Morten S. Thaning

The Problem of Objectivity in Gadamer's Hermeneutics in Light of McDowell's Empiricism

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Morten S. Thaning
Department of Politics, Management and Philosophy
Copenhagen Business School
Frederiksberg, Denmark

Contents

Chapter 1
Introduction: Reconstructing Philosophical Hermeneutics

Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is developed as a dialogical form of thought. He is a philosophical ventriloquist, one who articulates his thoughts through the prominent figures of the tradition rather than attempting to develop a system of his own. In the decades after the publication of *Truth and Method,* Gadamer also engaged in intense dialogue with prominent, contemporary philosophical figures in order to defend and develop his hermeneutics. The debates with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida are perhaps the most memorable examples of such encounters.[1]

There's no doubt that the dialogical form of Gadamer's thought is in part an expression of his personal propensity. But it also connected with a guiding thought in philosophical hermeneutics, namely that understanding of a complex problem is best achieved by articulating it as a common subject matter through dialogue. The following investigation employs this approach in relation to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. It aims to develop and reassess his philosophy by bringing it into a dialogue with John McDowell's minimal empiricism. In accordance with Gadamer's own dialogue with the philosophical tradition, the intention is not to use McDowell in order to work out a *historical* reconstruction of philosophical hermeneutics. Rather, the goal is to present a hermeneutic conception of objectivity and experience in light of McDowell's empiricism that avoids the potential problems to which Gadamer's critics have pointed. As it will become clear, this reading of philosophical hermeneutics also reflects upon our understanding of McDowell's thinking.

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics belongs in the Continental tradition of phenomenology. He views himself as part of what he terms the phenomenological

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[1] Grondin lists the most important papers from these debates. Cf. Grondin, J. 2000. *Einführung zu Gadamer.* Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

movement, originating in Edmund Husserl's phenomenology.[2] Within this tradition, Martin Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology is undeniably the position that exercises the most important influence on his thinking. McDowell's philosophy, on the other hand, is part of the analytic tradition shaped by such figures as Gottlob Frege, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Donald Davidson and Wilfred Sellars. Underlying these very different influences, we find a common interest in ancient philosophy. Both Gadamer and McDowell published some of their first work on Plato and, for both, an early engagement with Aristotle's practical philosophy played a decisive role in shaping their thought. Moreover, McDowell shares Gadamer's philosophical ventriloquism. They both articulate their thoughts through prominent figures of the tradition, and therefore understanding their original contribution requires study of many classical authors in order to critically evaluate how Gadamer and McDowell apply their thoughts in a modern context.

In McDowell's *Mind and World*, we find a number of references to Gadamer that may initially seem scattered and of limited relevance to the general thrust of the book.[3] However, a central purpose of the following investigation is to show that there is, at a deeper level, a substantial and philosophically fruitful affinity between the two philosophers.[4] By investigating this, it becomes possible to develop and strengthen both approaches, while at the same time, the double perspective makes it possible to articulate a clearer diagnosis of the potential problems in both Gadamer's and McDowell's positions.

More specifically, the aim is to show that McDowell's empiricism can help articulate hermeneutic concepts of objectivity and experience. Conversely, the investigation demonstrates that a hermeneutic account of meaning can support and develop McDowell's recent attempt to avoid an objectifying conception of the content of our experience.

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[2] Cf. Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Die phänomenologische Bewegung [1963]. *Gesammelte Werke 3*, 105–146. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[3] McDowell makes passing references to Gadamer in *Mind and World* concerning the concept of the fusion of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*), the distinction between world (*Welt*) and environment (*Umwelt*), and the notion of tradition (McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 35f., 115ff., 125. Cambridge: Harvard University Press). In 'Gadamer and Davidson on Understanding and Relativism', he defends Gadamer against the charge of relativism and employs the hermeneutic concept of tradition in a critique of Davidson (McDowell, J. 2009. *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 134–151. Cambridge: Harvard University Press). However, he does not explore the relation between his minimal empiricism and philosophical hermeneutics as such. Indeed at the end of the mentioned paper, he writes that he has 'barely scratched the surface of Gadamer's thinking about language' (ibid.: 151).

[4] To my knowledge, the relation between Gadamer and McDowell's philosophy has so far not been examined in detail, although several commentators have pointed to this relation as a fruitful avenue of research (e.g. Wachterhauser, B. 2002. Getting it Right: Relativism, Realism, and Truth. In *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. Robert, J. Dostal, 52–78. New York: Cambridge University Press; Ramberg, B. and Gjesdal, K. 2009. Hermeneutics. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/hermeneutics. Accessed September 5, 2014).

1 The Problem of Objectivity in Philosophical Hermeneutics

The relevance of McDowell's thinking for developing philosophical hermeneutics becomes clear if we take our point of departure both in Gadamer's rejection of the idea of an ultimate foundation for our understanding, and in his alternative, the idea that our understanding is always historically situated. Even though this rejection is crucial to his project and has inspired philosophers in diverse traditions, it has also occluded the fact that what is at stake for philosophical hermeneutics in understanding and interpretation is the experience of truth. That is to say, even though Gadamer takes exception to the ambitions of traditional philosophy in a decisive way, he shares its conviction that any understanding that truly deserves its name is objective, in the minimal sense that it is constrained by its relation to its subject matter (*Sache*). Since the status of objectivity is never sufficiently clarified in Gadamer's thinking, the strengths of his philosophical hermeneutics – the rejection of the conviction that philosophy's task is to provide an ultimate foundation for understanding; and the 'elevation of the historicity of understanding to a hermeneutic principle'[5] – have become precisely its weakness in the dominant reception of this thinking.[6] Gianni Vattimo's constructivist appropriation of hermeneutics, for example, attempts to articulate the presuppositions of Gadamer's approach to objectivity, but thereby ends up in a form of scepticism. In Chap. 2, I will examine Vattimo's interpretation and describe how its untenable nature points to the need for an alternative account of objectivity in philosophical hermeneutics. The discussion of Vattimo also makes clear that such an account is bound to have transcendental implications. Vattimo rejects the idea that philosophical hermeneutics is a form of transcendental philosophy because he thinks this is equivalent to a problematic meta-theory of objectivity. He therefore ignores Gadamer's repeated but also vague remarks concerning a transcendental dimension of hermeneutics. I think that Vattimo is right to warn against a transcendental hermeneutics in the sense of a meta-theory. But since his own account is indistinguishable from scepticism, he indirectly points towards a different conception of a transcendental hermeneutics, one developed from within the order of representation. In contrast to Vattimo, such an approach would give proper consideration to the first-person or experiential perspective. It is from this perspective that we should address the nature of objectivity by attempting to describe how our understanding or interpretation can be normatively guided by its subject matter. Vattimo is aware that if we want to do justice to our experience that our understanding is more or less adequate – and in some cases, even fails completely – this requires that we make sense of the

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[5] Cf. the title of one of the important chapters of Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 268–306. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode,* 270–312. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[6] This is also Figal's diagnosis in *Gegenständlichkeit* (Figal, G. 2006. *Gegenständlichkeit*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)). From this point of departure, Figal develops a conception of hermeneutics that decisively and programmatically leaves behind Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

idea of normative guidance. Nonetheless, his interpretation of hermeneutics as an enacted form of scepticism undermines this very idea.

In Chap. 3, McDowell's interpretation of Sellars' Kantian idea that our intentional life takes place within the so-called space of reasons is presented as a framework within which a hermeneutical concept of objectivity can be reconstructed. What makes McDowell of crucial and positive relevance to Gadamer is that he belongs to a tradition that insists that objectivity, understood in the broad sense as *Sachlichkeit*, must be at the very core of our conception of intentionality, and as such he conceives objectivity precisely in terms of a constraint by the subject matter upon our understanding. McDowell stresses the fundamental *normative* nature of objectivity, conceived as something that our understanding can succeed at or fail to live up to. Since he accounts for the way in which the subject matter of our judgements and interpretations provides normative constraint, he can provide Gadamer's hermeneutics with an adequate notion of objectivity.

Crucial to McDowell's Sellarsian conception is that we must be able to manifest the objectivity of our interpretations and judgements discursively. Only then are we able to critically evaluate whether we are in fact normatively guided by the nature of the subject matter or whether that merely seems to be the case. The idea of normative guidance by the subject matter thus hinges on the possibility of discursive manifestation. This is the motivation behind McDowell's Sellarsian rejection of the so-called Myth of the Given – the idea that we, in our intentional life, could be constrained by non-conceptual content, i.e. a subject matter that, from the subject's point of view, is completely beyond the scope of verbal articulation. Even if this rejection could initially seem foreign to Gadamer's project in *Truth and Method*, a number of his writings, especially on Plato and Aristotle, reveal that his thinking is congenial with the fundamental assumptions of McDowell and the Sellarsian tradition. Of particular importance in this respect is Gadamer's emphasis on the demand of the Platonic Socrates to give an account (*logon didonai*). McDowell points to this ancient paradigm when he speaks of the time-honoured tradition in Western philosophy of conceiving of reason and discourse as intrinsically connected.[7] Through McDowell's use of Sellars' Kantian approach, however, the Socratic paradigm is turned in a transcendental direction. Thus, McDowell claims that the content of our experience as such must be accessible to discursive explication if we are not to undermine our intentional relation to the world. This transcendental version of the Socratic understanding of objectivity gives us, I suggest, the proper background for understanding a programmatic thesis put forward by Gadamer in the last part of *Truth and Method*, namely that language and understanding comprehend everything that could ever be an object.[8] This is not, as Richard Rorty's interpretation suggests, an attempt to dissolve objectivity in favour of a plurality of more or less useful language games.[9] Rather, it expresses the idea that anything that

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[7] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 165. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.

[8] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 405. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G.1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 408. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[9] Rorty, R. 2001. Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache. In *Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache. Hommage an Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 30–49. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

could count as an object for us must also be a subject matter (*Sache*) that we can grasp or fail to grasp adequately, and therefore must be within the reach of discursive articulation. Within this framework, philosophical hermeneutics can be understood as an attempt to renew the Western philosophical tradition, with its emphasis on reason, rather than leaving it behind as a useless and misguided Platonism.[10]

2   Perceptual Experience and the Hermeneutics of Self-Presentation

The idea of interpreting objectivity in terms of a transcendental version of the Socratic paradigm of demanding and giving an account is beset with an important ambiguity. This is because the idea of transcendental philosophy, as Kant paradigmatically formulates it, involves a critical delimitation of our understanding that is incompatible with the ontological aspirations of philosophical hermeneutics. The ontological dimension of hermeneutics is expressed most succinctly in what has become its motto: '*Being that can be understood is language*'.[11] This sentence is perhaps the most widely commented upon in all of Gadamer's work – and as has been noted, when read in isolation it is notoriously ambiguous.[12] The relative clause in the sentence could be understood restrictively, so that it translates thus: 'Being that can be understood is language', rather than 'Being, which can be understood, is language'. In the latter instance, the relative clause is non-defining and can therefore be left out without any fundamental loss of meaning (like when we say: 'The President, who wore his usual black suit, arrived at the meeting at 9 P.M.'). Read in this way, Gadamer's sentence could simply be seen as 'Being is language' without missing anything essential. In the former case, Gadamer does not simply equate being with language. Rather, the relative clause specifies the extension of the subject (like when we say: 'The pill that is lying on the table is the one you should swallow'). Read in this way, his thesis only pertains to being that is understood, and not to being as such.[13] In other words, his claim would not be an ontological thesis that pertained to being but (only) a thesis about our understanding, namely that linguisticality (*Sprachlichkeit*) is a nec-

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[10] Cf. McDowell's critique of Rorty's rejection of the concept of objectivity. McDowell, J. 2000. Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity. In: *Rorty and his Critics*, ed. by R. Brandom, 109–21. Massachusetts: Blackwell Press.

[11] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 470. London and New York: Continuum; 'Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache' (Gadamer, H.-G.1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 478. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[12] Grondin, J. 2001. *Von Heidegger zu Gadamer – Unterwegs zur Hermeneutik*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

[13] Grondin discusses a reading on these lines (ibid.: 103).

essary precondition for human understanding.[14] This reading clarifies how Gadamer's thesis is not a doctrine according to which we and our world are products of words and sentences, and is therefore in line with the fact that Gadamer refers to his thesis as methodological and says that a literal understanding of it would be 'a grotesque absurdity'.[15] Rather, Gadamer wants to highlight that his thesis isolates a certain universal aspect, namely language, and does not claim that everything 'is' or 'is produced by' our language.[16] However, it seems implausible, as the anti-ontological reading claims, that Gadamer refrains from invoking an ontological dimension, and that his thesis implicitly operates with a fundamental distinction between 'being as such' and 'being that is understood'. On the contrary, Gadamer speaks of a 'universal ontological structure'.[17] And there are not only exegetical reasons for being sceptical

[14] Theunissen argues for such an anti-ontological reading. He claims that we should interpret Gadamer's thesis (partly against himself) in line with E. Husserl's phenomenology, which rejects all ontological implications of its analyses (Theunissen, M. 2001. Philosophische Hermeneutik als Phänomenologie der Traditionsaneignung. In *Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache. Hommage an Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 62. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag). Theunissen admits that his interpretation is in conflict with several programmatic passages in the text, but he claims that it is consistent with Gadamer's explicit acknowledgement that his book stands on 'phenomenological ground' (Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Vorwort zur 2. Auflage [1965]. In *Gesammelte Werke 2*, 446. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck); cf. Theunissen, M. 2001. Philosophische Hermeneutik als Phänomenologie der Traditionsaneignung. In *Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache. Hommage an Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 81. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag). Thus, his presupposition for diagnosing a conflict between phenomenology and ontology in Gadamer's work is that Husserlian phenomenology has no ontological implications. As has been shown, however, this view confuses Husserl's early position that he developed primarily in *Logische Untersuchungen*, namely *descriptive phenomenology*, with his later position, *transcendental phenomenology*. Indeed, in one of his later works, *Erste Philosophie II*, Husserl describes his approach in terms that seem incompatible with Theunissen: by stressing that 'the theme of a universal transcendental inquiry also includes the world itself, with all its true being' (quoted from Zahavi, D. 2003. Phenomenology and Metaphysics. In *Metaphysics, Facticity, Interpretation: Phenomenology in the Nordic Countries*, ed. D. Zahavi, S. Heinämaa and H. Ruin, 13. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers).

[15] Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Rhetorik, Hermeneutik, Ideologiekritik. Metakritische Erörterungen zu *Wahrheit und Methode* [1967]. In *Gesammelte Werke 2*, 242. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[16] In a later piece Grondin entertains an ontological interpretation of Gadamer's sentence. He says that we should read Gadamer as going beyond modern nominalism and putting the emphasis on being, not on language (Grondin, J. 2007. Vattimo's Latinization of Hermeneutics: Why Did Gadamer Resist Postmodernism? In *Weakening Philosophy. Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo*, ed. S. Zabala, 211. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press). He ends this article by affirming that Gadamer in fact attempts to develop a hermeneutical ontology (ibid.: 214).

