imitation does not contribute to our understanding of its subject matter, but distracts us from it.¹⁷⁸

There is also a much deeper variance in Gadamer and Plato's respective relationships to tradition and the historicity of human understanding. While Plato certainly engages with poetic and philosophical traditions in his dialogues, the manner in which understanding occurs within and is constituted by history is not directly relevant to his concerns. As we see in the *Ion*, for example, the truths about which the poets sing are not their own, but ultimately belong to the gods. In chapter two we saw that, for Gadamer, Plato incorporates a principle of motion into the necessary structure of being, according to which the ideas can manifest themselves differently in different contexts. Yet our ability to recollect knowledge about the ideas is described by the soul leaving the body and returning to a timeless realm where truth is permanent. For Gadamer, however, our awareness of the nature of these ideas beyond the contingency of their appearances is always historically conditioned. We do not, and cannot have a perspective of them that is outside of any temporal or historical context. Thus while the principle of the Many underscores for both Plato and Gadamer the finitude of human understanding and the unending nature of dialectic, it is decisively a Gadamerian point that this finitude has an essential and inescapable relation to the historicity of human understanding.

Notwithstanding these differences, what emerges in our presentation of the Platonic ground of Gadamer's hermeneutical ontology is a specific question about the nature of philosophical reflection and which leads us to consider the character of this reflection.

¹⁷⁷ Arguably this is not true for all forms of imitation for Plato. For Socrates' philosophical use of images, see Collobert 2012 and Gonzalez 1998, 129-150.

¹⁷⁸ Gadamer argues that the participation between ideas and appearances is not just a form of imitation for Plato but implies a relation between the One and the Many that imitation cannot capture, for which reason Plato intentionally coins the term μέθεξις (IG, 10-11).

Understanding for Gadamer is inescapably self-understanding, and so unlike the Cartesian attempt to isolate the self, the relation between self and world that hermeneutics describes necessitates the other and therefore the shared commitment toward a conceptualization of truth that is mutually determined in light of common ideas. Importantly, the finitude and historicity of human nature means that self-knowledge and self-understanding are always oriented toward a more robust and comprehensive awareness of the ideas, principles, and concepts that develop our shared reality and organize our relationships with others. Our philosophical attempts to articulate the meaning of being cannot be exhausted; the essential nature of the unity of being as many implies a continuous and unending search for further meaning and self-understanding. In this way, through his articulation of the principles of the One and the Many, Plato confirms for Gadamer and for ourselves that the “highest possibility of human knowing must be named not sophia but philosophia” (PH, 155).

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