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On the destructive power of the third

Gadamer and Heidegger's doctrine of intersubjectivity

Abstract Axel Honneth investigates an ambiguity in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer lays out key forms of reciprocal recognition. By means of them, he can subject historical transmission to normative appraisal. Gadamer makes the recognitional interaction relative only to an 'I' and 'Thou', omitting reference to an objective 'Third'. Honneth claims that Gadamer posits this restriction based on the influence of Heidegger's *Mitwelt* concept. Honneth claims, however, that Gadamer's model fails to explain the possibility of a hermeneutic openness to agents who are not in close personal proximity to us. Instead, Honneth argues that the concrete other in I/Thou relations must be supplemented by a standpoint where the concrete and generalized other continually and reciprocally correct one another.

Key words concrete other · Gadamer · generalized other · Heidegger · hermeneutics · intersubjectivity · recognition

The main theme of the now famous *laudatio* that Jürgen Habermas paid to Hans-Georg Gadamer, on the occasion of Gadamer's reception of the Hegel Prize, appears in the superb formulation 'Urbanizing the Heideggerian Province'. According to Habermas, Gadamer was able to urbanize the philosophy of Heidegger decisively inasmuch as he removed its 'obstinate and idiosyncratic character' (*das Dickschädelige-Eigensinnige*) by means of the hermeneutic opening to the other, and thus, through a lessening of distance (*Distanzverringern*), placed it on 'firm ground'.¹ Now this reflection is less free from ambivalence than it may initially seem, since the talk of 'firm ground', with which Habermas

decisively grounds his metaphor, permits the reader to think of a process of reclamation (*Urbarmachung*) rather than that of 'urbanizing' (*Urbanisierung*). Although identical in their initial Latin syllable, the two concepts designate processes that could hardly be more different: while 'urbanization' is understood sociologically as the emergence of civilized forms of life, 'reclamation' since ancient times designates that arduous and time-consuming process through which economically useless land is changed into fruitful 'firm' ground, be it field, meadow, or forest. Applied to the situation here, we would have in the first case a civilizing of the motives of Heidegger's philosophy, transforming them into a cosmopolitan openness to the world; in the second case, by contrast, Gadamer would be making them fruitful on their own terrain, i.e. would be unfolding the productivity of what was originally meant.

It is this suggestive ambivalence, unintended by Habermas, that I would like to use as a key to investigating an ambiguity in Gadamer's idea of a philosophical hermeneutics. Furthermore, as for Habermas, for me too the essential question concerns the way in which Gadamer inherited from central themes of Heidegger in order to make them fruitful for his own project. Thus my reflections will center on that key chapter in the middle part of *Truth and Method* in which Gadamer tries to elucidate the 'essence of hermeneutical experience' by comparing it with various forms of the experience of reciprocal recognition. Here occurs the argument that will be central to the following investigation: the 'highest mode' of the experience of historical tradition must be able to be conceived in conformity to that particular form of intersubjectivity that is characterized as a 'genuine human connection [*Bindung*]', in the mode of 'openness to one another'.² This train of thought provokes further questions, even skepticism, though not by the paralleling of historical consciousness and forms of intersubjective recognition as such. Indeed, Gadamer here provides a methodological turning-point of the greatest utility, for now the attitude towards historical transmission in general first becomes susceptible to a normative analysis, inasmuch as correspondence is sought in interpersonal forms of interaction. It is astonishing, rather, that Gadamer restricts his comparison to forms of recognition that are free from the intervention of a third, and thus that ought always to exhibit 'immediate' forms of encounter between 'I' and 'Thou'. I would like to show not only that there is built into this restriction a specific form of the legacy of Heidegger's concept of *Mitwelt*, which points in the direction of a 'reclamation' rather than an 'urbanization', but also that Gadamer has thus implicitly made a normative pre-decision (*Vorentscheidung*) about the form that the historical consciousness has ideally to take.

I would like to proceed then by outlining in very rough strokes the train of thought in which Gadamer undertakes a hierarchical ordering of various types of historical consciousness, an ordering that should

parallel the forms of reciprocal recognition. In this way it should become clear how central the reference to correspondening intersubjective relations is for Gadamer's justification of the prioritizing of 'hermeneutical consciousness' as opposed to other forms of historical making-present (*Vergegenwärtigung*) (I). From here I can then move to the actual substance of my question, inasmuch as I subject the form of reciprocal recognition, which Gadamer conceives as an intersubjective phenomenon parallel to the hermeneutic attitude, to a more exact analysis. With that I shall show not only to what extent this category of recognition represents only a limited form of intersubjectivity, but also and especially how much its normative character stems from the legacy of *Mitwelt*, which occupies a central position in Heidegger's *Being and Time* (II). Only following this critical analysis can I then attempt, in a final step, to indicate the theoretical consequences that result for the project of philosophical hermeneutics as a whole from the unconsidered assumption of Heidegger's model of intersubjectivity. In this I must be content with tentative conjectures, since a further exposition would exceed the framework of this critical appreciation (III). It should be added in advance that the argumentation developed in the following pages does not, and could not, in any way diminish the value of Gadamer's work. At the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st, there is probably no philosophical position that, in view of its lasting and indeed increasing effective power and central role, would need less defense than that position delineated in *Truth and Method*.

