

## GADAMER, HEIDEGGER AND PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS

*“I came to your for answers. Very specific answers.”  
“So you keep telling me. And I will repeat the only answer I know.  
I have none. Not that I haven’t spent the last forty years looking, but I find  
answers are as rare as golden eggs or unicorns. All I can do is help you  
look for yourself. Think of what Manlius says and apply it to yourself: ‘A  
good act without understanding is not virtue; nor is an ill act; because  
understanding and virtue are the same.’ That is what you are seeking.  
Understanding, not answers. They are different things.”  
Olivier and Gersonides in The Dream of Scipio by Iain Pears*

There is something very seductive about Descartes’ project of using mathematical logic to search for truth and the idea that to understand one does not need to “know” anything – in particular that one does not need to know what others have thought throughout human history. One need only “think” carefully and clearly, starting with whatever is irrefutably obvious and following the dictates of “reason.” Since all human beings are endowed with “reason,” no individual need defer to the authority of another. We all have an equal opportunity to understand, although it may be some individuals are better equipped to “think clearly” than others. Most attempts at systematic philosophy seem to follow this dream, but Descartes’ foray is particularly appealing because so many of his assumptions are still part of what is held to be “common sense.” As much his starting point (*Cogito ergo sum.*) may be mocked as symptomatic of overly abstract thinking, most people would agree that there is a physical world “out there” which is distinct from an interior realm of consciousness and that what matters most in thinking is “clear and distinct” ideas. Most people also do not bother to join him in this exercise,

perhaps because they are willing to rely on the conclusions of others or because they sense in some way that they know better.

If one does embark on Descartes' project, the chances are good one will soon become lost in the forest of conundrums which have kept philosophers busy for 300 (if not 3000) years. Not the least of these is that having assumed a separation of the "mind" from the "real world" one has great difficulty finding a way to connect them. Few people after their sophomore year take seriously the need to "prove" the existence of the other people much less the existence of the physical world, but the question of how one can be certain that ideas correspond to reality rather than fantasy can be a live issue. Descartes managed to connect the mind with the world by means of an idea of God, and many thinkers since him who have inherited his basic distinction between "material" and "mental" substance have found it necessary to resort to an even more abstract notion of the Infinite or the Absolute in order to tie everything neatly together.

Descartes' real legacy of course is the impetus which he provided science. His own attempt to understand the natural world via the logic of Euclidean geometry may seem naïve by contemporary standards, but there is no denying that he provided a framework within which science was able to develop. It may have taken philosophy two hundred years to appreciate fully the implications of that framework, but science lost no time in applying it to the work of mastering the physical world. Scientific knowledge, of course, is not purely deductive in the way that Descartes seemed to be imagining at the outset of his meditations. It requires the accumulation of information via observation and experimentation. The way in which it expands and evolves over the generations gives rise to the idea that the search for knowledge is an endless task, and scientific "progress"

became associated with the idea of similar “progress” in other areas of human life. The problem is that science has little or nothing to contribute to the kind of “wisdom” that is required to make progress in those other areas.

Descartes understood this. He did not expect his method to provide moral guidance; nor did he expect science to undermine religion. His successors, however, saw no reason to limit the questioning of authority to the natural sciences, and many devoted themselves to the task of formulating a “rational” foundation for morality. The scientific approach was also applied to the attempt to understand human as well as physical phenomena. Psychology, sociology and anthropology aspired to be a sciences on a par with physics and biology. Human history became an object for “scientific” inquiry. Even art, literature and religion came to be seen as manifestations of a “worldview” which would be studied with the same “rigor” as a natural phenomenon. The idea that science should be the model for all knowledge became part of “common sense;” despite the Romantic rebellion against the domination of everything by “reason.”

The more successful science became the more people began to sense that something else was needed. Science and technology seemed not only to be undermining religion but dehumanizing life, draining meaning and purpose from the universe and unleashing destructive powers on a previously unimaginable scale. Much of philosophy during the last century has revolved around an attempt to determine the limitations of scientific knowledge and to describe other ways of coping. Hans-Georg Gadamer’s major work, Truth and Method, is surely one of the more successful attempts to show how the scientific method does not produce what is really meant by the idea of “truth.” He is not, of course, challenging the validity of scientific research and its obvious results.

He is describing another mode of understanding which is more basic than the scientific method, which determines the context within which scientific research is even possible and which may provide a more fruitful context for grappling with moral or spiritual issues.