[17] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 470. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 478. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). In the same vicinity he writes: 'To come into language does not mean that a second being is acquired. Rather, what something presents itself as belongs to its own being. Thus everything that is language has a speculative unity: it contains a distinction, between its being and its presentations of itself, but this is a distinction that is really not a distinction at all.' (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 470. London and New York: Continuum); 'Zur-Sprache-kommen heißt nicht, ein zweites Dasein bekommen. Als was sich etwas darstellt, gehört vielmehr zu seinem eigenen Sein. Es handelt sich bei all solchem, das Sprache ist, um eine spekulative Einheit, eine Unterscheidung in sich, zu sein und sich darstellen, eine Unterscheidung, die doch auch gerade keine Unterscheidung sein soll' (Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 479. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)). This is clearly not the language of a cautious 'Kantian'

about ascribing an anti-ontological interpretation to Gadamer. If we follow the anti-ontological reading, our purchase on the idea of objectivity will fall victim to sceptical doubts, similar to those that have haunted Kant's transcendental idealism.[18] If the subject matter's constraint upon our understanding is separated from the question of the nature of the world, independently of our understanding, then it is not clear in what sense we can be said to be normatively guided by the world and its subject matters at all.

One way to explicate what Gadamer could mean when he speaks of an ontological dimension is to focus on his claim that language is the medium through which our primordial belongingness to the world presents itself.[19] From the immediate context, it is clear that Gadamer seeks to point out the world-constituting power of language. According to Gadamer, language is not merely one among a number of possessions or instruments that we, as humans, are able to employ in the world. Rather, the fact that we live in a world at all depends on language and is reflected in it. The world, *as* world, exists for us as for no other living being that lives in the world, and the nature of this world depends upon the acquisition of language.[20] In other words, in order to experience the world in the sense intended by Gadamer, one must be able to relate reflectively to it. This entails that one is able to maintain a free, distanced position towards the phenomena that one encounters, which implies that one is able to reflect on whether these phenomena are what they appear to be. This way of experiencing the world, as a subject matter for reflection, distinguishes humans from all other animals, and entails an openness that is achieved through initiation into language. Our initiation into language grants us a world-

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who seeks to avoid ontological claims about the structure of being, but rather the daring rhetoric of a post-Linguistic Turn Hegelian. In other words, Gadamer's methodological 'idealism of language' does not merely isolate a universal aspect of understanding, but of reality or being.

[18] It should also not be overlooked that Gadamer endorses Hegel's critique of Kant's 'thing *in-itself*' and thereby his rejection of transcendental idealism. Gadamer claims that Hegel's dialectical argument attempts to show that by making such a distinction (separating the appearance from the thing *in-itself*), reason was in fact proving this distinction to be its own, meaning that it by no means comes up against its own limits. Rather, reason has itself set this limit, which means that it has already gone beyond this limit. According to this argument, a limit is a limit only because it always includes some sort of understanding of what is on both sides of it. In other words, it is the dialectic of the limit to exist only by being superseded (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 338. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 348. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)). Gadamer can therefore conclude: 'Thus the quality of being-in-itself that distinguishes the thing-in-itself from its appearance is in-itself only for us' (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 338. London and New York: Continuum); 'So ist auch das Ansichsein, das das Ding an sich im Unterschied zu seiner Erscheinung Charakterisiert, nur für uns an sich' (Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 348. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)). We put ourselves at the mercy of this dialectical argument if we claim, as the anti-ontological interpretation does, that Gadamer's thesis does not make any ontological claims but instead separates being *in-itself* from being as it is understood by us.

[19] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 469. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 478. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[20] *Truth and Method*: 439–441; *Wahrheit und Methode*: 446–447.

view, in the sense that this process opens us up to the phenomena we encounter as facts and subject matters that have an independent being, that can be articulated discursively and that can challenge and constrain us. Other animals are denied this 'open' access to the world. While they live their life in an environment (*Umwelt*), only humans experience the world as a world.

However, if language is where our most primordial relation to the world is disclosed, it seems pertinent to ask how we should understand our sensuous or perceptual relation to world. On this matter, however, Gadamer is remarkably silent. This lack of an account is a problem, because it makes his philosophical hermeneutics susceptible to two unacceptable interpretations. On the one hand, it becomes tempting, from the standpoint of Husserlian phenomenology, to insist that the access to the world disclosed in language presupposes a more basic form of world-disclosure, one that involves meaning – namely, perceptual experience. As for our belongingness to the world, the Husserlian approach insists that language is a founded phenomenon, and as such represents a form of foundationalism. Prior to the verbal modes of disclosedness are allegedly aspects of our belonging to the world that are constituted non-linguistically. We should be clear that such an interpretation would entirely undermine the project to universalise hermeneutics undertaken in the third part of *Truth and Method*. It would reduce philosophical hermeneutics to a handmaiden of Husserlian phenomenology that might claim to articulate a regional ontology of the objects of the human sciences but only by presupposing the basic level of experiential life uncovered by Husserlian phenomenology. And even more important in this context, such an interpretation would be incompatible with the Socratic idea that our understanding is constituted by a constraint of the subject matter which is open to discursive articulation. Instead we would have reinstalled the idea of a foundational level of pure perception (*reine Wahrnehmung*) that we find in Husserl's phenomenology and which Gadamer credits Heidegger and Max Scheler for having decisively overcome.[21] On the other hand, the lack of an account of perceptual experience in philosophical hermeneutics could also seem to lend support to Rorty's interpretation, which simply rejects the questions of world-belongingness and ontology as unfruitful and instead recommends us to stay at the level of competing language games.[22]

The aim of Chap. 4 is to show that this unacceptable exegetic and systematic dilemma can be avoided by understanding the ontological dimension of philosophical hermeneutics through McDowell's account of perceptual experience. He not only adopts Gadamer's view on the world-constituting power of language and the distinction between environment and world but he also develops a conception of perceptual experience that supports and fleshes out this overall picture of our being in the world. In this way, McDowell's account can help philosophical

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[21] Cf. Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Text und Interpretation [1983]. In *Gesammelte Werke 2*, 339. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[22] Rorty, R. 2001. Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache. In *Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache. Hommage an Hans-Georg Gadamer*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

hermeneutics steer clear of an appropriation by both Husserlian foundationalism and Rorty's pragmatic nominalism. We can thereby provide an account of perceptual experience that does not compromise the claim that man's relation to the world is absolutely (*schlechthin*) and fundamentally (*von Grund aus*) verbal.[23] A significant consequence of this account is, I will argue, that the key term in a hermeneutic account of meaning and understanding is not interpretation, but self-presentation (*Selbstdarstellung*). Although self-presentation is ascribed a paradigmatic role in all three parts of *Truth and Method*, it is McDowell's conception of perceptual experience that enables us to see why it can and must play this crucial role. In the end, conceiving understanding within the framework of self-presentation is the ultimate consequence of insisting that all understanding is constrained by its subject matter. The focus on self-presentation separates Gadamer not only from traditional forms of hermeneutics, such as those developed by Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey, but also from its contemporary proponents.[24]

3 Tradition, Practical Wisdom and the Hermeneutic Concept of Meaning

In light of the reconstruction of the notion of objectivity and perceptual experience in philosophical hermeneutics, Chap. 5 reconsiders some of the fundamental objections put forward against Gadamer. An important consequence of my reconstruction is that it now becomes possible to recognise the true point of Gadamer's claim that all understanding is dependent upon tradition. Although there is a problematic tendency in Gadamer's account of understanding and tradition, this tendency is not essential to his argument. The idea of the constitutive tradition-dependence of all understanding need not, as Gadamer's critics have claimed, imply an invocation of a pure immediacy that lies principally beyond the limits of our reflective power. This important point becomes obvious when McDowell's approach is employed to reconstruct a hermeneutical concept of objectivity and experience. In this perspective, the concept of tradition implies the idea that every act of understanding, no matter how conscious it may be of its presuppositions, is nonetheless positively dependent upon structures of meaning that this act cannot make fully transparent. An act of understanding is not completely at the subject's disposition – and for this reason, it has the structure of an event.

According to Gadamer, the notion of tradition also has an ontological dimension. The notion is an heir to the guiding idea of classical Greek thought concerning the

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[23] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 471. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 479. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[24] Figal's position, as developed in *Gegenständlichkeit* and explicitly directed against Gadamer, seeks to rehabilitate interpretation rather than self-presentation as the most fundamental concept of hermeneutics. In *Beyond Interpretation*, Vattimo attempts to go beyond the category of interpretation, but I shall argue below that he fails in this attempt because he cannot account for the objectivity of understanding (cf. Sects. 2, 3, and 4 in Chap. 2 below).

intrinsic belongingness between mind (*Geist*) and world, because according to philosophical hermeneutics it is through our initiation into a verbally mediated tradition that we acquire a world-view at all. Tradition, in this most encompassing sense, can therefore be said to constitute us as intentional subjects. At the same time, however, the emphasis on the 'always already' character of our experiential life has a significant consequence for how we must assess the explanatory ambitions of this concept of tradition. The notion of tradition does not designate an attempt to engage in the project of describing how we are constituted as intentional subjects. Rather, the very idea that we need to engage in such a project in order to understand the nature and fundamental structure of our intentionality is denied. In this way, neither Gadamer nor McDowell attempt to provide 'non-circular' accounts of intentionality. Not only do they avoid to make 'intentional soup out of non-intentional bones',[25] they also reject the obligation to account for the institution of intentional meaning as a 'baseless metaphysical scruple'.[26]

Gadamer's ontological notion of tradition was originally developed as a critique of historicism. By discussing Robert Brandom's problematic appropriation of philosophical hermeneutics, it becomes clear that Gadamer's concept retains its critical potential beyond the particular target of historicism, and that his distinction between a purely methodological and an ontological hermeneutics is still valid. Criticising Brandom's interpretation serves to bring out an important difference between the two Pittsburgh philosophers.[27]

In the light of my reconstruction of philosophical hermeneutics, the Aristotelian concept of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) also gains renewed significance. It allows us to address a severe and seemingly well-motivated objection to philosophical hermeneutics that is directly connected to the concept of experience. Given Gadamer's language-oriented account of experience, the suspicion has been raised that this approach is bound to ignore or underestimate the specificity of our perception. In this connection, it is of crucial importance that the model of practical

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[25] Brandom, R.B. 2001. Modality, Normativity and Intentionality. In *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 63: 587. Brandom attributes this image to F. Dretske.

[26] Cf. McDowell, J. 2009. Gadamer and Davidson on Understanding and Relativism. In *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical essays*, 150f. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[27] Brandom and McDowell are sometimes labelled as 'The Pittsburgh Neo-Hegelians'. Cf. Barber, M.D. 2011. *The Intentional Spectrum and Intersubjectivity: Phenomenology and the Pittsburgh Neo-Hegelians*. Athens (OH): Ohio University Press, for a recent example. In my view, the differences between the two philosophers are quite substantial. In the context of a dialogue with Gadamer, it seems important to point to the fact that McDowell, as opposed to Brandom, regards the first-person perspective to be of irreducible importance. Wanderer suggests that Brandom should reject McDowell's idea that the first-person perspective must play a constitutive role in our understanding of intentionality, but he also implies that the difference between the two Sellars-inspired philosophers concerning the status of the first-person perspective is more important than Brandom has so far been ready to acknowledge (Wanderer, J. 2008. *Robert Brandom*, 192–199. Stocksfield: Acumen). Cf. also Sect. 5 in Chap. 5.

wisdom offers a paradigm of rationality as situation-dependent.[28] McDowell's account of so-called *demonstrative concepts*, which develops the idea behind Aristotle's account of practical wisdom, is especially important in this respect. Without invoking the idea of demonstrative concepts, we cannot accommodate the obvious fact that perceptual experience presents us with fine-grained aspects that outstrip our conceptual capacities, and therefore Gadamer and McDowell's position is simply undermined if we do not take this idea into consideration. In order to emphasise the importance of this idea for philosophical hermeneutics, I go on to discuss Gadamer's approach to the structure of a specific dimension of the perceptual – the so-called visual *logos*. I suggest that the idea of demonstrative concepts can provide a framework within which we can acknowledge the irreducible character of the visual *logos* and still maintain the guiding idea of hermeneutics, namely that language comprehends everything that can ever be an object.

With his reflections on the relation between practical wisdom and rule-following, McDowell offers a further justification of practical wisdom against the suspicion that a situation-dependent form of reason – which entails that the content of a host of, e.g. perceptual, aesthetic and ethical concepts cannot be explicated in abstraction from their actual application – does not deserve the name of 'reason' at all. McDowell demonstrates that this objection rests on a deep-seated but problematic prejudice about the nature of reason. Significantly, McDowell achieves the goal of justifying the rationality of practical wisdom by articulating the idea that all understanding is embedded in and dependent upon tradition, and thus affirms the intrinsic connection between the tradition dependence and the situated nature of understanding.

Finally, Chap. 6 develops Gadamer's hermeneutical concept of meaning by rearticulating the status of the proposition within a hermeneutical conception of meaning and experience. The paradigm of the proposition – the *logos apophantikos* – has, according to Heidegger and Gadamer, dominated the conception of meaning in the Western tradition and has likewise been ascribed a model role in much of the analytic tradition. In *Mind and World*, McDowell conceives the content of experience to be propositional, but he has recently modified his position on this very important point, and has tentatively suggested a different approach.[29] As we shall see, Gadamer does not deny that assertions with a propositional structure can represent the world as it is, but he points out that

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[28] This can also shed light on the discussion of McDowell's position. Thus, several commentators with a phenomenological background are not sufficiently attentive to the importance of the model of practical wisdom for McDowell's argument, e.g. Dreyfus, H.L. 2005. Overcoming the Myth of the Mental. *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, Vol. 79, 2: 47–65; Dreyfus, H.L. 2007. The Return of the Myth of the Mental. *Inquiry* 50: 352–365; Dreyfus, H.L. 2007. Response to McDowell. *Inquiry* 50: 371–377; Christensen, C.B. 2008. *Self and World – From Analytic Philosophy to Phenomenology*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter; cf. Thaning, M. S. 2010. Carleton B. Christensen, Self and World. *Husserl Studies*, Vol. 26: 233–243.

[29] Cf. McDowell, J. 2008. Avoiding the Myth of the Given. In *Experience, Norm and Nature*, ed. J. Lindgaard, 1–14. London: Blackwell Publishing (reprinted in McDowell, J. 2009. *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 256–272. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press).

the meaning of an assertion is not fully present in the explicit content of the assertion. The meaning of the assertion is rather a whole that is not immediately present in the content of the assertion, but which is still grasped when we understand the assertion. He thus places the meaning of the assertion in relation to the hermeneutical whole, where it belongs, and in this way also provides a model for how we should conceive of the status of the assertion in our account of perceptual experience. My interpretation of the hermeneutical conception of meaning will therefore serve to emphasise and develop the important step away from an objectifying approach to experience that McDowell has taken by renouncing the idea that the content of experience is propositional.