I

After the first chapters of the middle part of his investigation into 'truth and method', where he has already fleshed out the error of a methodological narrowing of what understanding achieves and has laid bare its character in its completeness – found in the circular movement of prejudice-formation and the fusion of horizons – Gadamer turns in the course of his argumentation to the solution of a key problem of his endeavor, one which is introduced with reference to Hegel's philosophy of reflection: should not everyday understanding also be conceived as a process that contains in itself the continuous possibility of rational self-correction, because of its conscious character, and that thus possesses a reflexive rather than an event-like character? It is not difficult to see why this alternative interpretation presents a challenge that Gadamer must overcome before he can pursue his project of a philosophical hermeneutics any further. If it were actually demonstrated that the chance of reflexive control befalls the understanding of any written or oral expression, then understanding would lose that anonymous event-like quality through which human existence as a whole is nevertheless characterized.

Thus Gadamer must now attempt to make a principled rejection of the possibility of a reflexivity of understanding, while he unambiguously confirms the mode of its accomplishment (*Vollzugscharakter*). The way he pursues this goal consists, as is well known, in the demonstration that all understanding possesses the structure of an experience that is accomplished (*sich vollzieht*) 'with us' rather than intentionally 'by us'.

In his analysis, Gadamer proceeds in basically the same way that American pragmatists had done with their revision of the conventional concept of experience. Thus Gadamer first of all criticizes, no differently than John Dewey had, the epistemological narrowing of experience to a mere cognitive function, as found in the idea of a sense datum, in order then, in a second step, to stress instead as its essential moment the fracturing of ordinarily mutually well-adjusted behavioral expectations. While we have only 'experiences' in the case of the sense confirmation of something typically expected, we have 'an' experience only in the negative case of the emergence of something unexpected, thus in the interruption of our mutually adjusted routines.³ Now according to Gadamer, the productivity of this 'authentic' experience consists in the fact that it informs us about the mistake of a categorial universalization with which we had heretofore disclosed the world. In this way such a correcting experience gives rise to an increase in knowledge not only regarding the relevant state of affairs, but also about the convictions we previously held as valid. Thus we can speak of a 'determinate negation' or a 'dialectical experience'. But unlike Hegel, whose *Phenomenology of Spirit* seems to be the force behind these reflections, Gadamer does not see the process of a succession of such experiences ending in a state that guarantees complete, 'absolute' knowledge. Since every new experience of the failure of a past universalization rather increases the knowledge of the fallibility in principle of all our experience, at its conclusion lies not a type of finalized knowledge, but rather only the radical openness for the surprise value of new experience. From here it requires only a single step to arrive at the claim that Gadamer conceives as the first interim finding of his analysis: if the provisional quality of all our convictions and our certainties about our action reveals itself to us in every moment of an actual experience, then we envisage in them nothing other than the fundamental finitude of the way in which our practical life accomplishes itself (*Lebensvollzugs*). Thus authentic experience is, as Gadamer sums it up, the 'experience of one's own historicity'.⁴

This preliminary conclusion already reveals, at any rate, that in reference to human experience we are not dealing with something that is in any way intentionally effected. On the contrary, it would be more appropriate to speak here of an event (*Ereignis*) that effects in us an insight into the finitude of the way in which our life accomplishes itself (*Lebensvollzüge*). If we now refer back to the aim that Gadamer has set for his excursus on the concept of experience, the next step that comes

up is the task of demonstrating as well the experience-character of hermeneutic understanding. For according to what has been said so far, the demonstration of such an inner affinity would show that we do not hope reflexively to attain, either in understanding or in experience, a determinate cognition or insight, but rather the converse: an expansion of our knowledge accomplishes itself (*sich vollzieht*) in us, an expansion that is fundamentally open to renewed correction and thus knows no closure. Interestingly, Gadamer does not carry out this proof, nor the critique of the legacy of the philosophy of reflection, in a direct way by revealing those moments in the hermeneutic consciousness that show its agreement with the accomplishing (*Vollzug*) of an authentic experience. Rather he chooses the roundabout way of an analysis of the communicative relation between 'I' and 'Thou', in order to uncover in the mode of its accomplishing (*Vollzugscharakter*) the form of experience that is also found in the understanding of historical tradition. The reason for such an indirect proceeding results from the thesis that in hermeneutical understanding we are dealing with an object that shares a particular property with the 'Thou' of interaction: it is able, for its part, to relate itself towards the understanding subject. Thus the experiential quality of the hermeneutic consciousness shows itself completely only then, when that consciousness is conceived in correspondence to the event of communication in which we 'have' a singular experience with the 'Thou' of the other.