There is obviously a rich tradition of thought which is critical of the results as well as the assumptions of “science.” Gadamer shares the sense of urgency found in this tradition but never the “irrationality” or the dogmatic, authoritarian conservatism that characterizes much of it. His writing is never “oracular.” If anything, the reasoned, circumspect and scholarly tone of his prose may often conceal the radical depths of what he is saying. What distinguishes Gadamer in addition to the obvious passion of his moral or existential commitment is his prodigious scholarship and the depth of his appreciation for all aspects of both the religious and humanistic traditions. He approaches “understanding” from a grounding in art, literature and culture rather than mathematics. He is also perhaps unique in the degree to which he brings to his task an appreciation for the contributions of Heidegger without having succumbed to discipleship. Unlike Heidegger or Derrida he does not feel a need to contort or re-invent language, although he shares with both the ability to unpack the meaning of contemporary concepts via etymology.

Ultimately what Gadamer describes is the intimate connection between understanding, language and experience. He attempts to do this without succumbing to “subjectivist” psychology by building on the insights contained in Heidegger’s idea of human existence as “being-in-the-world” and his ideas about the relationship between language and being:

“Thought brings to fulfillment the relation of Being to the essence of man, it does not make or produce this relation. Thought merely offers it to Being as that which has been delivered to itself by Being. This offering consists in this: that in thought Being is taken up in language. Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells. Whoever thinks or creates in words is a guardian of this dwelling. As guardian, he brings to fulfillment the unhiddenness of Being insofar as he, by his speaking, takes up this unhiddenness in language and preserves it in language. Thought does not become action because an effect issues from it, or because it is applied. Thought acts in that it thinks. This is presumably the simplest and, at the same time, the highest form of action: it concerns man’s relation to what is. All effecting, in the end, rest upon Being, is bent upon what is. Thought, on the other hand, lets itself be called into service by Being in order to speak the truth of Being. It is thought which accomplishes the letting be.” (Heidegger Letter 271)

Gadamer speaks in terms of the “linguisticity” of understanding (Truth 549) and how “in language the order and structure of our experience itself is originally formed and constantly changed.” (Truth 457)

Language is not just one of man’s possessions in the world; rather, on it depends the fact that man has a *world* at all. The world as world exists for man as for no other creature that is in the world. But this world is verbal in nature. (Truth 443)

In attempting to read Heidegger's obsessive and endless re-asking of "the question of being," it is easy to slide into a misconception in which "being" is assumed to be some sort of fundamental mystical "substance" from which all things emerge. With Gadamer this temptation is not present, but perhaps an opposite temptation may result in the misconception that all he is talking about is the definitions of the words we use. Something in Heidegger's style, especially when he explicates Holderlin's poetry, encourages mystical flights of fancy of a sort rarely launched by Gadamer's scholarly analysis of the history of ideas in Western culture. This is not to say that Gadamer's insights are any less profound than Heidegger's, but there is a difference in "style" and perhaps focus between the two. It is no surprise that Gadamer is often misconstrued as a "traditionalist" and "conservative," especially when he attempts to explain the role of "prejudice" in understanding.

*[Just for the record, Gadamer remained in Germany throughout World War II. He managed to avoid direct conflict with the Nazi regime without unduly compromising his integrity – partially because he spent most of the war years at Leipzig University, which was regarded as provincial and inconsequential by the Nazi authorities. Gadamer was repulsed by Nazi policies and was never swept up in the kind of nationalistic fervor that seems to have led Heidegger to join the Nazi party. He remained in Leipzig after the war becoming Rector in 1946 and had then to deal with the Russians and the East German Communist government. There is a revealing gloss on the idea of "interrogation" in "Man and Language" (Philosophical Hermeneutics 67) which brings to mind a description in Gadamer's memoirs of an episode when he was arrested and held for questioning for four days by East German authorities (PA 112). In 1947 he was*

*able to immigrate to West Germany where he taught first at Frankfurt University and then at Heidelberg. After retiring in 1968 he found a second home in the United States, teaching for ten years at Boston College and lecturing at several other American universities. In retrospect Gadamer's career from a political point of view is a remarkable case study in what is required to combine a commitment to philosophical integrity with a love of one's own country and native culture.]*

Gadamer calls his approach “philosophical hermeneutics.” Traditionally hermeneutics is the study of the method for interpreting the meaning of written texts, particularly religious scripture. The word comes from the Greek word *hermeneuein*, generally translated as to interpret and probably derived from Hermes, the name for the messenger of the gods. In the context of Jewish or Christian biblical studies, hermeneutics connotes a method of interpretation in which the meaning of a particular passage is found by reference to an understanding of the whole text. There is an obvious circularity in such a process since an understanding of the whole text implies an understanding of all the individual passages. In one extreme form hermeneutics is a technique for reconciling seemingly contradictory texts by applying an “allegorical” interpretation based on a presupposed dogmatic interpretation of the meaning of the whole tradition. It can be used to reconcile alien and seemingly conflicting traditions with one's own chosen tradition and was used by Christian theologians to reinterpret Jewish scripture as the “old testament.” In the Reformation Protestant theologians sought to develop a form of hermeneutics which would enable the Bible to be understood without recourse to the dogmatic authority of the Church. In this they attempted to emulate the techniques of secular scholarship involved in the evaluation of fragments of