Chapter 2
The Lack of Objectivity in Postmodern Hermeneutics

A good way to begin a reconstruction of the notion of objectivity in philosophical hermeneutics is to sketch the ambiguous status of the idea of the transcendental in Gadamer's *Truth and Method*. On the one hand, understanding always takes place within and is therefore constitutively shaped by our historical pre-understanding. This view of understanding as essentially an expression of our being-in-world makes Gadamer highly sceptical of all traditional attempts to describe the necessary and sufficient conditions for experience from a position that does not presuppose the structures of our situated world-view. On the other hand, Gadamer claims that, by its very nature, the idea of understanding as essentially embedded in a world-view goes beyond a certain empirical domain and has a transcendental or universal reach. Gadamer never clarifies this tension in his view of the idea of transcendentality, and therefore there remains a fundamental ambiguity concerning the status of his hermeneutical account of understanding (Sect. 1 below).

Especially in his book *Beyond Interpretation*, Vattimo is keenly aware of the importance of the question of the explanatory status of Gadamer's theory of understanding. Specifically, he warns of the danger that the ambiguity concerning the relation between philosophical hermeneutics and transcendental philosophy leads to an attempt to construct a meta-theory of understanding. By 'meta-theory', he is referring to an attempt to ground Gadamer's conception in a theory that does not, in its explanation of understanding, presuppose the embeddedness of understanding in a historically shaped world-view. Vattimo rightly rejects such foundationalist projects as both exegetically irreconcilable with Gadamer's texts and systematically unsatisfying. As we shall see, however, his own attempt to clarify the status of Gadamer's account of understanding is a hyper-allergic overreaction to foundationalism. His constructivist account of hermeneutics is aporetic and ultimately ends in a form of scepticism. On this account, it is unclear how our practice of understanding is constrained and thus can be recognised as a practice of understanding at all. The discussion of Vattimo's account (Sects. 2, 3, and 4) thus serves to substantiate the claim that frames this investigation, namely

that a philosophical hermeneutics that neglects the task of making sense of the objectivity of understanding is bound to be unsatisfactory. Furthermore, Vattimo's 'postmodern' example can warn us against both the bad alternative of a meta-theoretical – or as McDowell puts it, 'sideways-on' – conception of the transcendental and a historicism that attempts to avoid any invocation of a transcendental dimension at all. Rather, a viable reconstruction of Gadamer's account of understanding must seek to explore the transcendental from within the perspective of the first-person and thus respect that his hermeneutics, though decisively different from Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, remains phenomenological.

1   The Status of Transcendental Philosophy in Gadamer's Hermeneutics

In his reflections on the tradition of phenomenology in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer remarks that although *Being and Time* has not entirely overcome the tradition of transcendental philosophy, this is only because Heidegger had yet to fully consider the consequences of his critique of the metaphysical tradition. According to Gadamer, Heidegger's true predecessor was not Husserl – and by extension, the transcendental tradition reaching back to Kant – but rather Nietzsche, although this was not fully clear to Heidegger himself in the 1920s. However, in the light of Heidegger's further development, it becomes apparent that the implicit intention of *Being and Time* was to develop Nietzsche's critique of Platonism, so that this critique would attain the philosophical level of the tradition it criticised. According to Gadamer, the task Heidegger set himself was not to widen or even to redefine the tradition of transcendental philosophy, but rather to reveal that the transcendental investigative approach (*Fragestellung*) is a consequence of modern subjectivism. In other words, his aim was to decisively overcome transcendental philosophy.

Gadamer's rejection of the transcendental aspirations of Heidegger entails that Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity, which he developed in the early 1920s,[1] and the analytics of *Dasein* from *Being and Time* must be detached from a transcendental framework in order to attain their full philosophical import. Gadamer claims that his philosophical hermeneutics draws on the consequences of this interpretation of Heidegger. He conceives the project of philosophical hermeneutics precisely as an attempt to work out the consequences of detaching Heidegger's analytic of *Dasein* from the transcendental framework of *Being and Time*, and furthermore to draw the appropriate consequences from Heidegger's later critique of metaphysics for the hermeneutical problem as it paradigmatically presents itself in the human sciences.[2]

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[1] Paradigmatically, this hermeneutics is developed in the lecture course from 1923, *Ontologie. Hermeneutik der Faktizität* (Heidegger, M. 1982. *Gesamtausgabe* 63. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann).

[2] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 250. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 264. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

In short, *philosophical hermeneutics seems to be founded on a rejection of transcendental philosophy.*

However, there are several good reasons to question Gadamer's rejection of the tradition of transcendental philosophy. First, one might ask if it is really helpful to construe Heidegger as a Nietzschean philosopher. As we know, Heidegger became steadily more obsessed with Nietzsche in the late 1930s and early 1940s, but this engagement did not result in a positive identification with Nietzsche's project. On the contrary, Heidegger conceives his relation to Nietzsche as an *Auseinandersetzung*,[3] since he judges Nietzsche's thinking to be metaphysical. Although Gadamer admits that Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche is violent, he nonetheless thinks it is profoundly true.[4] He recognises in Heidegger's interpretation the view of Nietzsche as a tempter (*Versucher*), in the sense that on the surface he seems to offer a way out of the metaphysical tradition, but in reality his approach leads to an even deeper involvement in metaphysical thinking.[5]

Given this interpretation of Nietzsche, it seems hazardous to accept Gadamer's choice between a transcendental tradition that remains irrevocably metaphysical and a Nietzschean tradition to which Heidegger and Gadamer allegedly belong. An even stronger reason for doubting that Gadamer's rejection of transcendental philosophy should be taken at face value is found at the end of the very chapter where the denouncement takes place. Here, Gadamer discusses Heidegger's concept of understanding (*Verstehen*), and stresses that, for Heidegger, understanding is no longer a methodological concept and is prior to any differentiation into pragmatic or theoretical interest: 'Understanding is the original characteristic of being of human life itself.'[6] Due to the scope of the concept, it has 'an a priori, neutral validity' (*apriorisch-neutrale Geltung*) and therefore Heidegger, with his analysis, is right to invoke a transcendental aim, in the same sense that Kant's intentions were transcendental.[7] It is not only here that Gadamer refers to Heidegger's 'transcendental aim' in positive terms and claims that the critics who have read a specific (bleak) ideal of existence into Heidegger's analysis are misinterpreting his intentions. He also programmatically claims that his own philosophical hermeneutics shares this transcendental interpretation of our understanding:

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[3] Cf. the note published with the lecture course 'Nietzsches Metaphysik' from 1943, where Heidegger interprets his relation to Nietzsche as an *Auseinandersetzung* (Heidegger, M. 2007. *Nietzsches Metaphysik. Gesamtausgabe* 50, 84. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann).

[4] Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Nietzsche – der Antipode. Das Drama Zarathustras [1984]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 4, 450–51. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[5] Nietzsche's involvement in the tradition of metaphysics is 'deeper', not least because it is unrecognised – he thinks of himself as having decisively overcome metaphysics.

[6] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 250. London and New York: Continuum; 'Verstehen ist der ursprünglichste Seinscharakter des menschlichen Lebens selber' (Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 264. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[7] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 252–253. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 267–268. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

Hence we too are beginning with the *transcendental* significance of Heidegger's problematic. The problem of hermeneutics becomes universal in scope, even attaining a new dimension, through his transcendental interpretation of understanding.[8]

Having witnessed, just a few pages earlier, Gadamer rejecting the notion of transcendental philosophy, even to the extent of attempting to purge *Being and Time* of its residual transcendentality, these remarks seem surprising. Moreover, these last statements cannot be regarded as mere footnotes on Heidegger, with little or no significance for Gadamer's own project. On the contrary, the passage quoted is part of *Truth and Method*'s programmatic transition from the historical account of the tradition to which philosophical hermeneutics belongs to Gadamer's own theory of hermeneutic experience. In fact, Gadamer connects the transcendental dimension of Heidegger's thinking with his own idea of the universal character of hermeneutics. Gadamer is therefore saying that transcendentality is not only an indispensable notion if one wants to get Heidegger right. Rather, the hermeneutic notion of experience and understanding and the universality claim of philosophical hermeneutics are intrinsically tied to a transcendental dimension of understanding.

As Gadamer develops his theory of experience in subsequent chapters, he relies on this transcendental dimension of hermeneutics.[9] The best example of this is his discussion of the famous notion of the fusion of horizons (*Horisontverschmelzung*), which describes how understanding always consists of a horizons of horizons that supposedly exist independently.[10] Sometimes, however, Gadamer describes this process of understanding as demanding a task (*Aufgabe*) that is to be carried out by the interpreter. More specifically, Gadamer claims that in order for an authentic relation to the text to be established and a fusion of horizons to be established, the text's claim to truth must be preserved in the interpretation. Describing the fusion of horizons in these terms entails a severe danger of reducing understanding to a methodological concept – the very view that was characteristic of hermeneutics from Schleiermacher to Dilthey, and which was overcome by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. When the fusion of horizons is solely a task that we may or may not choose to take up, then it seems tempting to conceive of it as just one possible strategy of interpretation. Conversely, we might also choose to ignore this hermeneutical strategy and, for example, act as historicists in an attempt to reconstruct a past horizon of meaning as accurately as possible on its own terms – in which case, there would be no fusion between our horizon and that of the text. Gadamer's theory of understanding and experience then becomes a methodological tool, with specific

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[8] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 254. London and New York: Continuum; 'So knüpfen auch wir zunächst an den *transzendentalen* Sinn der Heideggerschen Fragestellung an. Durch Heideggers transzendentale Interpretation des Verstehens gewinnt das Problem der Hermeneutik einen universalen Umriss, ja den Zuwachs einer neuen Dimension' (Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 268. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[9] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 268–371. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 270–384. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[10] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 305. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 311. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

advantages and disadvantages, which we may use when it is in our interest to focus on agreement and continuity rather than on dissent and discontinuity.

In his discussion with the Italian philosopher of law Emilio Betti, Gadamer emphasised that his philosophical hermeneutics is no such doctrine of method (*Methodenlehre*). On the contrary, although he acknowledges the legitimacy of the modern ideal of scientific method, he regards this ideal as limited in scope. Philosophical hermeneutics investigates what '*always* happens' (*immer* geschieht) and thus has a universal scope.[11] It is in this context that Gadamer relates his project to Kant's transcendental philosophy. Just as Kant attempted to describe the transcendental possibility of the natural sciences, Gadamer attempts to reveal the 'possibility' of the human sciences, which does not imply that he pretends to disclose how they ought to be constituted or practised.[12] In this way, Gadamer makes clear that it is of paramount importance for his project to explicate understanding in more than methodological terms. Philosophical hermeneutics needs a transcendental dimension if it is not to dissolve into a method of interpretation that is in competition with an indefinite number of other methods. Alternatively, Gadamer's thinking would not be a *philosophical* hermeneutics.[13]

In the years after *Truth and Method*, it becomes increasingly important for Gadamer to stress the transcendental aspect of his theory of understanding. In the foreword to the second edition from 1965, he warns against a methodological interpretation of his *oeuvre*, emphasising that his deepest ambition is not to describe what we do, nor what we should do, but rather what happens to us when we understand over and above our will and our actions.[14] Furthermore, in the years after *Truth and Method*, Gadamer claims that the practice of understanding in the human sciences is not the sole object of inquiry for him in *Truth and Method* but rather functions as a model that is meant to shed light on the fundamental, transcendental conditions of understanding as such. This point is made in Gadamer's response to Habermas, where he emphasises that the focus of his

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[11] Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Hermeneutik und Historismus [1965]. In *Gesammelte Werke 2*, 394. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[12] Ibid.

[13] A consequence of this is that the fusion of horizons should not be conceived as merely a methodological concept describing a certain kind of understanding; it happens every time we understand something that is initially alien to us. Cf. Sect. 5 in Chap. 5. If the fusion of horizons is not established when agreement or consensus is secured on the subject matter, then this also has consequences for how we should understand the role of otherness or alterity in Gadamer's theory of understanding. The concern that Gadamer's hermeneutics disregards or plays down the role of otherness in experience must be reconsidered when it is acknowledged that his theory of understanding is not oriented toward agreement. In this sense, a transcendental interpretation of the fusion of horizons could lead to an account of hermeneutic experience that is more open to irreducible forms of otherness.

[14] 'Mein eigentlicher Anspruch aber war und ist ein philosophischer: Nicht, was wir tun, was wir tun sollten, sondern was über unser Wollen und Tun hinaus mit uns geschieht, steht in Frage' (Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Vorwort zur 2. Auflage [1965]. In *Gesammelte Werke 2*, 438. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

hermeneutics on understanding in the humanities does not rule out that it contains a universal dimension that can be developed and defended.[15]

Despite Gadamer's growing emphasis on the importance of a transcendental interpretation of understanding, there remains a profound ambiguity concerning the transcendental dimension in his thinking. This has to do with the role of *historicity*. Gadamer describes the transcendental dimension of understanding in terms of an *event*, as something that happens to us, rather than an a priori *structure* to be uncovered by transcendental reflection (Kant) or via transcendental reduction (Husserl). This reminds us that philosophical hermeneutics cannot compromise its Heideggerian heritage, namely the insight into the fundamental *historicity* of understanding. The first chapter of Gadamer's hermeneutic theory of experience is accordingly entitled 'The elevation of the historicity of understanding to the status of a hermeneutic principle'.[16] There is an apparent tension expressed in this title – immediately after Gadamer has sworn allegiance to Heidegger's transcendental notion of understanding, he programmatically declares that it is the *historicity* of understanding that is to be elevated to a hermeneutical principle; historicity is the fundamental principle (*archē*) of understanding. How is it possible to claim both that understanding is transcendental and that the historicity of understanding has the status of a hermeneutical principle?

2   Vattimo's Rejection of a Transcendental Hermeneutics

It is precisely this question from which Vattimo's work in hermeneutics departs. Since the late 1980s, he has described hermeneutics as a new *koinē* or common idiom of the Western intellectual world.[17] According to Vattimo, the true problem of this *koinē* is 'that of radically coming to terms with the historicity and finitude of pre-understanding, with Heidegger's *Geworfenheit*'.[18] Vattimo departs from the assumption that the majority of those who practise hermeneutics today share the conviction that every experience of truth has an interpretive character. The problem, however, is the philosophical status

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[15] Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Rhetorik, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik. Metakritische Erörterungen zu *Wahrheit und Methode* [1967]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 232. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[16] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 268. London and New York: Continuum. 'Erhebung der Geschichtlichkeit des Verstehens zum hermeneutischen Prinzip'. In Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 270. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[17] Cf. Vattimo, G. 1989. Heideggers Nihilismus: Nietzsche als Interpret Heideggers. In *Kunst und Technik. Gedächtnisschrift zum 100. Geburtstag von Martin Heidegger*, ed. W. Biemel and F.W. v. Herrmann, 141ff. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann. *Koinē* refers to *hē koinē dialektikos*, the common dialect. This was the popular form of Greek used in post-classical antiquity.