Gadamer does not doubt that in turning to interaction the quality of the experience to be examined also changes. While earlier we were concerned with those moments in which fragments of the horizon of our certainties for action fail in the face of mere objects, we have before us now the case in which the falsifying instance is itself a person and thus for its part can relate itself back towards the acting subject. But in this way the experience that is to be analyzed changes into a 'moral phenomenon',⁵ in which the type of the relation between the (at least) two persons is of decisive importance. Indeed the use of the expression 'moral' is not further justified here, though it is obviously the circumstance of a general 'being affected' of the interaction partner by the prevailing attitude of the subject that is thus intended. This moral quality of intersubjectivity is what Gadamer subsequently applies as criterion in order to be able to register various forms of the I-Thou relation in a graduated rank-ordering, to which he then correspondingly attempts to rank various modes of historical consciousness. Such a parallelization should show in the end that one specific manner of making history present (*Vergegenwärtigung*) is thus already superior to all others, because it corresponds to the most morally demanding form of intersubjective interaction. Of course Gadamer must not lose sight of the fact that his actual goal nevertheless consists in demonstrating the experience-character of hermeneutic understanding. Thus for him the highest level

of intersubjectivity must possess at the same time the characteristic of making possible a relation between two subjects, within which each can have from its side 'an' experience with the other. From this fact, however, the suspicion already arises that Gadamer allocates the moral quality of an intersubjective relation only on the basis of whether it is able to preserve the surprise-value of any particular Other.

Nor is it more astonishing that Gadamer introduces on the lowest level of his scale a form of interaction to which corresponds, in the field of historical consciousness, the already criticized primitive form of natural science methodology. In the text only a few lines are sufficient to make clear with what form of intersubjective relation it is here concerned: here the 'I' has gained from its past experience categorial schemes of human types, schemes which it rigidly applies in the encounter with a 'Thou' in order to carry out its own intentions successfully.⁶ With such a schematic conception not only does it follow that the other is treated as a mere means to one's own ends (*à la Kant*) and is not 'recognized' as an end in itself; the 'I' rather imagines itself in the role of a completely independent subject, one that is wholly unaffected by the preceding actions of others and thus one that is without any intersubjective past. In the field of historical consciousness there corresponds to such a form of interaction an attitude that finds itself in no way included in the historical occurring of tradition. In this attitude, the past is pushed to such a distance that it appears as an external object about which regularities or typical repetitions can be investigated. In both directions, both with respect to history and also to the interaction partner, such an objectivizing attitude is incapable of having an 'actual' (*wirkliche*) experience. Bound fast by a few fixed properties, the other is deprived of all otherness and all surprise-value to the extent that it can no longer contribute to the unsettling or refutation of presuppositions about it.

As these considerations show, it is not difficult for Gadamer on this first level of his parallel to make the moral and the methodological objections coincide. The reason for this lies in the fact that here a type of implication relation (*Implikationverhältnis*) exists between moral wrongdoing and cognitive error. If the interaction partner is treated as a mere means, the subject cognitively reduces him or her to only those characteristics that form the starting-point for the pursuit of the subject's own goals. Such an identification is much more problematic for Gadamer, however, as soon as he moves to the second level of his scale, and to a form of interaction that no longer presents a simple instrumentalization. Now an intersubjective and reflexive relation is at stake in which each subject knows about the personal being (*Personsein*) of each, but on the other hand each believes that she or he possesses a 'preemptive' (*vorgreifende*) interpretation of the claims of the other. With reference to such a relation Gadamer therefore also claims that

the understanding of the 'Thou' here presents a 'form of I-relatedness':⁷ both subjects reciprocally project into the other needs or claims, about which they assume, with all the requisite openness to the otherness of the 'Thou', that they have a superior, unprejudiced knowledge. The decisive character of such a form of intersubjectivity Gadamer designates at several points with the concept of 'reflecting-oneself-out' (*Herausreflektierens*). With this concept Gadamer characterizes the circumstance that the fiction of a sure knowledge about the other's well-being is here owed to the effort at distancing oneself, through reflection, from immediate reciprocity, and with that as well to the effort at withdrawing oneself from the dominant (*überlegenen*) presence of the 'Thou'. Given this last determination it is no longer difficult to name that which corresponds, in the realm of historical knowledge, to such a form of intersubjectivity. For according to Gadamer, the fundamental error of the historical Enlightenment up to Dilthey's hermeneutics lies in the fact that it pursued, in knowledge about the 'otherness of the past', the ideal of an objective and unprejudiced historical interpretation. What is common both to such a scientific hermeneutics and to solicitous paternalism is the tendency to 'reflect-oneself-out', which ensures in both cases that the prior connection to the other is denied and that accordingly a type of freedom from prejudice is demanded for our interaction (with others and/or the historical object): in the same way in which the subject claims superior knowledge in understanding his or her interaction partner, the historian tries to cope with the otherness of the past in that he or she strives for objective knowledge through the denial of any effective-historical influences.