ancient texts in terms of a relationship to the assumed coherence of the entire text. The term hermeneutics is primarily associated with this Protestant tradition which relies on the guidance of faith and an inner spiritual intuition or experience . The circularity of the process is essentially the mystery of the how the word becomes flesh.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century scholars and philosophers expanded the idea of hermeneutics to include the understanding of secular texts and works of art, largely in response to developments in the idea of history. As history came to be understood increasingly as a progression of unique periods each characterized by its own “worldview,” the issue arose of how it is possible to access the point of view of a period in the past. The problem of interpreting a work handed down through history was seen as similar to the problem of understanding a passage in scripture. The work had to be viewed as an expression of its “Age,” in other words the particular had to be understood in terms of the whole. Scholarship was the task of churning this circular process to yield an ever more refined interpretation both of a period as a whole and of the individual documents which provided the basis for any understanding of the period.

Schleiermacher provided a theory of hermeneutics which rested on his idea of an empathy which was possible between a contemporary reader and the author of an ancient text. The ultimate goal in reading and interpreting a work for him was to achieve a kind of immediate participation in the mind of the author as it was expressed in the work, to literally see the work from the author’s point of view. In a vague and general way this is still the “common sense” view of the appreciation of a work of literature or art, even though critics have dissected the shortcomings of such a view (cf. “The Intentional Fallacy”). This idea of hermeneutics found its culminating development in Dilthey’s



distinction between the kind of understanding involved in what are now called humanistic studies or liberal arts as opposed to the understanding involved in scientific explanations of natural phenomena.

Heidegger took up Dilthey's notion of hermeneutics and expanded it by combining it with ideas from phenomenology to conceive an idea of interpretation that was adequate to the task he saw confronting philosophy. Theodore Kisiel in his book The Genesis of Heidegger's Being & Time presents the development of Heidegger's idea of a "hermeneutics of facticity" as one of the seminal ideas which gave birth to Being and Time. Out of context the opaqueness of this phrase is typical of what one experiences in a cold reading of Being and Time. Kisiel goes to great lengths to reconstruct the development of Heidegger's thought during the decade prior to the publication of Being and Time in order to explain the importance of this idea. Gadamer, who also views Heidegger's merging of Dilthey's hermeneutics with Husserl's phenomenology as a major breakthrough, had the advantage of living through that decade as Heidegger's student and colleague. He comments on Heidegger's influence on his thinking in a summary explanation of his idea of philosophical hermeneutics:

As I was attempting to develop a philosophical hermeneutic, it followed from the previous history of hermeneutics that the interpretive (*verstehenden*) sciences provided my starting point. But to these was added a hitherto neglected supplement. I am referring to the experience of art. For both art and the historical sciences are modes of experiencing in which our own understanding of existence comes directly into play. Heidegger's unfolding of the existential structure of understanding

provided the conceptual help in dealing with the problematic of *Verstehen*, now posed in its proper scope. He formerly called this the “hermeneutic of facticity,” the self-interpretation of factual human existence, the existence that was there for the finding. My starting point was thus the critique of Idealism and its Romantic traditions. It was clear to me that the form of consciousness of our inherited and acquired historical education – aesthetic consciousness and historical consciousness – presented alienated forms of our true historical being. The primordial experiences that are transmitted through art and history are not to be grasped from the points of view of these forms of consciousness. The calm distance from which a middle-class educational consciousness takes satisfaction in its educational achievements misunderstands how much we ourselves are immersed in the game [*im Spiele*] and are the stake in this game.

(Apprenticeships 177f)

The circularity of concept of hermeneutics implies that there is always some form of understanding from which one starts in an effort to “interpret” the work at hand. The interpretive process articulates and refines or brings to fruition this pre-understanding. What Heidegger did was to apply this notion to ideas about human existence as a form of being which is essentially involved in interpreting itself and its world. Authentic thinking must begin with the concrete existence of the thinking individual and is always done on the basis of some kind of understanding of himself and his world. Much of Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s thought is devoted to exploring the implications of this idea.

As the above quote indicates Gadamer starts in Truth and Method with an analysis of what is involved in the experience of art. His aim obviously is to reveal the limitations inherent in the scientific attitude in which “knowledge” is acquired by viewing and manipulating “objective” phenomena. While it is difficult to follow his ideas without jumping into the technical philosophical issues and terminology, the relationship one has with a work of art is clearly an entirely different kind of involvement than scientific observation and experiment, and what it yields is every bit as relevant to the idea of “truth” as the constructs resulting from scientific inquiry. He draws on the idea of the playing of a game in order to indicate how the encounter with a work of art is a process in which one is involved and by which one is altered. Simplistic empirical psychology cannot possibly do justice to what transpires when one is engaged by a work of art. The work of art is not just a fixed object which is “perceived” and then synthesized or analyzed in the mind of the spectator. Someone who views an art object in this way is not “getting it.” It almost makes more sense to say that a work of art “lives” in the encounter with it; its meaning is not in what the artist had in mind but in what happens when it engages a responsive individual.