[18] Vattimo, G. 1997. *Beyond Interpretation – The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy*, 6. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press. This passage is quoted from *Beyond Interpretation*, first published in 1994. Vattimo writes in his foreword to this book that the reflections presented here are 'in lieu of a larger work' (ibid.: ix). *Beyond Interpretation*, with the telling subtitle *The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy*, thus presents Vattimo's most definitive and systematic articulation of hermeneutics so far and it is therefore this work to which I shall primarily refer in the following discussion.

that this conviction has achieved. For Vattimo, what reduces hermeneutics to a generic philosophy of culture is the wholly metaphysical claim – albeit often implicit and unrecognised – that it comprises a true description of the permanent, interpretative structure of human existence. Instead, the contradictory character of this claim must be taken seriously, and a reflection on the historicity of hermeneutics must be developed on this basis.[19] According to Vattimo, hermeneutics cannot merely regard itself as a *theory* about the historicity of truth; it must also regard *itself* as a radical historical truth. As a guiding thread for his interpretation of hermeneutics, Vattimo points to Nietzsche's aphorism 22 from *Beyond Good and Evil*. Here, Nietzsche questions the natural sciences' faith that the laws are written into the Great Book of Nature – i.e. that these laws refer to objective and intrinsic features of the world. According to Nietzsche, the laws employed by the natural sciences are not texts but interpretations, and he contrasts this with his own concept of the will to power. In conclusion, he remarks: 'Granted, this is only an interpretation too – and you will be eager enough to make this objection? – well then, so much the better'.[20] If this insight is taken seriously, it means that hermeneutics must recognise and reflect upon the self-referential character of its conviction that there are no facts, only interpretations. In Vattimo's words, this means that hermeneutics must acknowledge its *nihilistic vocation*:

> If hermeneutics, as the philosophical theory of the interpretative character of every experience of truth, is lucid about itself as no more than an interpretation, will it not find itself inevitably caught up in the nihilistic logic of Nietzsche's hermeneutics? This "logic" may be encapsulated in the statement that there can be no recognition of the essentially interpretative character of the experience of the true without the death of God and without the fabling of the world or, which amounts to the same thing, of Being. In short, it seems impossible to prove the truth of hermeneutics other than by presenting it as the response to a history of Being interpreted as the occurrence of nihilism.[21]

What, specifically, does it mean to heed a nihilist vocation or to respond to 'a history of Being interpreted as the occurrence of nihilism'? Vattimo rightly stresses that Nietzsche's 'death of God' is not a thesis about an objective fact, but must rather be understood as an announcement that is meant to call forth a certain fundamental change of attitude.[22] Nietzsche's announcement declares that God has become superfluous due to 'the transformations wrought in our individual and social existence by our very belief in him'.[23] According to Vattimo's Nietzsche, the

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[19] Ibid.: 6.

[20] Nietzsche, F. 2002. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 23. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 'Gesetzt, dass auch dies nur Interpretation ist – und ihr werdet eifrig genug sein, dies einzuwenden? – nun, um so besser –' (Nietzsche, F. 1999. *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden* 5, 37. Bonn: de Gruyter).

[21] Vattimo, G. 1997. *Beyond Interpretation – The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy*, 8. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press.

[22] Cf. Nietzsche's aphorism, 'The madman' (*Der Tolle Mensch*). Nietzsche, F. 2001. *The Gay Science*, 119f. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Nietzsche, F. 1999. *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden* 3, 480ff. Bonn: de Gruyter.

[23] Vattimo, G. 1997. *Beyond Interpretation – The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy*, 7. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press.

God of metaphysics was necessary in order to organise and justify an ordered social existence that was continually exposed to the threats of nature and internal drives. By helping to provide and legitimise a certain social hierarchy and sanction a specific morality, Christianity helped to counter these threats. However, this stabilising work is, relatively speaking, complete – today, humanity lives in a formal and ordered social world in which science and technology are available to rid us of the terror that dominated primitive man and made God a necessary assumption in the first place. In such a context, 'God seems too extreme, barbaric and excessive a hypothesis'.[24] Moreover, the insight into the superfluousness of God is itself a product of the *will to truth* that was an integral part of the Christian tradition: it is the faithful that have killed God. The self-undermining logic of nihilism finally questions the notion of truth itself, and we have thus reached the state of Nietzsche's announcement that there are no facts, only interpretations. In this way, Vattimo attempts to show that the central idea of hermeneutic *koinē* is itself a product of the unfolding of nihilism, as Nietzsche diagnosed it. *This is what Vattimo means when he speaks of the nihilistic vocation of hermeneutics.*

As we can see, Vattimo not only uses Nietzschean terminology, such as the death of God, nihilism and how the 'the True World became a fable'. He also, synonymously, speaks of the history of Being (*Seinsgeschichte*). This is due to an interesting and provocative aspect of Vattimo's thinking, namely that he interprets Heidegger's later idea of the history of Being through Nietzsche. This is made paradigmatically clear in his article 'Heideggers Nihilismus: Nietzsche als Interpret Heideggers'.[25] The background for Vattimo's claim is the fact that a whole generation of Continental philosophers have been obsessed with the relation between Nietzsche and Heidegger in their discussion of the end or overcoming of metaphysics.[26] As Vattimo points out, however, that these investigations of the affinities between Heidegger and Nietzsche do not accept Heidegger's critical interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy, which he develops in *Nietzsche I–II* – namely, that it is the end of metaphysics.[27] Vattimo agrees with this rejection of Heidegger's critique of Nietzsche, and instead seeks to emphasise an agenda common to both philosophers. According to Vattimo, Nietzsche's diagnosis of the inherently nihilist logic of the history of metaphysics has a deep affinity with Heidegger's idea of the history of Being. Vattimo emphasises that Nietzsche's genealogy of metaphysics is not an attempt to uncover the 'lies of metaphysics' in order to provide them with a more

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Vattimo, G. 1989. Heideggers Nihilismus: Nietzsche als Interpret Heideggers. In *Kunst und Technik. Gedächtnisschrift zum 100. Geburtstag von Martin Heidegger*, ed. W. Biemel and F.W. v. Herrmann, 141ff. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.

[26] This discussion was spurred by the publication of Heidegger's collection of texts *Holzwege* in 1950, which includes 'Nietzsches Wort: Gott ist Tot', the publication of Heidegger's lectures on Nietzsche (*Nietzsche I–II*) in 1961, and Colli's and Montinari's publication of Nietzsche's collected writings in 1964, which was the first to be based upon proper philological editing principles.

[27] Vattimo, G. 1989. Heideggers Nihilismus: Nietzsche als Interpret Heideggers. In *Kunst und Technik. Gedächtnisschrift zum 100. Geburtstag von Martin Heidegger*, ed. W. Biemel and F.W. v. Herrmann, 141. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.

stable authentic foundation, but rather an exercise of what Nietzsche calls 'celebrations of memory'. Even if the tradition of metaphysics is a history of illusions or 'mistakes' (*Irrtümer*), this process is at the same time a history of Being.[28] The ambiguity of this Nietzschean attitude toward our metaphysical tradition is crucial for Vattimo's position: On the one hand, the fundamental concepts of metaphysics are illusions, in the sense that they do not explicate eternal truths. On the other hand, the aim is not to overcome these notions but to recognise that they represent the only foundation available to us, and the only framework that allows our experience of the world to retain any sense.[29] The Nietzschean stance recommended by Vattimo is therefore an awareness that I am dreaming, but that I must go on dreaming in order not to perish (*zu Grunde gehen*).[30] In short, our attitude toward concepts like being and truth must be to regard them as 'necessary illusions' (*notwendige Irrtümer*). According to Vattimo, there is an analogy between Niezsche's genealogy of morality and Heidegger's concept of *Seinsgeschichte*. On Vattimo's reading, Heidegger's concept of *Being* is not to be conceived as a foundation that can be justified, but rather as an event.[31] The concept of event is not to be understood as presenting a new key concept – event – as a candidate for a (post-metaphysical) ontology. Rather, for Vattimo, event signifies the unfolding of Western metaphysics itself. In Nietzschean terms, this is the history of nihilism; while in Heideggerian terms, it signifies the forgetting of Being

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[28] Ibid.: 148. The notion of *Gedächtnisfeste* (celebrations of memory) is used by Nietzsche in *Menschliches Allzumenschliches* (Nietzsche, F. 1999. *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden* 2, 186. Bonn: de Gruyter). On Vattimo's reading, the notion expresses the idea of a historical form of philosophy that aims at a reappropriation of history, conceived as a series of metaphysical 'mistakes' or illusions. We are, according to Nietzsche, not liberated from these mistakes or illusions by refuting them. Nietzsche characterises the attitude towards the history of metaphysics that is beyond rejection and refusal as a 'good temper'. (Vattimo, G. 1992. *Nietzsche – eine Einführung*, 53f. Stuttgart: Verlag J.B. Metzler). It is precisely such good-tempered thinking that Vattimo seeks to develop.

[29] Vattimo, G. 1989. Heideggers Nihilismus: Nietzsche als Interpret Heideggers. In *Kunst und Technik. Gedächtnisschrift zum 100. Geburtstag von Martin Heidegger*, ed. W. Biemel and F.W. v. Herrmann, 148f. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.

[30] Here, Vattimo quotes from Nietzsche, F. 2001. *The Gay Science*, 63f. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (Nietzsche, F. 1999. *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden* 3,416f. Bonn: de Gruyter). I will return to this aphorism in detail in Sect. 4 below.

[31] Being, as it is conceived in the tradition of metaphysics, is, according to Nietzsche, an 'illusion', but this illusion permeates all of the diverse expressions of our past culture and is thus the only form of being at all. We only exist in so far as we are related to this tradition of illusions. Heidegger's concept of post-metaphysical thinking as *An-denken*, i.e. as the continued remembrance and reappropriation of metaphysics, is in Vattimo's reading quite similar to Nietzsche's idea of philosophy as consisting of genealogical celebrations of memory (*Gedächtnisfeste*). Both conceive of 'being' not as a permanent structure or foundation, but as an 'event'. Heidegger does not recognise this affinity because he shies away from accepting and articulating the nihilistic implication of his conception of being (Vattimo, G. 1989. Heideggers Nihilismus: Nietzsche als Interpret Heideggers. In *Kunst und Technik. Gedächtnisschrift zum 100. Geburtstag von Martin Heidegger*, ed. W. Biemel and F.W. v. Herrmann, 149. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann). It is thus a provocative consequence of Vattimo's Nietzschean interpretation of Heidegger that the process of ever-expanding *Seinsvergessenheit* is a tendency to be embraced (ibid., 152).

(*Seinsvergessenheit*). Forgetting Being, or taking a nihilist stance to the world, is for Vattimo therefore a matter of seeing Being as the result of a history in which it has been so 'weakened'[32] that this concept no longer purports to signify permanent structures or features of an independent reality, but rather reveals itself as what it has always been: a product of our interpretation.

The circularity of Vattimo's account is apparent when he claims that his interpretation of Being as the result of an interpretation is itself grounded in the history of metaphysics as a precondition for its existence. Following his Nietzschean approach, Vattimo insists that Heidegger's philosophy is nihilist, and that only by returning to a metaphysical frame of mind that understands being as '*archē*, foundation, stable structure' can Heidegger avoid this vocation.[33]

In order to avoid metaphysics – understood by Vattimo as the universally valid description of transcendental conditions or structures of experience – hermeneutics can therefore not offer any conclusive evidence for its world-view, but only 'present itself as the most persuasive philosophical interpretation of a situation or "epoch" of the course of events of which it feels itself to be the outcome'.[34] When driven into the process of attempting to justify itself self-reflectively, hermeneutics can only point to what is, by its own principles, a myth – paradigmatically, Nietzsche's fable about how the True World became a fable.[35] Even so, relating the history of nihilism as the provenance of hermeneutics – or in Vattimo's appropriation of Heideggerian terms, overcoming metaphysics by recollecting the oblivion of Being – allegedly has an important transformative potential: it can dislodge an 'unconscious, implicit, unintentional metaphysical presupposition' that continues to determine the popularised versions of hermeneutics.[36] The presupposition to be

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[32] Vattimo sometimes presents his post-metaphysical philosophy as 'weak thought' (*pensiero debole*).

[33] Ibid. This is where Vattimo's distinction between a Heideggerian Left and a Heideggerian Right becomes relevant. As Vattimo emphasises, this distinction is not to be understood in a political sense but rather in analogy with the well-established distinction between a Hegelian Left and a Hegelian Right: Vattimo continues: 'Right, in the case of Heidegger, denotes an interpretation of his overcoming of metaphysics as an effort, in spite of everything, somehow to prepare "a return of Being", perhaps in the form of an apophasic, negative, mystical ontology; left denotes the reading that I propose of the history of Being as the story of a "long goodbye", of an interminable weakening of Being' (Vattimo, G. 1997. *Beyond Interpretation – The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy*, 13. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press). Vattimo argues that by opting for a leftist interpretation of Heidegger we are able to 'remain faithful, even beyond the letter of his texts, to the ontological difference' (ibid.). If we do not accept that Being is only the history of how it has gradually revealed itself as a product of the play of interpretations we inevitably objectify it as a being.

[34] Ibid.: 10f.

[35] Cf. Nietzsche's *Götzen-Dämmerung* (Nietzsche, F. 2005. The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, 171. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Nietzsche, F. 1999. *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden* 6, 80f. Bonn: de Gruyter).

[36] Vattimo, G. 1997. *Beyond Interpretation – The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy*, 12. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press.

dislodged is the idea that all understanding is of an interpretative nature, and that this in itself amounts to a true description of reality.

Vattimo admits that his position can be understood as a form of historicism. Consequently, he claims that its value lies in establishing 'a coherent picture we can share while we wait for others to propose a more plausible alternative'.[37] A consequence of this *Nietzschean historicism* is the rejection of any transcendental dimension in hermeneutics. Indeed, Vattimo claims that by recognising the nihilistic implications of hermeneutics, we may free it from the oscillation between relativism and transcendentalist metaphysics.[38] Hermeneutics as a theory amounts to nothing more or less than a correct interpretation of a message from tradition.[39]

It is this Nietzschean historicism that shapes Vattimo's reading of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. It is thus telling that Vattimo reads the third part of *Truth and Method* as claiming that the purpose of hermeneutics is to grasp 'being's vocation of giving itself, and increasingly so, as the truth of human language, and not as thing or datum, *Gegenständigkeit*.[40] According to Vattimo, hermeneutics is a true 'ontology of actuality', i.e. a philosophy of the late-modern world in which the world increasingly dissolves into a play of interpretations.[41] As is apparent, recognising that hermeneutics is an ontology of actuality amounts to the same as recognising the nihilistic vocation of hermeneutics.

Finally, it should be mentioned that Vattimo's constructivist hermeneutics rejects an intrinsic connection between phenomenology and hermeneutics. Not only does he seem to distinguish between a phenomenological and an ontological tradition, but also criticises the foundation of hermeneutics based on a phenomenological analysis of aesthetic and historical experience.[42] Vattimo claims that such use of phenomenological analysis inevitably entails the self-contradictory pretence to provide an 'objective' description of reality.[43] An example of Vattimo's phenomenological abstinence is his analysis of truth. In the article 'The Truth of Hermeneutics', which he adds as an appendix to *Beyond Interpretation*, Vattimo attempts to counter the suspicion that his version of hermeneutics amounts to relativism. Using Heideggerian terminology, he distinguishes between truth as correspondence and truth as opening or unconcealment (*Unverborgenheit*). Truth in the sense of opening is understood as a 'historico-cultural horizon [...] or paradigm'.[44] According to Vattimo's interpretation of this doctrine, one may speak of propositions that correspond to facts, but only as situated 'within a horizon,

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[37] Ibid.: 11.