Again in the case of this second level of intersubjectivity Gadamer is able to establish a direct connection between moral argumentation and epistemological considerations. In Gadamer's eyes, the morally problematic tendency of an 'authoritarian solicitude' results when a subject cognitively abstracts from the connection that it earlier already maintained with her or his interaction partner. In a comparable way the fiction of a hermeneutic objectivism emerges in the moment in which we deny the effect of the past on our own initial situation, so that an unprejudiced, neutral knowledge can be striven for. Gadamer would like to show that in both cases it is an error related to cognition that must lead to the morally questionable assertion of a superior understanding (of the other). It is true that in the one case the partner and in the other history are recognized in their otherness, but their difference is again contested in the very same stroke, since an objective knowledge is claimed about their particularity. The intersubjective attitude that Gadamer now introduces on the third level of his scale is the first to be free from this simultaneously cognitive and moral mistake: here the subject knows itself to be bound beforehand to its counterpart, and in

such a way that it can confidently give itself over to the accomplishment (*Vollzug*) of reciprocal understanding, and open itself up to the 'Thou' as a constant source of refutation of its own presuppositions.

The last formulation already makes it adequately clear in what, in the following exposition, the exact point of Gadamer's analysis must consist. If heretofore we have dealt with two levels of intersubjectivity, the moral deficiencies of both of which were an expression of the impossibility of an experience's actually accomplishing itself, so now the limits to an accomplishment of 'genuine' experience together with the related moral deficits no longer apply at this highest level. Only at this point, when the subject no longer denies its prior dependence on the 'Thou', can communications from the latter give the impetus for an experience, through which accepted opinions and prejudices are revised, as it were, involuntarily (*unwillkürlich*). The concept with which Gadamer attempts to characterize this third form of intersubjectivity is that of 'openness'.⁸ This concept is to express the fact that we are here concerned with a relation between two subjects such that each has recognized his or her dependence on the other, and to such an extent that each can allow the judgment of the respectively other to be valid as an objection against oneself. From here we need only a single step to reach the thesis for the sake of which Gadamer initially undertook this entire excursus concerning the levels of intersubjectivity. For if now by analogy the properties of the final, completed form of interaction are carried over to the attitude that we should take towards historical tradition, then the resulting guiding principle of (historical) knowledge requires that we concede in advance our own dependence on the past to such an extent that the goal of objective knowledge must be abandoned. In the structure of a successful I-Thou relation the patterns of an appropriate historical consciousness mirror themselves not only in that it always requires beforehand the recognition of the influence that the respective historical object (*Gegenüber*) has upon its own point of departure; in addition, the correspondence between both patterns of relationship also makes clear that history and the interaction partner are perceivable in their otherness only if they can become the source of refutation of those presuppositions that beforehand arose under their influence (of the other/historical object). In this way the drawing of correspondences, which Gadamer had carried out on all three levels, ends exactly at the point at which the experience-character of all historical understanding becomes transparent: one can speak of an appropriate attitude toward historical tradition only if the tradition is conceived like an interaction partner, over against which it is necessary to open oneself, trustingly, in understanding. Any intrusion by reflection would therefore be only disruptive, since it would take the ground from the prior bond (between subject and history), on the presupposition of which the necessary trust

can first be advanced. Though the philosophy of reflexion would have it otherwise, the understanding of history is thus an accomplishment that happens (*Vollzugsgeschehen*), not a reflexive act of appropriation.

Now these conclusions depend in essential measure upon the question of how convincing the description is that Gadamer gives to the final level of intersubjective relations. For he there prepares the argument about the destructive character of reflection that then comes into play, by way of the assertion of correspondence, in the field of historical consciousness. Thus it is not unimportant to test once again those separate steps in which Gadamer systematically develops his normative ranking. If he has left deficiencies or inconsistencies; this may affect his characterization of the appropriate relation to history. An appropriate point of departure for this re-examination might involve the question as to which historico-theoretical background has allowed Gadamer to arrive at his very specific conception of intersubjectivity.