Gadamer expands his discussion to show that the study of history demands a similar engagement to that required for the appreciation of art. Because we are inevitably immersed in history and already shaped by it, it cannot be objectified like a natural phenomenon and studied scientifically. Or rather, it could be, just as a painting could be scientifically analyzed in terms of its physical and chemical makeup; but history like art demands something more of us. In attempting to understand history we are questioning ourselves and our world. We are inextricably involved in what we are studying and any

“objective” point of view which disentangles us from it ignores the essential aspect of what it is. This is perhaps an unconvincing oversimplification of what is at stake, but it may suggest a rough framework within which we can begin to examine what Gadamer is actually saying.

Once Gadamer has shown the connection between aesthetics and history and the hermeneutical process of interpretation required by both, he is ready to explore the real connection between experience, language and interpretation which forms the basis for his philosophical hermeneutic.

The classical discipline concerned with the art of understanding texts is hermeneutics. If my argument is correct, however, the real problem of hermeneutics is quite different from what one might expect. It points in the same direction in which my criticism of aesthetic consciousness has moved the problem of aesthetics. In fact, hermeneutics would then have to be understood in so comprehensive a sense as to embrace the whole sphere of art and its complex of questions. Every work of art, not only literature, must be understood like any other text that requires understanding, and this kind of understanding has to be acquired. This gives hermeneutical consciousness a comprehensiveness that surpasses even that of aesthetic consciousness. *Aesthetics has to be absorbed into hermeneutics.* This statement not only reveals the breadth of the problem but is substantially accurate. Conversely, hermeneutics must be so determined as a whole that it does justice to the experience of art. Understanding must be conceived as a part of the event in which

meaning occurs, the event in which the meaning of all statements – those of art and all other kinds of tradition – is formed and actualized.

In the nineteenth century, the hermeneutics that was once merely ancillary to theology and philology was developed into a system and made the basis of all the human sciences. It wholly transcended its original pragmatic purpose of making it possible, or easier, to understand written texts. It is not only the written tradition that is estranged and in need of new and more vital assimilation; everything that is no longer immediately situated in a world – that is, all tradition, whether art or the other spiritual creations of the past: law, religion, philosophy, and so forth – is estranged from its original meaning and depends on the unlocking and mediating spirit that we, like the Greeks, name after Hermes: the messenger of the gods. It is to the *rise of historical consciousness* that hermeneutics owes its centrality within the human sciences. But we may ask whether the whole extent of the problem that hermeneutics poses can be adequately grasped on the basis of the premises of historical consciousness. (Truth 165)

Grasping the whole extent of the problem that hermeneutics posed was Heidegger's contribution. Before attempting to elaborate on that contribution there is one aspect of what Gadamer is saying here that may merit emphasis: *Understanding must be conceived as a part of the event in which meaning occurs...* Meaning "occurs" in an "event." This is not just loose or figurative diction. There is a pointer here to an underlying issue that is easily unappreciated. Meaning is not something static or

permanent or fixed. Meaning is something that happens in time. Meaning also does not just reside in some object. It “occurs” in an event which involves understanding. The full import of this idea can not be grasped within a framework based on a basic distinction between a “subject” and an “objective world.” Heidegger’s idea of human existence as “being-in-the-world” is an attempt to provide a framework that avoids “subjectivism” and permits “understanding” and “meaning” to be conceived in this way. The relationships between “meaning” and “being” and “time” are of course a large part of what Being and Time is about.

Heidegger’s explication of the “hermeneutics of facticity” is just one aspect of his description of the nature of “interpretation.” In the introductory discussion of the method for his “Interpretation of the meaning of Being in general,” Heidegger explains his concept of phenomenology and announces his famous “task of Destroying the history of ontology.” (Being and Time Macquarrie 7) The first part of Being and Time is devoted to an analysis of human existence or *Dasein*, a common German word for existence which Heidegger uses in such a unique way that translators tend to leave it untranslated and often follow Heidegger in hyphenating it. (*Dasein* or *Da-sein* has become a technical philosophical term in English, but I am not at all sure that using it promotes an understanding of what Heidegger is saying. Nor does translating it as “being-there” as some have done really help all that much.) Heidegger’s initial point is that human existence necessarily involves some kind of understanding of being, but that it is inevitably obscured. His ultimate goal is the interpretation of the meaning of being, and he starts with human existence because it involves a kind of being that questions its own being and for this reason provides a unique gateway to an understanding of being. To be