[38] Ibid.: 28.

[39] Ibid.: 105.

[40] Ibid.: 305.

[41] Ibid. In *Beyond Interpretation*, Vattimo states that 'Ontology of Actuality' is the definitive title of a larger work that is yet to be published.

[42] Ibid.: 12.

[43] Ibid.: 103f.

[44] Ibid.: 80.

an opening [. . .] that institutes every possible criterion of conformity of the prop-
osition'.[45] On the one hand, Vattimo therefore admits that the aim is not to
overcome the model of correspondence, but to rearticulate and 'distort' it.[46] On
the other hand, he takes Heidegger's reflections on truth to be a 'critique of the
notion of truth as correspondence'.[47] And he seeks to correct the 'misapprehension'
that Heidegger's objection to the notion of truth as correspondence is based on its
inadequacy as a faithful description of the experience of truth.[48] From Vattimo's
perspective, such a strategy would be self-contradictory, because it would posit
Heidegger's alternative notion of truth as the more adequate and thereby confirm
the notion of truth as correspondence that was allegedly the initial target of
Heidegger's critique. Vattimo seems to think that this paradox prohibits him from
engaging with the task of redefining adequacy or correspondence. Instead, he ends
up with a notion of truth understood as the outcome of the articulation of meta-
physics as the reduction of Being to presence. This includes its culmination in
techno-science, and the consequent dissolution of the very idea of reality in the
'multiplicity of interpretations'.[49] He does not, however, indicate how this notion of
truth is to be reconciled with some sort of correspondence model that can articulate
how we experience truth in our everyday life. Vattimo does not, in other words,
attempt to reconcile this position with the view he also propounds, namely that the
model of correspondence must be maintained as a secondary moment within the
experience of truth.[50]

3   A Critique of Vattimo's Conception of Hermeneutics

It is tempting to begin a critical engagement with Vattimo's conception of herme-
neutics by enquiring what he means when he speaks of hermeneutics as 'the most
persuasive interpretation of a situation or "epoch"', '[a] *valid* form of argument', 'a
coherent picture' or 'a *correct* interpretation of a message from tradition'.[51] All of
these phrases imply some kind of norms or standards according to which an
interpretation is 'correct', an argument is 'valid' and so on. However, on the basis
of the thesis that there are no facts, only interpretations, the status and existence of
such normativity are entirely questionable. According to Vattimo, we are to accept
that hermeneutics rests on a Nietzschean diagnosis of modernity which, while itself
not being an objectively true description, is still the most persuasive interpretation.

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[45] Ibid.: 81.

[46] Ibid.: 88.

[47] Ibid.: 75.

[48] Ibid.: 76.

[49] Ibid.: 91.

[50] Ibid.: 88.

[51] Ibid.: 10–11, 105; emphasis added.

In order to accept this thesis, it seems imperative to specify what 'persuasive' amounts to, given that it does not mean something like 'the interpretation that corresponds to objective reality'. Conversely, as long as we don't know if and in what sense there are *norms*, nor whether our understanding and interpretation must answer to them, it is hard to make sense of what it would mean to 'assume responsibility for an interpretation'.[52] To take responsibility for something is to expose oneself to the risk of failure. By what norms can one be deemed to fail to defend Nietzsche's nihilistic interpretation of modernity, when the interpretation itself suspends the status of these norms? In short, if the normativity of interpretation is not clarified, how can Vattimo's proposal bring any sort of self-transparency to hermeneutics?

Vattimo might object that he does accept a more standard concept of truth as correspondence, although he regards it as derivative, and he is therefore able to give some meaning to words like 'correct' or 'persuasive'. As we have seen, however, Vattimo never clarifies the relation between the notion of truth as correspondence and a more prior notion of truth as opening. When a state of affairs is judged to be true, this must entail that it is thought to have *some* kind of independent status in relation to the one who judges. This independent status, however, seems completely undermined if the opening in which every true state of affairs is situated is itself the product of an interpretation. It is clear that Vattimo is aware that this Nietzschean dissolution of reality and Being in the play of interpretations may make us wonder whether it is another, more sophisticated name for constructivism and scepticism. It is for this reason that he offers a hermeneutic notion of truth, in order to calm such a suspicion. In the end, however, this notion of truth is spelled out in terms identical to the idea that provoked the initial suspicion.

Vattimo might also refuse to acknowledge the objections since they are motivated by 'theoretical' concerns. Hermeneutics, he might claim, and its critique of metaphysics consist of 'a thinking primarily motivated by ethical considerations'.[53] Vattimo finds the roots of this distinction between an ethical and a theoretical 'grounding' of hermeneutics in Heidegger's critique of metaphysics. When Heidegger posed the question of the meaning of Being anew, he did not attempt to articulate 'a more adequate representation of Being than that inherited from metaphysics' nor was his concept of truth as unconcealment meant as a more proper notion of truth.[54] Rather Heidegger's critique is, on Vattimo's reading, an ethical protest against the *violence of metaphysics*. Vattimo describes this 'violence' in the following way:

> [I]t is as a thinking of the incontrovertible presence of Being – as the ultimate foundation before which one can only fall silent and, perhaps, feel admiration – that metaphysics is a violent thinking: the foundation, if it is given in incontrovertible evidence that no longer admits further enquiry, is like an authority that keeps things quiet and takes control without explanation.[55]

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[52] Ibid.: 10–11.

[53] Ibid.: 30.

[54] Ibid.: 29.

[55] Ibid.: 31.

If hermeneutics, understood as an ethical comportment, has its roots in Heidegger then it is, according to Vattimo, most fully articulated in Gadamer's idea of ethics as a dialogue with tradition. This idea of ethics is a critical renewal of the Hegelian notion of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*), understood as the integration of single experiences into 'a continuity of individual existence'. Again, this individual existence is only sustainable by virtue of belonging to a historical and linguistic community that lives in language. And finally, the community is not something closed and isolated in a point of space or a moment of history, but moves with us, like the horizon: 'In this way, the integration of individual experiences in the horizons that sustain them is never concluded. Interpretive mediation has no limits, any more than the traducibility and commensurability of cultures'.[56] For Vattimo, the decisive point is that such a hermeneutic 'ethics of continuity', given its Hegelian heritage, walks a razor's edge. It is on the verge of conceiving authentic existence, or the good life, as the 'perfect integration into a totality that, as such, would be the good'.[57] In this version, the ethics of continuity would consist of an ethical revival of the ideal of classicist aesthetics, i.e. propounding 'a harmonious conciliation' of singular experiences in a whole.[58] In order to avoid such a metaphysical pitfall and instead insist on ethical life as an *open* continuity, Vattimo finds it necessary to invoke the idea of the nihilistic vocation of hermeneutics. According to this idea, our tradition is, in the most general terms, the history of unfolding nihilism. This means that the hermeneutic ethics of continuity consists of 'the call to place experiences within a network of connections that seem to us to be oriented toward the dissolution of Being, and thereby toward the reduction of the authority of presence'.[59] If *this* is the ethical demand of hermeneutics, then all appeals to an ideal of perfect integration are bound to be undermined, since such an appeal would exempt precisely the ideal in question from the history of the weakening of Being. In other words, instead of conceiving of tradition as a pre-given entity with which we must achieve a harmonious integration, we should instead view the meaning of tradition as something that we must put ourselves at risk to determine. In this way, Vattimo claims that the idea of nihilism can effect a reorientation of an ethically grounded hermeneutics, away from the Hegelian idea of conciliation with the totality.

However, I do not think that such a reply would work either. It is obvious that Vattimo does not wish to claim that hermeneutics, even if not 'theoretically' grounded, is an ethics completely devoid of rationality or understanding. Such a move would equal hermeneutics to a relativistic or 'decisionistic' existentialism, in which how we should live or should act would be a matter of arbitrary choice. Vattimo's description of the violence of metaphysical thinking reveals that he does

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[56] Ibid.: 38.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.: 39.

not conceive of his hermeneutical ethics in this way. Since 'violence' is a matter of propounding a supposed foundation that 'no longer admits enquiry' and 'silences all questions', the ethical reaction to metaphysics propounded by Vattimo must be one that is compatible with some form of questioning and reasoning.[60] In order to perform an enquiry, to pose meaningful questions, there must be some kind of normativity, some constraint at work that ensures that we can imbue this process with more meaning than just 'unrestrained conjecturing'. In a revealing passage about Gadamer, Vattimo admits this. He says that the hermeneutic striving toward the 'true word' presupposes something that 'cannot be reduced to a subjective act and which possesses a normative relevance of its own'.[61] Vattimo thinks he can help himself to this normative constraint by invoking the 'event of tradition (Überlieferungsgeschehen) in which the comprehension must participate in order to find its validity'.[62] However, as we have seen, the Gadamerian concept of tradition must, according to Vattimo, be radicalised and thus understood in terms of the history of unfolding nihilism. And this makes it a product of our interpretation. By reinterpreting the concept of tradition in this way, Vattimo undermines his ability to appeal to it as a resource of normative resistance. In this sense, he appears to be doing exactly what he says one cannot coherently do, namely reducing that which cannot be reduced to our subjective act of striving after the true word to the product of such a subjective act.

A third response that Vattimo might attempt is to admit that the idea that all understanding amounts only to an interpretation is 'grounded' in a circular way, in a narrative of nihilism that itself is an interpretation, but also add that such circularity is unavoidable in our account of hermeneutics. After all, Gadamer follows Heidegger in describing the essential fore-structure of understanding (Vorstruktur des Verstehens) as circular. The image of the hermeneutic circle shows how our understanding is always directed by our expectations and prejudices and that it

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[60] Cf. the definition of violence given by Vattimo in an interview with Zabala: 'VATTIMO: What we do lose in the dissolution of metaphysics is the idea that *in nature* there are a right and a wrong. Put it this way: given the dissolution of metaphysics, it seems to me that the only supreme principle to be propounded both in ethics and law is the *reduction of violence*. According to Heidegger, metaphysics must be refused, not only because it produces a totalitarian and overly rationalist social structure, but also because the idea of *Grund*, of ultimate foundation, is an authoritarian idea. The notion of primeval evidence, of a *Eureka*!, of a moment in which I have reached bedrock, of a foundation at which no questions can or need be asked – that state, in which questions are lacking, is not the end product of violence, but its origin. ZABALA: Would that be your definition of violence? VATTIMO: I would say so. *Philosophically, violence can only be defined as the silencing of questions* [...]' (Vattimo, G. and Zabala, S. 2002. 'Weak thought' and the Reduction of Violence: A Dialogue with Gianni Vattimo. *Common Knowledge* 8: 455; last emphasis added).

[61] Vattimo, G. 2002. Gadamer and the Problem of Ontology. In *Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Malpas, J., Arnswald, U. v. and Kertscher, J., 304. London: The MIT Press.

[62] Ibid. In this sentence, Vattimo is paraphrasing a passage from Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 291. London and New York: Continuum; *Wahrheit und Methode* (Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 295. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

makes no sense to speak of objectivity as something detached from the process of explicating, revising and confirming prejudices.[63] Understanding is always already operating, and therefore cannot be grounded on more fundamental conditions. A pertinent question that the following investigation will attempt to investigate is how to articulate the Gadamerian concept of objectivity (*Sachlichkeit*) immanent to tradition, in such a way that it allows for sufficient normative constraint. This is necessary if the hermeneutic circle is to be a productive condition of understanding, as Gadamer, following Heidegger, claims. However, it seems to me that Vattimo's proposal is not a productive circle, but rather a self-refuting one. A productive circle requires that an interpreting or understanding 'subjectivity' interacts with some sort of 'objective' resistance or constraint. There is no doubt that Gadamer intends the idea of a hermeneutic circle to be compatible with an intelligible appeal to such objective constraints on our interpretations. He makes this clear in a passage found in the context of his discussion of the hermeneutic circle: 'Working out appropriate projections, anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed "by the things" themselves, is the constant task of understanding.'[64] I have argued that Vattimo's Nietzschean historicism differs in this regard. Since the constraint imposed by the subject-matter objective is ultimately reduced to the product of our interpretation, the circular structure seems to collapse.

4 Vattimo's Response: The Paradox of Interpretation

In a certain sense, the objections against Vattimo put forward above are so obvious that one may wonder why he has devoted so little space to discussing them. A charitable reading of his position would be that, for some reason, he finds them to be beside the point. Since these objections focus on self-contradiction, Vattimo probably sees in them a deficiency similar to the formal arguments against scepticism, which he thinks do not persuade anyone to change their view and do not allow for any further advance in thinking.[65] In fact, Gadamer also finds arguments that focus on self-contradiction of 'specious philosophical legitimacy' and products of a 'lazy reason'.[66] Furthermore, it is clear that in developing the idea of a nihilist vocation,

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[63] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 270. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 272. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[64] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 270. London and New York: Continuum; 'Die Ausarbeitung der rechten, sachangemessenen Entwürfe, die als Entwürfe Vorwegnahmen sind, die sich "an den Sachen" erst bestätigen soll, ist die ständige Aufgabe des Verstehens' (Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 272. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[65] Vattimo, G. 1997. *Beyond Interpretation – The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy*, 77. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press.

[66] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 340f. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 350f. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). Heidegger also remarks that such arguments express 'the harmlessness of formal-dialectical surprise attacks (*Überrumpelungsversuche*)' (Heidegger, M. 1993. *Sein und Zeit*, 229. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag).

the central motivation for Vattimo is not only to avoid a transcendental meta-theory but also to steer clear of relativism and scepticism. In order to fully comprehend Vattimo's position and thereby use it as point of departure for the attempt to re-articulate the transcendental dimension of Gadamer's hermeneutics, it is therefore necessary to understand the motivation behind this conviction. The best way to do this is, I think, by way of Nietzsche's aphorism 'The consciousness of appearance' from *The Gay Science*, which Vattimo cites in connection with describing his version of hermeneutics[67]:

> *The Consciousness of Appearance* – How wonderful and new and yet how fearful and ironic my new insight makes me feel towards all of existence! I have discovered for myself that the ancient humanity and animality, indeed the whole prehistory and past of all sentient being, continues within me to fabulate, to love, to hate, and to infer – I suddenly awoke in the middle of this dream, but only to the consciousness that I am dreaming and that I must go on dreaming lest I perish – as the sleepwalker has to go on dreaming in order to avoid falling down. What is "appearance" to me now! Certainly not the opposite of some essence, – what could I say about any essence except name the predicates of its appearance! Certainly not a dead mask that one could put on an unknown x and probably also take off x! To me, appearance is the active and living itself, which goes so far in its self-mockery that it makes me feel that here there is appearance and a will-o'-the-wisp and a dance of spirits and nothing else – that among all these dreamers, even I, the "knower", am dancing my dance; that the one who comes to know is a means of prolonging the earthly dance and thus is one of the masters of ceremony of existence, and that the sublime consistency and interrelatedness of all knowledge may be and will be the highest means to sustain the universality of dreaming, the mutual comprehension of all dreamers, and thereby also the duration of the dream.[68]

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[67] Vattimo never engages in a full-fledged discussion of this aphorism, and the following represents my own attempt to employ the aphorism in order to articulate the strongest possible version of Vattimo's interpretation of philosophical hermeneutics.