II

In a discussion that appeared at least 30 years before *Truth and Method*, Gadamer praised in detail the merits of a book Karl Löwith published in 1928 on the individual in the role of *Mitmenschen*.⁹ The goal of this ground-breaking investigation, originally Löwith's *Habilitationsschrift*, had been to develop further Heidegger's category of the *Mitwelt*, both historico-theoretically and systematically, to the point at which its normative implications would begin to emerge in their essential features. Thus the first part of the text aimed principally at working out the formal structures of intersubjectivity as a condition of all human existence, while the second part labored on a new interpretation of the Kantian concept of respect, in order to make use of it as the key to an intersubjective ethics. Now in Gadamer's review of Löwith's book, the affirmative parts are of no less interest than his rather cautiously raised objections. If the positive aspects make it easy to recognize how strongly the categories of intersubjectivity in *Truth and Method* are indebted to Löwith's development of Heidegger, so the negative parts unmistakably show that in any event the moral-philosophical resolution in Kant's concept of respect should be rejected. Basically we are here concerned with the preliminary justification for the doctrine of intersubjectivity, which in *Truth and Method* is appealed to only in an excursus in order indirectly to verify the way in which historical understanding is accomplished.

The idea that the greatest danger to any real intersubjectivity consists in the destructive power of reflection presents the most obvious type of connection between the two texts. In the review, this theme determines the exposition so strongly that it becomes the decisive

criterion on the basis of which the strengths and weaknesses of Löwith's book are judged. After the brief introduction in which he acknowledges the theoretico-historical contributions of Löwith, which above all are said to lie in his inclusion of Feuerbach in the problematic of intersubjectivity, Gadamer comes quickly to the problem that most preoccupies him: if, according to Löwith, human *Dasein* is always already conceived intersubjectively, and this intersubjectivity must be determined as 'the reciprocal relating of self towards other', then the question arises how the 'authentic' or 'genuine' form of such a 'being with one another' (*Miteinanderseins*) can be conceived. Thus from the many forms of interpersonal relating that one sees everyday, Gadamer wants to set off the particular form that fulfills the criterion of being exemplary in the sense of 'authenticity' (*Eigentlichkeit*). And even if, in Gadamer, the name of Heidegger does not occur a single time (unlike with Löwith, who cites Heidegger throughout), such an 'authentic' form of relation is now determined in the spirit of *Being and Time* as that relation through which 'the one and the other' can be 'for themselves', thus as that relation through which they reciprocally reach 'uniqueness'.¹⁰ Accordingly, in what follows (the laying out of 'inauthentic' forms of intersubjectivity), it is not easy to decide whether Gadamer simply repeats Löwith's text or whether reference is indirectly made to Heidegger. So it is the corrupt form of the I-Thou relation that Gadamer, with Löwith, first emphasizes (after the simple case of reciprocal instrumentalization, the 'using of one another' is only briefly touched upon): in altruism we often have an especially refined form of egoism, since here the concern for the other can occur in 'the consideration of oneself'. If we analyze more closely in what the peculiarity of such a 'paternalistic concern' consists, it quickly becomes apparent, according to Gadamer, that a tendency towards making reflection autonomous is inherent within it. The 'I' already anticipates the response of the 'Thou', since 'in its relation to the other', the 'I' 'in truth already relates itself to the relationship itself'.¹¹ Instead of holding to the presence of the other and making herself dependent on the other's responses, the subject reflects over and beyond the framework of immediate being-with-one-another, in order to have it before himself as such, like an object. The externalizing displacement (*Nachausenverlagerung*) thus made possible allows an as it were objectivizing view, in which the claims of the other can be interpreted without allowing the other to have its say at all.

As easy as it is to recognize in this formulation the second level of interaction from *Truth and Method*, so is it just as easy to find in it the continuation, mediated by Löwith, of a Heideggerian problematic. In the fourth chapter of the first division of *Being and Time*, after the prior intersubjectivity of all human life as it accomplishes itself (*Lebensvollzüge*) had been presented, Heidegger undertook the difficult task of separating out

the various forms of care for the other. In so doing he established as a standard of his analysis, as only becomes clear afterwards, the idea of one particular form of individual freedom: resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) to oneself.¹² On this background, Heidegger now distinguishes two forms of concern with respect to the degree to which they can contribute to the achievement of such freedom: while on the one hand the 'dominating' (*ein-springende*) concern places itself in the position of the other and takes over its burden vicariously, so that it amounts rather to a form of domination, 'authentic' (*vorrausspringende*) concern, on the other hand, is such that it 'helps the other to become transparent to himself *in* his care and *free for* it'.¹³ The somewhat unconventional conceptual choice, which Heidegger applies here as everywhere, probably stems at bottom from the extended sense that the expression 'leap in' (*Einspringen*) possesses in German. If a subject acts with this kind of concern in the name of his or her partner and takes from him or her the possibility of self-determination, then the 'leap ahead' (*Vorrausspringen*), in the second case of concern, means that the subject's support takes place in an anticipative grasp of the *existential* openness of the other and to such an extent makes possible only self-responsible action.¹⁴ There should now be no question that all that Gadamer says with reference to Löwith about 'paternalistic [*bevor-mundende*] concern' is gathered from Heidegger's brief remarks on the first, 'dominating' form of concern. Moreover, the ensuing reflections on the connection between paternalism and 'reflecting-oneself-out', occurring in both the review and in *Truth and Method*, are adapted from Heidegger's distinction inasmuch as for him as well the 'dominating' (*Einspringen*) has the character of a destruction of the intersubjective presence of the other.