human means to have some kind of understanding of one's own being, even if the understanding is "inauthentic" or in some way short-sighted. The analysis which Heidegger provides of human existence was responsible for much of the impact of the publication of Being and Time since it gathered together and put into a systematic framework many of the insights that would later be called "existentialist." While he does not credit the sources of many of the ideas behind his concepts, it is clear that he was greatly influenced by Kierkegaard and in some sense was breathing the same cultural air as Kafka. Gadamer also sees the influence of Nietzsche as even more central in the development of the ideas of Being and Time than the more obvious influence of Dilthey and Husserl. (Truth 257)

While Heidegger's analysis seems abstract in the extreme, it is based on an appreciation of the importance of everyday practical realities and the social-historical situation of the concrete individual as determining factors in human existence. Most of all Heidegger's emphasis on guilt, "finitude" and death as structural components of human existence are what attracted later "existentialists" to his thought. What we are most concerned with here, however, are his ideas about the way in which human existence inherently involves an understanding of its own being and the extent to which that understanding is shaped by the fact that human existence is inherently "historical."

...The being of Da-sein finds its meaning in temporality. But temporality is at the same time the condition of the possibility of historicity as a temporal mode of being of Da-sein itself, regardless of whether or how it is a being "in time." As a determination historicity is prior to what is called history (world-historical occurrences). Historicity means the

constitution of being of the “occurrence” of Da-sein as such; it is the ground of the fact that something like the discipline of “world history” is at all possible and historically belongs to world history. In its factual being Da-sein always is as and “what” it already was. Whether explicitly or not, it *is* its past in the manner of *its* being which, roughly expressed, on each occasion “occurs” out of its future. In its manner of existing at any given time, and accordingly also with the understanding of being the belongs to it, Da-sein grows into a customary interpretation of itself and grows up in that interpretation. It understands itself in terms of this interpretation at first, and within a certain range, constantly. This understanding discloses the possibilities of its being and regulates them. Its own past – and that always means that of its “generation” – does not *follow after* Da-sein but rather always already goes ahead of it. (Being and Time Stambaugh 17f)

The general idea here may be clear enough, but even this small dose of Being and Time is a nice indication of Heidegger’s early prose and the difficulties with which it confronts the reader, not to mention the translator. He seems driven by two concerns: the need to avoid anything that connotes subjectivist psychology and a desire to produce a rigorously systematic analysis. Attempting to digest and explicate this paragraph is a nice introductory exercise in interpretation or hermeneutics.

There are two ways a reader can come to terms with what is said here. One form of understanding it is to master it via pattern recognition. If one reads enough of Being and Time and has the appropriate skills, one can become conversant in its idiom. One



can learn how to use the terms in ways that follow the patterns in which they occur in the text, and one can formulate analogies which approximate the patterns in the text in some suggestive way while also indicating how they fall short. None of this is of much use for anything except appearing knowledgeable at an academic cocktail party or perhaps quelling private anxieties about whether one is “in the know” or “on top of things.” The ultimate form of this understanding is evoked by the jacket blurb on George Steiner’s book on Heidegger:

Acquaintance with the work of Martin Heidegger is indispensable to an understanding of contemporary thought and culture. His work has had a profound influence on a number of disciplines, including theology, Sartrean existentialism, linguistics, Hellenic studies, the structuralist and hermeneutic schools of textual interpretation, literary theory, and literature itself. With characteristic lucidity and style, George Steiner makes this philosopher’s immensely difficult body of work accessible to the general reader. The breadth of Steiner’s learning and interests also allows him to place Heidegger in a broader Continental literary-cultural context.

The other way in which this sample of Heidegger’s thought can be understood is a much more mysterious process akin to meditation in which the meaning of what is said somehow penetrates, illuminates and alters one’s consciousness. The difference is like the difference between analyzing the structure of a musical composition and really “getting it” when it is performed. A gifted musician, of course, can do both, and they are connected in such a way that the two processes illuminate each other. When a less gifted person begins to “get” a piece of music, perhaps the only way the experience can be

verbalized is by commenting on how obviously “right” certain aspects of the composition are or how moving the impact of it is. One begins to hear the necessity of the structure, and one responds to it emotionally or viscerally. The test of understanding is perhaps the richness or complexity of this interaction with what is understood rather than the facility with which one can regurgitate it. This is why Gadamer starts with the experience of art and attempts to describe how meaning resides in a interactive event.