[68] Nietzsche, F. 2001. *The Gay Science*, 63f. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 'Das Bewusstsein vom Scheine. – Wie wundervoll und neu und zugleich wie schauerlich und ironisch fühle ich mich mit meiner Erkenntnis zum gesamten Dasein gestellt! Ich habe für mich entdeckt, dass die alte Mensch- und Thierheit, ja die gesamte Urzeit und Vergangenheit alles empfindenden Seins in mir fortdichtet, fortliebt, forthasst, fortschliesst, – ich bin plötzlich mitten in diesem Träume erwacht, aber nur zum Bewusstsein, dass ich eben träume und das ich eben weiterträumen muss, um nicht zu Grunde zu gehen: wie der Nachtwandler weiterträumen muss, um nicht hinabzustürzen. Was ist mir jetzt "Schein"! Wahrlich nicht der Gegensatz irgendeines Wesens, – was weiß ich von irgend welchem Wesen auszusagen, als eben nur die Prädicate eines Scheines! Wahrlich nicht eine todte Maske, die man einem unbekannten X aufsetzen und auch wohl abnehmen könnte! Schein ist für mich das Wirkende und Lebende selber, das soweit in seiner Selbstverspottung geht, mich fühlen zu lassen, dass hier Schein und Irrlicht und Geistertanz und nichts Mehr ist, – dass unter allen diesen Träumenden auch ich, der "Erkennende", meinen Tanz tanze, dass der Erkennende ein Mittel ist, den irdischen Tanz in die Länge zu ziehen und insofern zu den Festordnern des Daseins gehört, und dass die erhabene Consequenz und Verbundenheit aller Erkenntnisse vielleicht das höchste Mittel ist und sein wird, die Allgemeinheit der Träumerei und die Allverständlichkeit aller dieser Träumenden unter einander und eben damit die Dauer des Traumes aufrecht zu erhalten' (Nietzsche, F. 1999. *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden* 3, 416f. Bonn: de Gruyter).

Nietzsche's reflection on knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) as dream (*Traum*), appearance (*Schein*) and dance of the spirits (*Geistertanz*) is quoted by Vattimo because he views it as a description of the status of the practice of interpretation. The aphorism begins by describing the ambivalent mood of a knower in the light of an all-encompassing insight. This insight is portrayed as waking from a dream in which the knower discovers his continuity with and dependency on all past sentient beings concerning crucial aspects of his self, his creativity, affectivity and rationality. The first and most obvious twist happens at this point: the knower awakes to discover that it was only a dream, but this 'awakening' amounts only to an awareness that he is dreaming and that he must continue dreaming in order not to perish.

At this point, what we have is a concentrated version of Vattimo's position, spelled out in terms of a consciousness of appearance. According to Vattimo, hermeneutics, understood as the consciousness of interpretation, is the result of a history of nihilism or forgetting of Being. This corresponds to the insight into the continuity and dependency on history expressed in Nietzsche's text. Vattimo also follows the first twist of Nietzsche's text, since he holds that the insight that hermeneutics is the result of a history of nihilism is itself only an interpretation, albeit one that it is necessary to hold on to. In the metaphors of the aphorism, Vattimo interprets hermeneutics as a dream that one must continue dreaming, a necessary illusion.

In the last part of Nietzsche's aphorism a further, second twist is added. This part begins as a kind of commentary on the prior text, with the knower asking what conclusion we should draw concerning the status of the notion of appearance from the 'dream-discovery'. His radical answer is that appearance is not merely, as the first part of the aphorism seems to suggest, an *object* that the knower comes to realise is a necessary precondition for its existence. Rather, in the second part of the aphorism, appearance is revealed as the *subject* of the 'dream-discovery': appearance is the living and the effective (*Wirkende*) that itself effectuates the discovery that it is appearance and nothing more. The knower conversely now becomes an object, a means (*Mittel*) for prolonging and preserving appearance. Knowledge and appearance, therefore, are not opposites, as in the idea of a 'mere appearance' contrasted with an essence. Rather, the virtues of knowledge – consistency (*Consequenz*), universality (*Allgemeinheit*) and the possibility it creates for mutual comprehension between all dreamers (*Allverständlichkeit aller dieser Träumenden*) – ensure the continuation of the dream and the keeping up of appearances. Similarly, the knower is no longer somebody who reveals the status of appearance, but one who is forced to accept the necessity of appearance in order to secure their own existence. Describing appearance as a 'dance of spirits', Nietzsche says that the knower is an instrument for prolonging the dance, and is thus the master of ceremonies (*Festordner*) of existence. If we now re-read the beginning of the aphorism, we are able to see the first statement in a new light. Now, the ambiguity concerning the knower's knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) refers not only to a special mood arising from the specific insight described in the dream discovery; rather, the knower feels 'wonderful, new and yet gruesome and ironic' because of his insight

into the status of his knowledge (*meiner Erkenntnis*) as such. In this way, the aphorism's title refers to the dialectical experience of the consciousness of appearance that it describes.[69] It begins as a *consciousness of appearance* in the sense of *genitivus objectivus*, a consciousness of what appearance is, but the dialectical experience is that it is equally a *consciousness of appearance* in the sense of *genitivus subjectivus*, a consciousness effectuated by appearance.

The strategy in my first critique of Vattimo, above, was to point out how his account makes use of certain terms that presuppose objectivity and normativity, such as 'correct interpretation', 'normative relevance' and 'violence of metaphysics', and then argue that the very same account undermines the possibility of such objective and normative constraint. According to Vattimo, both the standard of correctness of our interpretations and the tradition that should supply us with normative restrictions are themselves products of our interpretation. The dialectical movement described so ingeniously in Nietzsche's aphorism serves to illustrate why Vattimo might think that this critique misses its mark. In his afterword to *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Giorgio Colli points to 'Das Bewusstsein vom Scheine' as paradigmatic of the unique spirit of this book. This spirit lets Nietzsche 'soften glaring antinomies (*Krasse Antinomien*) which in other works are left standing, in a contemplative, transparent perspective (*Sicht*)'.[70] I think Vattimo's thinking seeks to evoke exactly this spirit concerning the paradox he finds at the heart of contemporary hermeneutics.

In Nietzsche's aphorism, the initial discovery of the knower is that he is not a self-standing and autonomous self, but that, in crucial ways, he can only be understood as the expression of a past in its most radical sense. The revelation that this is a dream might seem to question this insight, as if the knower could dismiss it as a mere dream-like appearance. The last part of the aphorism rejects this possibility and reaffirms the initial discovery in a paradoxical way. The insight that the dependency on the past is 'only an appearance' does not undermine it, because even this insight is effectuated by appearance. Even as *appearance*, the past makes use of the knower as a means by which to preserve its continuity with him, and does so precisely by exploiting his capacities for reason. Similarly, Vattimo's version of hermeneutics cannot be content with an insight into the interpretive character of all forms of understanding. It must reflect on this insight so that it does not become a dogmatic fact or a meta-theory. According to Vattimo, such a consequent reflection on the status of hermeneutics shows that it is grounded in the history of the unfolding of nihilism. This grounding of hermeneutics equals the reaffirmation of the dependency on the past in Nietzsche's aphorism. Conceiving the history of hermeneutics as a consequence of Western nihilism is, in Vattimo's case, a

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[69] For the idea of experience as the dialectic reversal (*Umkehr*) of consciousness, cf. Hegel, G.W.F. 1999. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. In: *Hauptwerke in sechs Bänden* 2, 53–62. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag.

[70] Nietzsche, F. 1999. *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden* 3:659f. Bonn: De Gruyter.

paradoxical grounding because it remains an interpretation. In this sense, it is like the dream in Nietzsche's aphorism. However, exactly like Nietzsche, Vattimo seems to insist that this does not mean it can be dismissed as a 'mere' interpretation. Interpretations are themselves productive and use the interpreter as an instrument with which to express themselves. The interpretation of Western history as the history of nihilism is, of course, the paradigmatic example of this – we should not shy away from understanding hermeneutics as grounded in this history merely because it *is* an interpretation. Thus, the fear of an alleged lack of objectivity in interpretations is caused by a reluctance to embrace the paradoxical thought articulated by Nietzsche: that we can be constrained and guided in a real (*lebendig*) and effective (*wirkende*) manner by something that is only the product of our activity.

I think Colli's claim that Nietzsche softens the glaring antinomy of his thinking by making it *transparent* in the aphorism discussed is questionable. In the end, Vattimo follows Nietzsche in paradoxically asserting that our practice of understanding is constituted in such a way that the act of reflecting upon it renders unintelligible how it can be a practice of understanding at all. In other words, it does not make the antinomy *transparent*, but rather embraces it. The paradox of interpretation or appearance stands unresolved, but it is assumed – and this is the 'softening' – that our practice of understanding always copes with this paradox. Interpretive practice simply shows itself to be paradoxically possible; as interpreters, we perform the incredible feat of Baron von Munchhausen: pulling ourselves up by our own hair.[71] Given this willingness to embrace the paradoxical, Vattimo would reject the assumption behind the critique I have developed above – namely, that he needs to reconcile the understanding of reality as the product of interpretations with the need for objective, normative constraint. Vattimo's reflections on the concept of truth suggest that he follows Nietzsche's aphorism in simply assuming that our capacity to reason meaningfully in an intersubjectively accessible manner is possible, despite the fact that he provides an account which shows that this practice of reasoning has the status of an appearance or illusion.

From Vattimo's perspective, we can continue to make sense of the business of interpreting and mutual understanding, even though the normative constraint that makes it intelligible to describe this practice as one of 'interpretation' and 'understanding' has been undermined. In fact, his idea that 'the reduction of violence is the only supreme principle in ethics'[72] presupposes this. This is because the ethical act was implicitly defined as the process of questioning and enquiry in the face of metaphysics' violent tendency to end this process by assuming foundational truths. The effect of embracing Vattimo's version of hermeneutics (which amounts to the

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[71] I owe this image to Raffnsøe, who has employed it in relation to the question of the nature of the coherence (*samhørighed*) of our social practices. Cf. Raffnsøe, S. 2002. *Sameksistens uden common sense*, Bind I, 17. København: Akademisk Forlag.

[72] Cf. Vattimo, G. and Zabala, S. 2002. 'Weak thought' and the Reduction of Violence. A Dialogue with Gianni Vattimo. *Common Knowledge* 8: 455.

same thing as accepting the dialectical movement performed in 'Der Bewusstsein vom Scheine') is therefore, supposedly, not a position of scepticism concerning our understanding and interpretation. Rather, the act of comprehending that our practices of understanding are constituted paradoxically also encourages a change in our *ethical disposition*.[73] When we grasp the status of interpretation, we are spurred to change our disposition toward our own interpretations and those of others. Practically, we are impelled to become advocates of the weakness of thought by questioning tendencies to do 'violence'. Philosophically, we are prompted to support this ethical comportment through *genealogical narratives* that contribute to the weakening of our truths and values because they illustrate the long and complex historical development and evolution of these truths and values.[74] The paradigmatic example of such Nietzschean celebrations of memory (*Gedächnisfeste*) is, of course, the recounting of how 'the consciousness of interpretation' itself and its related values are also products of the Western history of nihilism. It is an integral part of such a narrative that it is aware of its own status as a fable or interpretation. In this sense, *hermeneutic philosophy consciously enacts the paradoxical nature of understanding* that is often forgotten in other practices of understanding, either because it is taken for granted, as e.g. in the theories of interpretation that Vattimo criticises, or because it is implicitly or explicitly denied in order to violently propound dogmatic truths. In this sense, we might speak of Vattimo's conception of hermeneutics as an *enacted scepticism*.

The German verb *austragen* means both to *carry out* and to *discharge*. As we have seen, in light of the paradox presented by his own narrative, Vattimo is not interested in accounting for the normativity and objectivity of understanding – and, if the analogy with Nietzsche is correct, he would probably deny that he was committed to give such an account. As has become clear, this must be seen as a consequence of his Nietzschean conviction that the paradoxical constitution of understanding cannot be dissolved through philosophical reflection, but only *ausgetragen* in the (philosophical) practice of understanding.[75]

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[73] According to Vattimo, the purpose of philosophy is to be edifying. Ibid: 452. He also emphasises this point in his interpretation of Nietzsche. Vattimo, G. 1992. *Nietzsche – eine Einführung*, 55. Stuttgart: Verlag J.B. Metzler.

[74] The paradigmatic example of such a genealogy is of course Nietzsche's *Zur Genealogie der Moral*. Foucault's work refines this interpretative strategy and applies it to a host of subjects. Cf. Raffnsøe, S. 2007. *Nietzsches Genealogie der Moral. Ein einführender Kommentar*. München: Beck Verlag.

[75] Figal uses the verb *austragen*, which can mean both 'to carry out' and 'to discharge', to describe Nietzsche's way of dealing with the antinomy developed in the aphorism between knowledge and illusion (*Irrtum*). He emphasises how philosophy is the conscious process of carrying out or discharging this antinomy. Figal, G. 1999. *Nietzsche – eine philosophische Einführung*, 155. Stuttgart: Reclam; Figal quotes from *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* (Nietzsche, F. 1999. *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden* 3: 471. Bonn: De Gruyter).

5   Guiding Threads for the Reconstruction of Philosophical Hermeneutics

It should be apparent that even this subtler version of Vattimo's conception of hermeneutics is desperately paradoxical. The intention is not, therefore, to rehabilitate his approach, but rather to indicate why it is insufficient to refute his conception by pointing to inconsistencies. Instead, in order to fully recognise the unsatisfactory character of Vattimo's conception, an alternative interpretation of philosophical hermeneutics is called for, one which does not seek to address the status of Gadamer's account of understanding in this paradoxical manner. If such an alternative reconstruction of philosophical hermeneutics is to be successful, it should begin by eliciting some guiding threads from the discussion of Vattimo.

First, Vattimo is right in insisting that hermeneutic philosophy contains an ontological dimension, although his own attempt to articulate a hermeneutic ontology fails, since in this 'narrative', Being is but a product of interpretation. The question, then, is how to account for the ontological dimension of hermeneutics in a more robust way without ending up in the position that Vattimo criticises: a metaphysical standpoint that pretends to describe the structures of Being as it is in-itself, completely detached from the horizon of subjectivity. Grondin expresses the difference between Vattimo's and Gadamer's version of hermeneutics in the following way: whereas Vattimo embraces Nietzsche's idea that 'There are no facts, only interpretations', Gadamer 'would rather reformulate Nietzsche's famous dictum by saying, "There are only facts *through* interpretation(s)"'.[76] In order to explain the difference here, Grondin points to the fact that Gadamer's model of interpretation is based on the role of interpretation in the performing arts. He writes:

> In a dance, a play, an opera, and all the performing arts (which we call in French l'arts d'interprétation), to interpret is not to bestow a meaning on something from an outside perspective; it is to play out the work itself, since the work requires such a playing out: music that isn't played isn't music. The very important point here is that interpretation is not a meaning-giving activity that is applied to an otherwise meaningless reality; instead it is the enacting of a meaning that strives to be expressed. The rendering can be more or less adequate, but it is obviously bound by what has to be transmitted.[77]

Grondin claims that this conception of meaning ultimately questions the '*nominalism* of modernity', where meaning is something projected or injected into a meaningless world 'out there'. I think Grondin's remark about Gadamer's notion of meaning, in a very general way, points out the direction that I take in my reconstruction of the ontological dimension of philosophical hermeneutics.