But more meaningful than the proof that Gadamer owes his characterization of the second level of intersubjectivity in its essentials to the Heidegger of *Being and Time* is, of course, the question that follows: how do the three authors stand with respect to the final, fulfilled form of intersubjectivity? For we must decide whether Gadamer at this stage still follows in the footsteps of his teacher, and if so, what the resulting consequences are for his conception of understanding as a whole. We have already briefly mentioned that Löwith aspires to a positive solution, one that aims in the direction of an interpretation of the Kantian principle of respect in terms of a theory of intersubjectivity. In a surprising turn, which constitutes even today the originality of his study, he develops out of Heidegger's structure of *Mitsein* a normative principle according to which subjects reciprocally owe one another respect or recognition. Only then (so goes the argument), when all persons reciprocally show respect to one another, can they find themselves in an intersubjective life-world in which each can fulfill itself (*sich verwirklichen*) according to self-chosen ends, without running the danger of paternalism or instrumentalization.¹⁵ Of course for Gadamer such a proposed

solution would appear completely unfounded, since he perceives the highest level of human being-with-one-another (*Miteinander*) in the reciprocal openness that two subjects can show one another, if they both pre-reflexively know their dependence on the other. The deeper reason for this striking difference between Gadamer and Löwith lies, however, in their views on the significance of reflection for the formation of interpersonal relationships. While the former seems always only to recognize in reflexive acts the negative side of distancing or externalization, Löwith sees structured within them the chance for a decentering of the 'I', which presents a necessary presupposition for intersubjective interaction. Löwith believes that without moral self-limitation no peaceable and uncoerced interaction between persons is possible, while for Gadamer the beginnings of objectivization already lie in such an act of reflection, by means of which the prior connectedness between subject and other is irrevocably shattered. With this strict rejection of reflection's achievements – which is accompanied by the rendering impossible of the perspective of an impartial third party – the influence of his teacher Heidegger also asserts itself in Gadamer's ideal of communication.¹⁶

The conclusion of Gadamer's discussion of Löwith's work already exhibits clear confirmation of the thesis just outlined. After the praise that had heretofore predominated, a few lines assert strong objections against the Kantian solution with which Löwith believed he could establish a counter-model to the deficient forms of intersubjectivity. Gadamer perceives in this theoretical solution a type of systematic self-misunderstanding, since Löwith (according to Gadamer) did not get clear on the fact that the principle of respect was not useful for what was at issue, the characterization of a positive I–Thou relation. For to respect someone may indeed only mean, on Kant's conception, to attribute to him or her the universal properties of a human person, and in such a way that the particular individuality of the 'Thou' is not perceived at all. Almost brusquely Gadamer claims that

Kant in particular is not able to support the exact sense of Löwith's question and shifts it unnoticeably in another direction. For respect in Kant's sense is respect before the law, which is to say, however, that the phenomenon of respect contains in itself a universalization of the human and not the tendency to the recognition of the 'Thou' in its particularity and for the sake of its particularity.¹⁷

To carry this line of thought further: the intersubjective attitude of respect seems just another form of that 'reflecting-oneself-out' that already showed itself in 'paternalistic concern' as the cause that destroys genuine human interaction. For here too a subject elevates itself beyond the immediate presence of the other inasmuch as it constitutes, by reflexive efforts, universal characteristics of personal being over against the

other that must divert the subject from any particular, unique characteristics. To this extent, this relation of respect shares with the other deficient forms of intersubjectivity the flaw of moving the interaction partner to such a distance that a prior dependence on her or him can no longer be experienced. From this destruction of all pre-reflexive connection then emerges the incapacity to open oneself up for the other, as genuine human interaction would demand.

But as correct as Gadamer's objection is – that the attitude of respect is unable to do justice to the individual particularity of the other person¹⁸ – no solution follows therefrom for the much more universal question, in what the 'highest' form of intersubjectivity consists. In the second part of his book Löwith obviously has an entirely different problem in mind than Gadamer appears to attribute to him: namely, he is trying to answer the question how subjects are able to protect themselves from the dangers that are present in the tendency to corruption of all interpersonal relationships. Of course Gadamer is right in interpreting Löwith as also seeing the essential cause of such intersubjective danger in the tendency to dissolve oneself from reciprocal connection, by way of reflexive distanciation, and thus in the tendency to make the other into an object of objectivizing ascription. And one of the great achievements of Löwith's study certainly consists in his having worked out the connection between such an objectivation and the phenomenon of a paternalistic concern or sheer instrumentalization. But the point of his recalling the Kantian concept of respect nevertheless lies in bringing a moral 'prohibition' (Gadamer) into play, the universal observance of which would protect subjects mutually and individually from the corrupt forms identified above. Mutually to respect one another, as Löwith might say, means to be able to enter into intersubjective relations without having to fear their potential dangers. For the attitude of respect guarantees that the other still is recognized as an autonomous person even when he or she begins to reveal his or her own individuality in intersubjective occurrences. Here it would lead us too far afield to pursue the problem as to whether there exists an insuperable tension between respect and loving care. Nevertheless we may still note that some feminist authors are currently trying to describe respect in the Kantian sense as a moral attitude that can guarantee a type of moral protection even in close personal relationships.¹⁹