In approaching our example from Heidegger the reader will obviously seize first on recognizable elements. For instance there is a very striking (for someone who has struggled to maintain a proper usage of Da-sein) description of how Dasein “grows up.” One can latch onto that and then retroactively assimilate the preceding sentences in the light of the familiarity of the idea that one grows up and acquires an understanding of who or what one is through education and social assimilation. It is easy to see that one’s “identity” is largely a product of the social environment and the traditions which are alive in that environment. One can also see that any human being acquires an identity in this manner regardless of how peculiar that identity may be, so that with some allowance for the necessary artificiality of the terms one can accept the notion that what is being described is the “constitution” or structure of a “mode of being” which is the human mode of being. Instead of featherless biped or rational animal, we have the beginnings of another description of the essence of man. Any informed reader of Heidegger knows better than to say this out loud, much less stop here in the interpretation of this passage.

The next thing that may catch the reader’s attention is a distinction between having a past and somehow *being* one’s past. Just as I know that my childhood is not a set of irrelevant memories that have no bearing on how I function now, I can know that I

*am* in some very real sense the culture which has produced me. My ability to imagine, to perceive, to behave is determined by the fact that I am a 20<sup>th</sup> century American raised in Alabama, etc. And there is perhaps no escaping this. I *am* always what I *was* or have been. At this point we may be getting closer to the real meaning of what is said. There is something about the way in which time is involved in being human which makes it possible for a human being to embody his past and to be part of “history.” Pondering this idea can open one to a suggestion about how the future is also a part of human being and the way in which one’s past determines what one’s future can be. The idea that one’s past “goes ahead” of one begins to seem less paradoxical.

At this point we have probably realized the need to have a better sense of the overall context of this passage in order to appreciate why the other seeming contortions of language are necessary to convey the real meaning here. The term *Da-sein* is clearly still a token which we can only hope to cash in much later in the hermeneutic process. The need for the terms “factual” and “historicity” is not self-evident. The best we can do is retain them as place holders and keep reading.

Heidegger himself was aware of the way his use of language was likely to be received:

With regard to the awkwardness and “inelegance” of expression in the following analyses, we may remark that it is one thing to report narratively about *beings* and another to grasp beings in their *being*. For the latter task not only most of the words are lacking but above all the “grammar.” If we may allude to earlier and in their own right altogether incomparable researches on the analysis of being, then we should compare the

ontological sections in Plato's *Parmenides* or the fourth chapter of the seventh book of Aristotle's Metaphysics with a narrative passage from Thucydides. Then we can see the stunning character of the formulations with which their philosophers challenged the Greeks. Since our powers are essentially inferior, and also since the area of being to be disclosed ontologically is far more difficult than that presented to the Greeks, the complexity of our concept-formation and the severity of our expression will increase. (Being and Time Stambaugh 34)

Given the idea that "historicity" is a structural component of human being, the next step is to see that there is an issue in the way one's past is normally understood. As much as Heidegger's analysis of existence is presented as a purely descriptive exploration of "being," there is a thread running through it which has unavoidable moral or normative overtones. Heidegger's description of the "everyday" mode of existence in which understanding is derived from or determined by the world in which one is "already" involved is set against his account of an "authentic" mode of existence in which understanding is somehow grounded in the individual. Existence has a kind of being which includes the possibility for something like a radical transformation and even if this transformation does not take place in an individual "soul," "self," "psyche" or "subject;" there is no denying that "authentic" sounds like a better or higher or superior mode than "inauthentic," "everyday," "fallen" or "entangled." Just as inauthenticity implies a kind of dispersion into the world it also implies something that seems almost like a domination by the past.

The preparatory interpretation of the fundamental structures of Da-sein with regard to its usual and average way of Being – in which it is first of all historical – will make the following clear: Da-sein not only has the inclination to be entangled in the world in which it is and to interpret itself in terms of that world by its reflected light; at the same time Da-sein is also entangled in a tradition which it more or less explicitly grasps. This tradition deprives Da-sein of its own leadership in questioning and choosing. This is especially true of *that* understanding (and its possible development) which is rooted in the most proper being of Da-sein – the ontological understanding.

The tradition that hereby gains dominance makes what it ‘transmits’ so little accessible that initially and for the most part it covers it over instead. What has been handed down it hands over to obviousness; it bars access to those original “wellsprings” out of which the traditional categories and concepts were in part genuinely drawn. The tradition even makes us forget such a provenance altogether. Indeed, it makes us wholly incapable of even understanding that such a return is necessary. The tradition uproots the historicity of Da-sein to such a degree that it only takes an interest in the manifold forms of possible types, directions, and standpoints of philosophizing in the most remote and strangest cultures, and with this interest tries to veil its own groundlessness. Consequently, in spite of all historical interest and zeal for a philologically “objective” interpretation, Da-sein no longer understands the most elementary

conditions which alone make a positive return to the past possible – in the sense of its productive appropriation. (Being and Time Stambaugh 18f)