Secondly, Vattimo's persistent attempt to question how the dimension of transcendentality and historicity can be brought together in an intelligible way is

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[76] Grondin, J. 2007. Vattimo's Latinization of Hermeneutics: Why Did Gadamer Resist Postmodernism? In: *Weakening Philosophy. Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo*, ed. S. Zabala, 207. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

[77] Ibid.: 208.

inspiring. Vattimo warns us against conceiving the transcendental dimension of hermeneutics as a kind of meta-theory. I believe he is right that the attempt to clarify the universality claim of hermeneutics is faced with a difficult *aporia* when, in the words of Gadamer, it claims that it is the *historicity of understanding* that has a transcendental status. How is one to explicate this thesis without resorting to a meta-theoretical form of transcendental reflection? Gadamer is aware of this problem, which perhaps explains why he does not speak of a transcendental *project*, but only of a transcendental *dimension* or a universal *aspect* in relation to hermeneutics. By avoiding conceiving of philosophical hermeneutics as a meta-theory, Gadamer remains true to what he perceives to be Heidegger's philosophical heritage – namely that his thinking led to the whole idea of grounding (*Begründungsgedanke*) undergoing a reversal.[78] I will attempt to develop this idea by bringing philosophical hermeneutics into dialogue with McDowell's thinking. McDowell, like Gadamer, is ambiguous in his relation to the idea of transcendental philosophy. For McDowell, the question is this: is transcendental philosophy necessarily exercised from a standpoint external to the processes whose world-disclosing ability is to be vindicated? McDowell aptly terms this a *sideways on* version of transcendental philosophy.[79] McDowell follows Rorty's critical description of this approach in terms of a 'demand [. . .] for some transcendental standpoint outside our present set of representations from which we can inspect the relations between those representations and their object'.[80] However, contrary to Rorty (and Vattimo), McDowell claims that transcendental philosophy can also be 'acceptably executed from within the conceptual order'. McDowell's *minimal empiricism* is a version of *this* kind of transcendental project, and I will attempt to show how it is relevant for a reconstruction of philosophical hermeneutics.

Thirdly, we can learn from Vattimo that an account of hermeneutics that completely avoids explicating our experiential life from a first-person perspective is profoundly flawed. Vattimo's reflection concerning the status of the hermeneutical interpretation of understanding relies upon a Nietzschean and Heideggerian history of philosophy. Vattimo never seriously attempts to compare the highly vague and abstract concepts of meaning, reality or truth presupposed in this reflection with the structure of meaning or truth *as it is experienced*. Ultimately, the question is therefore whether hermeneutics should cut the bonds to the phenomenological tradition from which it emerged.

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[78] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 247. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 261. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). This remark is found in the same chapter interpreted above (Sect. 1), where Gadamer oscillates between a Nietzschean rejection of all forms of transcendental philosophy and an adamant support of Heidegger's transcendental concept of understanding.

[79] McDowell, J. 2009. Sellars, Kant and intentionality. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 17f. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.

[80] Rorty, R. 1980. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 293. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd; cf. McDowell, J. 2009. Sellars, Kant and intentionality. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 18 n. 26. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.

Fourth and finally, I think the treatment of Vattimo shows that the inadequacy of his approach to hermeneutics is tied, above all, to the question of, as he terms it himself, 'normative relevance' in understanding. Vattimo admits that such 'normative relevance' is necessary to prevent understanding from dissolving into an enacted scepticism. He seeks to locate the element of normativity in Gadamer's conception of tradition, but since Vattimo insists that tradition is itself a product of our interpretation, he cannot consistently appeal to its normative constraint. The reason Vattimo underestimates the importance of normativity for philosophical hermeneutics may be due to the fact that this concept plays a disguised role in Gadamer's own account of understanding. It is here that McDowell's transcendental version of the Socratic paradigm of giving and demanding an account (*logon didonai*) can be of value to philosophical hermeneutics.

Chapter 3
The Socratic Paradigm of Objectivity

Vattimo's conception of philosophical hermeneutics departs from the assumption that hermeneutics has become the *koinē* of the contemporary (Western) world, i.e. that there is a broad-ranging but implicit cultural and academic consensus that every experience of understanding has an interpretive character. He calls this consciousness of interpretation a *hermeneutical koinē*, because he regards it to be philosophically expressed in the tradition of hermeneutics, especially in Gadamer's theory of understanding and language in *Truth and Method*. However, he thinks that our consciousness of interpretation in general, and Gadamer's theory in particular, itself falls victim to a problematic, metaphysical interpretation if we attempt to ground it in a meta-theory through transcendental reflection. Vattimo avoids this transcendental interpretation of philosophical hermeneutics in his own conception, which I have suggested can be understood as Nietzschean historicism. He claims that our consciousness of interpretation is a result of the gradual weakening of our conception of the structures of reality in metaphysical terms – in other words, as a result of the gradual unfolding of nihilism – but he also emphasises that this account of the provenance of hermeneutics is itself only an interpretation. As we have seen, Vattimo cannot help but become entangled in paradox while putting forward his conception of hermeneutics. Furthermore, his conception does not help us to grasp why the basic idea of hermeneutics seems to have a *legitimate* grip on us, why it has indeed become something of a *koinē*. Since it rightly rejects the idea of a transcendental meta-theory, it cannot provide a grounding justification for our consciousness of interpretation. Further, its own alternative, the constructivist account of hermeneutics, is deprived of its explanatory power by being termed 'only an interpretation'. If we look to Vattimo to clarify our confusion about the status of our consciousness of interpretation or its philosophical expression (i.e. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics), all he can offer in response is an enacted scepticism. As has become clear, this answer reduces our intuition that our attempts at understanding are constrained by the subject matter to a 'necessary illusion', in the Nietzschean sense.

In light of the problems with Vattimo's interpretation of hermeneutics, one way to attempt to renew the heritage of philosophical hermeneutics is therefore to ask what it means that understanding is *sachbezogen*, i.e. always related to subject matter. It is intuitive to understand this relationship in terms of a resistance or constraint exercised by the subject matter on our understanding. This raises the question of how we should conceive this constraint, which is intrinsic to understanding. In other words, what makes an utterance I make or a thought I think an expression of an understanding of a subject matter? One way to answer this question is to say that if I am asked, then I can point to a reason why I understand the subject matter as I do. In this explication of my understanding, I would permit the constraint or the resistance that the subject matter exercises to become apparent in an explicit way. I would thereby allow my understanding to be shared in an explicit manner, but I also risk being corrected or even rejected. In any case, as soon as I am asked to justify my understanding, the subject matter is explicitly placed between me and the interlocutor, both as an object of possible dispute and as a potential means of coming to an understanding.[1] This way of conceiving the intrinsic connection between understanding and objectivity is an everyday experience. Its paradigmatic importance is emphasised at the roots of our philosophical tradition, in Socrates' guiding idea that we should conceive the objectivity of understanding in the light of what happens when we attempt to give an account (*logon didonai*) of our understanding of a subject matter. The Socratic tradition contends that in this situation we paradigmatically experience the constraint of the object of understanding and are therefore confronted with the circumstance that understanding is related to subject matter. If we take seriously the Socratic paradigm of giving an account, then the normative character of understanding becomes apparent. When the Socratic demand is answered, we attempt to articulate our understanding of the subject matter and thereby put ourselves at the risk of failure. The basic structure of our understanding, namely that we apprehend something *as* something, is thereby highlighted when our understanding is questioned.

Conceiving the connection between understanding and objectivity within the Socratic framework of giving an account might seem to ignore Gadamer's guiding idea that our understanding is always situated in specific historical contexts. In other words, if we are always influenced by historical prejudices in our understanding, how can our accounts of what we say and do – even in the best cases – achieve objectivity? Although we must respect this insight, we cannot reduce understanding to the question of its influences. Such a category mistake objectifies understanding in a reductionist manner. In order to appreciate this point, we need only remind ourselves of the situation in which a partner in dialogue reduces our point of view to a matter of the (psychological, sociological, historical) forces that allegedly have caused us to adopt this point of view. In such a situation, we are rightly offended,

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[1] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 443. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 450. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

because our claim to understanding has been reduced to a matter of causal influence.

It may seem that much of our understanding is not directed at a subject matter, in the sense of something that could be the object of a heated dispute or of an interesting investigation. A lot of our ordinary understanding is simply expressed as a self-evident familiarity with our everyday world, its mundane objects and trivial tasks. But even in our most self-evident embeddedness in the world, we are not beyond the reach of the meddlesome voice of Socrates, i.e. none of the aspects of our everyday involvement are completely inaccessible to questioning. Even when our understanding takes the form of an 'unconscious' involvement with the task at hand, we remain within a sphere in which questioning could apply.[2]

Exploiting this Socratic paradigm of *logon didonai* as the way to retain the proper intrinsic connection between understanding and objectivity in philosophical hermeneutics does not situate Gadamer's thinking within a foreign framework. In fact, Gadamer himself makes crucial use of what he calls the Socratic 'process of giving an account', which he sees as key not only for understanding the role of the Socrates figure in the Platonic dialogues, but also for excavating what he claims is the common core (*Wirkungseinheit*) in Plato's so-called doctrine of ideas and Aristotle's practical philosophy. However, in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer does not explicate the relation between the Socratic paradigm and the claims made here about the event-character, historicity and verbal (*sprachlich*) nature of understanding. This lack in Gadamer's conception no doubt contributed to the critique of philosophical hermeneutics that it suffers from a dogmatic account of experience that undermines a proper role for subjectivity, critique and reflection.[3] This critique

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[2] It should be stressed that it is frequently appropriate to reject the Socratic stance – indeed, such a rejection can even be in the interest of understanding itself. A shrug, an ironic answer or an outright rejection can be the most appropriate way of answering a misplaced demand to give an account. This basic fact should warn us against conceiving of the Socratic demand in terms of a moral commitment to discuss until some sort of agreement is reached, and also against speaking of a universal moral obligation to give an account whenever we are challenged. No doubt the Socratic demand to give an account can, as Nietzsche remarked, be an act of *Depotenzierung*, i.e. a way of asserting oneself by attempting to undermine the other person or render him powerless. Cf. 'The problem of Socrates' in Nietzsche, F. 2005. *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols*, 164. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Nietzsche, F. 1999. *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden* 6: 70. Bonn: de Gruyter. Still, we can only make sense of Nietzsche's attack on Socrates as an acknowledgment that the demand to give an account is a challenge that cannot be dispelled, and hence a condition with which we must learn to live in a manner that ensures it does not become a tyrannical moral obligation. Even Nietzsche's critique of the Socratic tradition remains within its horizon, as a response to the challenge posed by the Socratic practice of questioning. We should therefore maintain that our legitimate rejection of the demand to give an account of our understanding also serves to confirm that we are constitutively responsive to this demand.

[3] Cf. Habermas, J. 1971. Der Universalitätsanspruch der Hermeneutik. In *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik*, ed. Habermas, J. et al., 120–159. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Verlag; Apel, K.O. 1997. Regulative Ideas or Truth-Happening? An attempt to answer the question of the conditions of possibility of valid understanding. Translated by Sommersmeier, R. In *The*

seems to find support in *Truth and Method*, e.g. when Gadamer, in his reflections on the ontology of the work of art, introduces the idea that the real subject in a hermeneutic relationship is the event of meaning itself, rather than the consciousness of the interpreter.[4] This could indeed seem to reduce subjectivity to something accidental. Furthermore, in relation to the investigation of understanding in the human sciences, Gadamer speaks of the focus of subjectivity as a 'distorting mirror', and goes on to say that the self-awareness of the individual is only 'a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life'.[5] Hence, it could appear that subjectivity, reflection and critique are intolerably played down in philosophical hermeneutics. In the case of the human sciences, this tendency allegedly threatens to reduce the interpreter to a mere vehicle for tradition, which continually unfolds its intrinsic meaning in new aspects. At the most general level, Gadamer's view could seem to undermine the ability of the experiencing subject to critically access the content of his or her experiences by acknowledging levels of experience that are 'unavailable to reflective life'.[6] As such, a reconstruction of the notion of objectivity could not only free philosophical hermeneutics from its post-modern appropriations by Rorty and Vattimo; it could also fuse Gadamer's emphasis on the critical use of reason and personal responsibility in his interpretations of Plato and Aristotle with his stress on the historical nature of understanding in *Truth and Method*.

As we shall see in this chapter, Sellars and McDowell's idea of understanding as being placed in the *space of reasons* conceptually develops the Socratic paradigm by positioning normativity at the centre of their approach, and by pointing out how an account that fails to do so falls victim to a 'mythical' conception of understanding (Sects. 1 and 2). Although the concept of normativity is not a central term in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, it is present in the guise of the influence of his interpretation of the Platonic Socrates, and as such this interpretation of understanding is not foreign to his thinking (Sect. 3). Sellars' and McDowell's approach therefore not only offers support for the idea of an intrinsic connection between understanding and objectivity, but also explicates Gadamer's idea that there is an irreducible transcendental dimension in his account of understanding, without resorting to the kind of sideways-on meta-theory that Vattimo warns against. Therefore, in the third part of *Truth and Method*, we gain a philosophical clarification of one of Gadamer's core ideas, namely that language and understanding

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Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, ed. L.E. Hahn, 67–94. The Library of Living Philosophers (Vol. XXIV). Chicago: Open Court; Blumenberg, H. 1983. *Säkularisierung und Selbstbehauptung*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Verlag; Pippin, R. 2002. Gadamer's Hegel. In *Gadamer's Century*, ed. Malpas, J. et al., 217–238. Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press; Figal, G. 2006. *Gegenständlichkeit*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck); and Gjesdal, K. 2009. *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

[4] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 106. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode* 112. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[5] Ibid.: 281.