What is more interesting in this context is certainly the question why Gadamer attributed so little import to Löwith's proposed solution, while he nevertheless, like Löwith, took his own point of departure from the danger that constantly threatens interpersonal communication. I see the reason for this in the premise, shared with Heidegger, that beyond simple togetherness (*Zweisamkeit*) there is no reflexively universalized form of intersubjectivity that does not bear the blemish of distortion or

distanciation. What cannot be imagined is thus the possibility that two subjects meet one another in the commonly shared perspective of a generalized other without having already removed the individual particularity of the other. Gadamer probably intends nothing else when he speaks in his review of the general 'reflexion-problematic of *mitweltlichen* relationships':²⁰ as soon as two subjects come upon one another as 'I' and 'Thou', the assumption of the standpoint of an impartial third party always already signifies a reflexive step, through which the previously existing dependence is irrevocably destroyed. It seems as if for Gadamer, too, all the features of '*das Man*', to which Heidegger in *Being and Time* had let the standpoint of a generalized other dwindle, adhere to this 'third party'. And conversely, it is not any more surprising that in *Truth and Method* a form of immediate encounter occurs as the highest level of interpersonal communication, a form that possesses the greatest similarity to Heidegger's 'authentic concern'. Gadamer not only takes over from Heidegger the criticism of all forms of latently authoritarian care (as Löwith does as well); he also still shares with his teacher (unlike Löwith) the normative orientation towards just those forms of interpersonal encounter that are free from any reciprocal reference to generalized norms or values. In this one-sided orientation (and only in this), Gadamer carries on intact a part of that Heideggerian provincialism of which the hostility toward *das Man* in *Being and Time* is the most unmistakable sign.

III

Now these conclusions do not do complete justice to Gadamer's approach, insofar as they are silent about the great significance that he ceded, in his theoretical considerations on intersubjectivity, to the idea of an undistorted accomplishing of experience (*Erfahrungsvollzugs*). In the relevant exposition in *Truth and Method*, the introduction of the intersubjective dimension was indeed aimed only at the goal of laying bare the structure of an authentic experience of the other. And from such a clarification Gadamer further hoped for details about how to think appropriately the process of the making-present (*Vergegenwärtigung*) of history. Measured according to this goal Gadamer certainly was right to have misgivings about theoretical models of intersubjectivity in which the interaction of 'I' and 'Thou' is thought only by reference to commonly shared norms. For the more strongly intersubjective attitudes that are the expression of general principles prevail, the less there remains of the particularity of the other in individual experience. It is indeed the distance that opens up here that has led since to the question, broadly discussed in moral philosophy, of whether a species

of constant tension exists between love and justice, concern and respect.²¹ Thus up until this point, the argumentation that Gadamer develops in his theoretical excursions on intersubjectivity is thoroughly convincing and can be followed step by step. But with his reflections Gadamer wants to defend more than just the thesis that the more we cling solely to the other's individual expressions, in awareness of our dependence, the more richly the other is experienceable in its surprise-value. Instead, such a holding-oneself-open is at the same time to form the highest level of moral attitude in intersubjective interaction. It is with this secondary thesis, which stems from the tacit equating of morality and authentic experience, that Gadamer crosses the threshold into the realm of the dubitable. But there are far-reaching consequences linked to such a conclusion, and above all with respect to the question regarding how we are to make the best sense of the making-present (*Vergegenwärtigung*) of history.