In the idea that tradition “gains dominance” Heidegger indicates the need to describe how the normal individual’s understanding of himself is an inherited one that he functions within without really understanding. The obviousness of what is received is the obviousness of common sense. Moreover Heidegger’s account attempts to explain the necessity or inevitability of this “entangled” form of understanding of one’s own being by presenting it as a structural component of existence. Dilthey had developed the idea of the “worldview” which characterizes any particular culture to the point where it seemed as though all thought was relative to a particular worldview and there might be no way of bridging the gaps between disparate worldviews. Heidegger understood this kind of relativism as a consequence of the subjectivist psychology underlying Dilthey’s thought, and the interest in exotic worldviews is seen as a distraction. His idea of “being-in-the-world” reconceives the “worldview” so that it is not a representational view held by a Cartesian subject. He provides a conceptual framework which can account for the possibility of multiple “worldviews” while also allowing for the possibility of getting beyond a particular world view in ontology.

The understanding of being implied by the idea of “ontology” can only be achieved by digging our way out of the sediment of centuries of thought which we have inherited via tradition in order to get back to the “primordial” experience of the Greeks.

... Greek ontology and its history, which through many twists and turns still define the conceptual character of philosophy today, are proof of the fact that Da-sein understands itself and being in general in terms of the

‘world.’ The ontology that thus arises is ensnared by the tradition, which allows it to sink to the level of the obvious and become mere material for reworking (as it was for Hegel). (Being and Time Stambaugh 19)

If the question of being is to achieve clarity regarding its own history, a loosening of the sclerotic tradition and a dissolving of the concealments produced by it is necessary. We understand this task as the destructuring of the traditional content of ancient ontology which is to be carried out along the *guidelines of the question of being*. This destructuring is based upon the original experiences in which the first and subsequently guiding determinations of being were gained. (Being and Time Stambaugh 20)

(This last passage is one of the places where Joan Stambaugh’s translation differs significantly from the earlier Macquarrie and Robinson translation. Stambaugh seems to be going out of her way to avoid using their phrase “to destroy the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being.” (Being and Time Macquarrie 44) The notion of this “task of destruction” is, of course, one of the ideas that spawned “deconstructionism.”) It is clear that Heidegger is envisioning a more demanding type of hermeneutics for his approach to the texts of Greek philosophers. The hermeneutic circle of course is obvious in this task. Heidegger aspires to re-experience what the Greeks experienced by aggressively analyzing their writings. Perhaps he has already had this “original experience” and aspires to articulate or communicate it by an analysis of the Greek texts. The question remains how he can know he is getting at the original experience if he has to “destructure” their ideas to get there. His point, however, is that

we are somehow deprived by the way in which ideas are transmitted in tradition. There can be no doubt that Heidegger felt something had been lost. The way in which the Greek experience of being was transmitted eventually gave rise to technology and science, but Heidegger views this as a double-edged sword. The course of Western civilization may have been an inevitable working out of the implications of the seminal Greek insights, but even Heidegger's later writings which no longer deal with particular milestones in the history of Western philosophy aspire to articulate something more basic than the conceptual framework within which science and technology thrive.

It is perhaps not completely inappropriate to compare this hermeneutical task to psychoanalysis in which the formative experiences of an individual's youth are brought to consciousness in a way that can have a transforming effect on the individual. It may well be that one English language equivalent of Heidegger's archeological expeditions is Norman Brown's psychoanalytic interpretation of history. Paul Ricoeur also turned his attention to Freud in his attempts to delineate the nature of hermeneutics and interpretation.

The method by which Heidegger hopes to loosen up the "sclerotic tradition" is his own brand of phenomenology. The battle cry for phenomenology was "To the things themselves!" Husserl's main idea was that the "things" of which we are conscious need not be assumed to be appearances of some "thing-in-itself" of which we cannot be conscious. Husserl had his own ideas about how to "bracket" the issue of "existence" of the things so that one could focus on an analysis of what is really conveyed by the consciousness we have of those "things." Heidegger sees Husserl as still limited by a



form of Cartesian subjectivism and appropriates his idea of phenomenology as a way of describing ontology.

Heidegger's examination of the root meaning of "phenomenon" is a nice example of his use of etymology:

The Greek expression *phainomenon*, from which the term "phenomenon" derives, comes from the verb *phainesthai*, meaning "to show itself." Thus *phainomenon* means what shows itself, the self-showing, the manifest. *Phainesthai* itself is a "middle voice" construction of *phainō*, to bring into daylight, to place in brightness. *Phainō* belongs to the root *pha-*, like *phōs*, light or brightness, that is, that within which something can become manifest, visible in itself. Thus the meaning of the expression "phenomenon" is *established as what shows itself in itself*, what is manifest. The *phainomena*, "phenomena," are thus the totality of what lies in the light of day or can be brought to light. Sometimes the Greeks simply identified this with *ta onta* (beings). Beings can show themselves from themselves in various ways, depending on the mode of access to them. The possibility even exists that they can show themselves as they are *not* in themselves. In this self-showing beings "look like ...." Such self-showing we call *seeming* [*Scheinen*]. (Being and Time Stambaugh 25)

He then proceeds to distinguish between "appearance" and "showing itself" and to explain that an appearance in which something seems to be something other than what it actually is possible only on the basis of a "showing itself." His explanation will feel

like a sleight of hand trick unless one has discarded all the assumptions of empirical psychology in which experience is viewed in terms of impressions made on the mind by sensations caused by something separate from those impressions. Phenomena are what they are, and Heidegger's task is to show how "beings can show themselves in various ways, depending on the mode of access to them." The point is that there is a mode of access to beings in which beings show themselves as they are.

He performs a parallel analysis of the Greek concept of *logos*, which is not just "speech" (much less reason, judgment, concept, definition, ground, relation of any of the other terms by which it is sometimes translated) but "as speech really means *deloun*, to make manifest 'what is being talked about' in speech." (Being and Time Stambaugh 28) The possibility of error or deception in speech is derived from this basic function.

Furthermore because *logos* lets something be seen, it can *therefore* be true or false. But everything depends on the staying clear of any concept of truth construed in the sense of "correspondence" or "accordance" [Übereinstimmung]. This idea is by no means the primary one in the concept of *alètheia*. The "being true" of *logos* as *alètheuein* means: to take beings that are being talked *about* in *legein* as *apophainesthai* out of their concealment; to let them be seen as something unconcealed (*alèthes*); to *discover* them. Similarly "being false," *pseudesthai*, is tantamount to deceiving in the sense of covering up: putting something in front of something else (by way of letting it be seen) and thereby passing it off *as* something it is *not*. (Being and Time Stambaugh 29)

The combination of these two ideas in the idea of phenomenology means that there is a mode of speech which has access to the beings which show themselves as they are and which lets them be unconcealed. Rather than having to ponder how or whether we could have access to the reality behind appearances, we have instead the task of explaining how concealment or deception is not only possible but inevitable.

The covering up itself, whether it be understood in the sense of concealment, being buried over, or distortion, has in turn a twofold possibility. There are accidental coverings and necessary ones, the latter grounded in the enduring nature of the discovered. It is possible for every phenomenological concept and proposition drawn from genuine origins to degenerate when communicated as a statement. It gets circulated in a vacuous fashion, loses its autochthony, and becomes a free-floating thesis. Even in the concrete work of phenomenology lurks possible inflexibility and the inability to grasp what was originally “grasped.” And the difficulty of this research consists precisely in making it self-critical in a positive sense. (Being and Time Stambaugh 32)

Heidegger is pointing here towards the way in which ideas become fossilized as they are passed down from one generation to the next. The idea that something is “buried over” connects with the hardening which Stambaugh translates as “sclerotic” and seems to be a natural or normal occurrence. Ultimately one suspects that concepts may only be functioning properly in the moment of conception when they are still fluid in some way. It may also be that the ideas can only “live” in spoken dialogue in a concrete situation and that as soon as they are recorded they harden or die. Norman Brown

described this process as taking metaphors literally. In Heidegger's terms understanding how this happens and why it is inevitable requires understanding the relationship between time and human existence, how "historicity" is a structural component of existence and the way in which "inauthentic" existence can become "authentic."

While Gadamer obviously admires and appreciates Heidegger's achievements, he does not share his exclusive interest in ontology. His focus is on a broader field of "the human sciences" and he appropriates Heidegger's insights for his own purposes.

Against the background of this existential analysis of Dasein with all its far-reaching consequences for metaphysics, the problems of a hermeneutics of the human sciences suddenly look very different. The present work is devoted to this new aspect of the hermeneutical problem. In reviving the question of being and thus moving beyond all previous metaphysics – and not just its climax in the Cartesianism of modern science and the transcendental philosophy – Heidegger attained a fundamentally new position with regard to the aporias of historicism. The concept of understanding is no longer a methodological concept, as with Droysen. Nor, as in Dilthey's attempt to provide a hermeneutical ground for the human sciences, is the process of understanding an inverse operation that simply traces backward life's tendency toward ideality. Understanding is the original characteristic of the being of human life itself. Starting with Dilthey, Misch had recognized "free distance towards oneself" as the basic structure of human life on which all understanding depended. Heidegger's radical ontological reflection was concerned to clarify this structure of Dasein through a "transcendental analytic of Dasein." He revealed the projective character of all understanding and conceived the act

of understanding itself as the movement of transcendence, of moving beyond the existent.

(Truth 259f)