For Gadamer the hermeneutic 'openness' towards another person obviously coincides with the intersubjective attitude that we must take towards him morally: to hear the 'Thou' with all its claims precisely means to treat the interaction partner as morally required. But this equation, which forms the basis of Gadamer's entire structural schema, is already justifiable in a conditioned way only with respect to close personal relations. For even in this case it might be that each partner individually judges its intersubjective behavior from the perspective of a generalized other who would represent socially generalized norms. This naturally does not mean that in such a case only what corresponds to a universalistic principle of justice counts as morally legitimate or obligatory. Instead the above remark makes clear that in normal cases the appropriateness of the partner's concern, thus its 'openness' for one's own claims, is tested in the light of universal moral attitudes. It would be misleading to object here that the reciprocal orientation toward such a perspective must inevitably destroy the kind of bond that Gadamer seems to presuppose as the condition of hermeneutic openness. For the example should make clear that, as a rule, what in general is seen as the morally appropriate results for both partners, from the comparative reference to the perspectives of both the 'concrete' as well as the 'generalized' other, results even in simple togetherness (*Zweisamkeit*). Perhaps we could counter still more succinctly the objections that appear to suggest themselves from Gadamer's position: even in very close personal relations, every conceivable concept of morality, of 'moral' affront or appropriateness, is owed precisely to the reference, however relativized, to an impartial third. Such a perspective does not penetrate into the I-Thou relation from without; rather it forms within the relation one of the two always given points of view in comparison with which common behavior is already constantly reciprocally tested.

But if the close personal relationship already survives, from a moral standpoint, through the inclusion of the generalized other, this perspective becomes only that much clearer in those communication-relations in which largely anonymous subjects encounter one another. With expanding distance between interaction partners, the possibility diminishes of viewing openness towards the claims of the other as the only morally appropriate behavior. Here the presupposition of individually perceptible dependence becomes inapplicable – that presupposition that, according to Gadamer, makes it possible that a subject enters into an understanding comprehension of the expressions with which its partner makes knowable his or her own individuality. On this level of social communication, then, those two perspectives part company that, perhaps, in reference to close personal relationships, can still be thought as one: to encounter someone under such anonymous conditions in a morally appropriate way can no longer mean to meet him or her with an attitude of hermeneutic openness; rather it must first and above all mean to treat him or her according to the universal principle of respect. As far as Gadamer's rank-ordering of levels is concerned, the conclusion follows that it can only be brought to bear on close social relations, and then only with the previously mentioned difficulties. As soon as we leave this confined field and move in the direction of more distant forms of communication, the ideal unity of morality and authentic experience – which still possessed suggestive plausibility in that limited field – breaks down.

Given this result, we would still need to examine how it stands with the correspondence that Gadamer claims for the relation between intersubjective encounter and historical consciousness. Two alternatives stand out, both of which would be difficult for the author of *Truth and Method* to accept. Either the claimed analogy is valid, but under the hardly comprehensible premise that our relation to historical tradition corresponds to the relation that we share with our closest interaction partners; or on the other hand, hermeneutic experience would not be the highest level of historical making-present (*Vergegenwärtigung*), but would have to give way to a form of consciousness in which the perspective of the generalized other would be included, as it must be included in anonymous communication-relations. In the end, that would probably be tantamount to the thesis that history too is appropriately made-present only when the two standpoints of the 'concrete' and the 'generalized' other continually and reciprocally correct one another.

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[Translated by James Swindal and Steven Findley]

Notes

- 1 Jürgen Habermas, 'Urbanizing the Heideggerian Province', in *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, trans. F. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), pp. 189–98.
- 2 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (hereafter TM) (New York: Crossroad, 1986), p. 324.
- 3 TM 317.
- 4 TM 321.
- 5 *ibid.*
- 6 TM 321–2.
- 7 TM 322.
- 8 TM 324.
- 9 Gadamer, 'Ich und Du (K. Löwith)', now in *Gesammelte Werke* (hereafter GW) (Tübingen: Mohr, 1985–) Vol. IV, pp. 234–9; Karl Löwith, *Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen* (Munich: 1928); a later version may also be cited (Darmstadt: 1969).
- 10 Gadamer, 'Ich und Du', GW: IV, 237.
- 11 *ibid.*
- 12 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Staumbaugh (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), p. 115.
- 13 *ibid.*
- 14 *ibid.* For the context of this analysis of care see the excellent interpretation of Stephen Mulhall, *Heidegger and 'Being and Time'* (London: 1996), Ch. 2.
- 15 Löwith, *Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen*, pp. 152ff.
- 16 Thus on my view all attempts to find in Heidegger's determination of the *Mitwelt* the point of departure for a universalistic ethics fail. For an example, see Frederick Olafson, *Heidegger and the Ground of Ethics: A Study of 'Mitsein'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- 17 Gadamer, 'Ich und Du', GW: IV, 239.
- 18 See my 'Liebe und Moral', *Merkur* 597(12) (1998): 519–25.
- 19 See, for example, Barbara Herman, 'Ob es sich lohnen könnte, über Kants Auffassungen von Sexualität und Ehe nachzudenken?' *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 43(6) (1995): 967–88; Marilyn Freedman, *What Are Friends For? Feminist Perspectives on Personal Relationships and Moral Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).
- 20 Gadamer, 'Ich und Du', GW: IV, 239.
- 21 See, for example, Paul Ricoeur, *Liebe und Gerechtigkeit* (Tübingen: JCB Mohr, 1990).