[6] Cf. Pippin, R. 2002. Gadamer's Hegel. In *Gadamer's Century*, ed. Malpas, J. et al., 226. Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press.

comprehend everything that can ever be an object (*umgreifen alles was je Gegenstand werden kann*).[7]

1 The Space of Reasons and the Freedom of Judgement

McDowell understands intentionality in terms of an intrinsic connection between concepts, normativity and language. The fundamental interconnectedness of these three phenomena is expressed in the notion of the *space of reasons,* introduced by Sellars in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (1956).[8] Here, Sellars claims that when we characterise a state as an intentional state, 'we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says'.[9] One of Sellars' main aims is to demarcate the intelligibility expressed in our intentionality from the intelligibility investigated by the natural sciences in their causal accounts. The concept of the space of reasons 'draws a line'.[10] Above this line are characterisations in which things are revealed as being, or approximately as being, as they *rationally ought to be*. Below the line are explanations that make things intelligible 'by representing their coming into being as *a particular instance of how things generally tend to happen*'.[11]

It is crucial not to construe this notion of intentional agents or intentionality in narrow terms. In the terminology of Heidegger (and Gadamer), we can say that intentionality in this broad sense includes any sort of openness (*Erschlossenheit*) toward the world. Examining the nature and the structure of the space of reasons is therefore more than an epistemological enterprise; it concerns the 'capacity of our

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[7] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 405. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 408. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[8] McDowell's transcendental philosophy is deeply inspired by Sellars. To what extent and on what specific points McDowell's philosophy differs from Sellars' thinking is a question with which McDowell still struggles. I shall not pursue this question in the following. My prime concern here is McDowell's value for a reconstruction of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

[9] Sellars, W. 1997. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, 76. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. As McDowell notes, Sellars 'means to exclude an externalist view of epistemic satisfactoriness, a view according to which one can be entitled to a belief without being in a position to know what entitles one to it. Knowing things, as Sellars intends his dictum to mean, must draw on capacities that belong to reason, conceived as a faculty whose exercises include vindicating one's entitlement to say things' (McDowell, J. 2009. Avoiding the Myth of the Given. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 256. Cambridge: Harvard University Press). In the following account I assume that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is also incompatible with an externalist epistemology and thus shares McDowell's internalist view on justification.

[10] McDowell, J. 2009. Kant, Sellars and intentionality. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 5. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[11] McDowell, J. 1998. Functionalism and anomalous monism. In *Mind, Value and Reality*, 328. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

mental activity to be about reality at all, whether knowledgeably or not'.[12] Ultimately, in this sense, the question of intentionality involves the transcendental problem of 'how empirical content is so much as possible' (ibid.). As McDowell emphasises, only if this prior condition is met is it possible that some of our thinking can put us in possession of knowledge. In this way, Sellars' and McDowell's concern is transcendental because it relates to the very possibility of thought being directed at the objective world.[13]

Furthermore, to speak of a space of reasons is for McDowell to understand intentionality in a *normative* context. For example, a belief 'whose content [. . .] is that things are thus and so [. . .] must be a posture or stance that is *correctly or incorrectly* adopted according to whether or not things are indeed thus and so.'[14] What distinguishes our intentional life from that of non-rational animals is not that it involves a certain kind of mental process that presupposes a certain metaphysical substance, but rather the practical fact that thinking, believing, intending and acting entail that we are *responsible*. Our intentional life is intrinsically bound up with responsibility or commitment because it involves a fundamental responsiveness to rules. Such rules or norms articulate the content of our commitments in thinking and acting, and are understood by McDowell as 'concepts'. The idea of the space of reasons as irreducible and normative can therefore also be comprehended as the claim that both our theoretical and practical life is responsible because it is constituted by our responsiveness to conceptual norms. This link between normativity and concepts is especially clear in the case of judgements, which McDowell therefore understands to be the paradigmatic mode of actualising conceptual capacities:

> [J]udging, making up our minds what to think, is something for which we are, in principle, responsible – something we freely do, as opposed to something that merely happens in our lives. Of course, a belief is not always, or even typically, a result of our exercising this freedom to decide what to think. But even when a belief is not freely adopted, it is an actualisation of capacities of a kind, the conceptual, whose paradigmatic mode of actualisation is in the exercise of freedom that judging is. This freedom, exemplified in responsible acts of judging, is essentially a matter of being answerable to criticism in the light of rationally relevant considerations. So the realm of freedom, at least the realm of the freedom of judging, can be identified with the space of reasons.[15]

As this quote demonstrates, being subject to the normativity of the space of reasons is a matter of being 'answerable to criticism in the light of rationally relevant considerations' or, as Sellars puts it, of 'justifying and being able to justify what one says'. The medium for such a practice can only be conceptual, since concepts constitute norms for cognitive activity. In contrast, when we explain our behaviour

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[12] McDowell, J. 2009. Experiencing the world. In *The Engaged Intellect*, 243. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[13] Sometimes McDowell uses the term 'mindedness' instead of intentionality.

[14] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, xi–xii. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[15] McDowell, J. 2009. Kant, Sellars and intentionality. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 6. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

by reference to non-conceptual forms of intelligibility – for example, by seeing it as a result of the merely causal influences described by the natural sciences – there is no room for us to step back into a critical stance and examine the legitimacy of this influence. A cause either exercises its influence or it does not. It makes no sense to ask the normative question, i.e. whether its influence is correct or not. In short, McDowell claims that 'rational necessitation is not just compatible with freedom but constitutive of it'.[16]

It is crucial to recognise that the notion of normativity, as it used by McDowell, does not only refer to the norms of behaviour as we are confronted with them in the realm of politics or in relation to ethical decisions. Rather, in McDowell's view, all of our practices and our dealings with the world involve norms. This notion of normativity pertains to intentional content as such. It designates the very *als-Struktur* that is the core of our intentional relation with the world. The idea of taking something *as* something is only intelligible in terms of whether this taking is right or wrong – i.e. it can only be understood in a normative context. Since the Sellars tradition holds that norms are what constitute concepts, we can also say that every implicit or explicit instance of taking something *as* something is conceptual.

The notion of the space of reasons is bound up with a conception of the freedom of our normative rationality as freedom *through* constraint. Concerning this idea of freedom, McDowell refers to one of Brandom's early papers, 'Freedom and constraint by norms', in which Brandom defends a version of the Kantian doctrine that 'freedom consists precisely in being constrained by norms rather than merely by causes, answering to what ought to be as well as to what is'.[17] Illustrating this notion of freedom, Brandom, in a more recent paper, refers to the guiding notion of Kant's famous essay 'Was ist Aufklärung', i.e. the achievement of majority (*Mündigkeit*). As Brandom points, out, when a person reaches legal majority, and thereby gains the possibility to bind herself legally, a host of new possibilities open up. She is, for example, able to enter into contracts and therefore borrow money, take out a mortgage, start a business etc. This 'new authority [of a person who has attained legal majority] to take on these normative statuses involves a huge increase in positive freedom. The difference between discursive creatures and non-discursive ones is likewise to be understood in terms of the sort of *normative positive freedom* exhibited by the concept-users'.[18] Freedom consists in a kind of constraint – constraint by conceptual norms.

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[16] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 5. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[17] Brandom, R. 1979. Freedom and constraint by norms. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (3): 187. Cf. McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 5. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[18] Brandom, R. 2009. *Reason in Philosophy: Animating ideas*, 58. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

2 The Myth of the Given

In McDowell's view, the essential connection between the space of reasons and the realm of normative freedom is best expressed in the Kantian concept of spontaneity (*Spontaneität*).[19] The connection between concepts and spontaneity is evident when Kant claims that concepts are based on the spontaneity of thought;[20] in fact, this is implicit in the definition of spontaneity as the power of the mind to produce representations from itself (*Vorstellungen selbst hervorzubringe*).[21] One can therefore restate McDowell's point as follows: for a state to be intentional – to exhibit directedness toward the world – the intentional object has to be within the reach of spontaneity.

As we have seen, according to the idea of the space of reasons, for something to count as an intentional state or act, it must entail responsiveness to conceptual norms, i.e. it must take place in the network of concepts that normatively constrain us: 'The power of spontaneity comprises a network of conceptual capacities linked by putatively rational connections, with the connections essentially subject to critical reflection'.[22] McDowell spells out this possibility for critical reflection as 'the standing potential for a reflective stance at which the question arises whether one ought to find this or that persuasive'.[23] If we conceive of the network of conceptual capacities (the space of reasons) in this way, then the intrinsic connection to language becomes obvious. 'Conceptual' in this sense is connected to verbal articulation, and thus intentionality and language are linked, as is the case in Gadamer's hermeneutics. In other words, the idea is that when we characterise somebody (or ourselves) as an intentional agent, we understand this person to have actualised certain conceptual abilities that they acquired upon being initiated into a language. The link between concepts and language is programmatically expressed in what Brandom calls Sellars' principle, namely that the 'grasp of a concept is mastery of the use of a word'.[24] McDowell describes the relation between language and the space of reason in the following way: 'In being initiated into a language, a human being is introduced into something that already embodies putatively rational

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[19] Spontaneity comes from *sponte* (Latin), which means 'of free will' or 'voluntarily'. Brandom also emphasises the importance of the Kantian notion of spontaneity (Brandom, R. 2009. *Reason in Philosophy: Animating ideas*, 59. Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

[20] Kant, I. 1929. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 68/B 93. Translated by N.K. Smith. London: Macmillan. Kant, I. 1911. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 68/B 93. In *Kant's gesammelte Schriften* III. Berlin: Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

[21] Ibid.: A 51/B 75.

[22] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 124f. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[23] Ibid.: 125.

[24] Brandom, R. 2000. *Articulating Reasons: An introduction to inferentialism*, 6. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. McDowell approves of this principle but also attempts to extend the notion of the conceptual beyond that for which we already possess language. In other words, he does not read the principle in an exclusive way (McDowell, J. 2009. What Myth? In *The Engaged Intellect*, 318f. Cambridge: Harvard University Press). Cf. Sects. 7 and 8 in Chap. 5 below.

linkages between concepts, putatively constitutive of the layout of the space of reasons, before she comes on the scene.'[25] Thus, initiation into a 'shared norm-governed practice' is required in order to inhabit the space of reasons.[26]

In order to fully understand McDowell's approach, we need to see how it rejects an alternative approach. According to such a line of argument, we are constrained in our intentionality from outside the realm of the conceptual – and therefore constrained in terms of what can be articulated verbally. In relation to the episte-mology of perception, the idea would be that our perceptual beliefs are of a conceptual nature but that they are based on – and could therefore be justified by – sensory input (sensations, intuitions, etc.) located outside the realm of the conceptual. Whereas our empirical justification depends on rational relations, the ultimate foundation for these justifications lies in impingements on the conceptual sphere from outside:

> So the space of reasons is made to be more extensive than the space of concepts. Suppose we are tracing the ground, the justification for a belief or judgement. The idea is that when we have exhausted all the available moves within the space of concepts, all the available moves from one conceptually organised item to another, there is still one more step we can take: namely, pointing to something that is simply received in experience. It can only be pointing, because *ex hypothesi* this last move in a justification comes after we have exhausted the possibilities of tracing grounds from one conceptually organized, and so articulable, item to another.[27]

This is the putatively reassuring answer of traditional empiricism. This version of the Myth of the Given understands such a level of bare immediacy that a mere pointing serves as a possible foundation for empirical knowledge. At this level, the real empirical substance is infused and then transmitted to empirical concepts that are further removed from immediate experience.[28]

In his attempts to show that the reassurance of the Myth of the Given is illusory, McDowell, again following Sellars, refers to the example of colour experience. According to McDowell, anyone making a judgement of colour presupposes a number of conceptual capacities. They must, for example, understand colour as a possible property of things, just as they must possess the concept of visible surfaces of objects and the concept of suitable lighting conditions for telling the colour of something. Only with these capacities in place can their experience be said to be of

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[25] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 125. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[26] McDowell, J. 2008. Responses. In *John McDowell: Experience, norm and nature*, ed. J. Lindgaard, 250. London: John Wiley.

[27] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 6. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[28] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 7. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. This description echoes a central passage from Sellars' *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*: 'The idea that observation "strictly and properly so-called" is constituted by certain self-authenticating nonverbal episodes, the authority of which is transmitted to verbal and quasi-verbal performances when these performances are made "in conformity with the semantical rules of the language", is, of course, the heart of the Myth of the Given. For the *given*, in epistemological tradition, is what is *taken* by these self-authenticating episodes' (Sellars, W. 1997. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, 77. Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

an objective world. McDowell contrasts this notion of experience with the alleged ability of a parrot to produce the correct 'colour' words in response to visual input. Here, there is no comprehension that these are responses to facts that the parrot can obtain independently of the perturbations in its stream of consciousness.[29] The act of 'pointing', the alleged immediate contact with reality, which the Myth of Given takes to be the foundation for empirical knowledge, cannot fulfil the function it is supposed to. It takes the space of reasons to be more extensive than the space of concepts.[30] However, as the parrot example shows, the immediate sensation is not a reason that might justify our beliefs, but rather must be depicted as 'a brute impact from the exterior'.[31] This is incompatible with the account of understanding in terms of normative constraint. In such a picture of experience, empirical knowledge is not an expression of a free judgement based on the possibility of scrutiny. I cannot be held accountable for my judgement about the world if the support for my judgement takes the form of a 'brute impact from the exterior'. As McDowell points out: 'If those impingements [the bits of Given] are conceived [. . .] outside the domain of responsible freedom, then the best they can yield is that we cannot be blamed for believing whatever they lead us to believe, not that we are justified in believing it.'[32] By using the term 'exculpations' for intuitions conceived of as elements of an extra-conceptual Given, McDowell emphasises the contrast with our goal, i.e. intuitions conceived as justifications. At one point, he uses an image from Plato's dialogue *Theatetus* – the theme of which is knowledge – to describe the picture of empirical knowledge purported by the Myth of the Given: the deliverance of receptivity conceived as 'receiving a dent in the mind's wax tablet'.[33]

There is an interesting parallel here to a passage in Gadamer's essay 'Wie weit schreibt Sprache das Denken vor?', although Gadamer does not explicitly stress the transcendental implications of his reflections. In discussing Heinrich von Kleist's 1805 essay 'Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden', Gadamer places importance on Kleist's description of an exam situation where the professor asks a question quick as a shot (*wie aus der Pistole geschossen*) and

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[29] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 12. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[30] As we shall see in Sect. 7 in Chap. 5, there is also room for gestures of 'pointing' in McDowell and Gadamer's approach. However, such behaviour is interpreted as the application of so-called demonstrative concepts to content that is always already conceptually presented to the subject, rather than as instances of immediate contact with non-conceptual elements of the Given.

[31] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 8. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[32] Ibid.: 13.

[33] McDowell, J. 2009. Experiencing world. In *The Engaged Intellect*, 252. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. He adds the following comment: '(It would make no difference if we replaced that image with some sophisticated physiology.) [. . .] [T]he Myth of the Given, in the relevant form, is the hopeless attempt to make a mere dent in the tablet of the mind – not a fact about the dent but the dent itself – into a rational consideration' (ibid.). Cf. Plato. *Theatetus,* 191c. In *Platonis Opera I*, ed. J. Burnet 1901–07. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

the student is expected to respond with similar speed.[34] Gadamer uses this example to clarify his notion of language and its inherent relation to reason. In an exam situation as Kleist describes it, the candidate is reduced to an idiot (*Dummkopf*) or a parrot by the reductive method of interrogation. Although he uses language and speaks 'meaningfully', his answer is regarded as a possible exculpation – that might at best free him from blame – rather than a possible justification in which a range of possible answers are weighed against each other. Using Kleist's expression, Gadamer insists that if an answer is to express a justification, then 'the flywheel of thinking must be initiated' (*das Schwungrad der gedanken muß in Gang gesetzt warden*). If an exam is to be meaningful, it must measure effort according to such standards.

Of course there is a major difference between an answer in an exam situation and a basic perceptual judgement, e.g. that we see a red cube. As McDowell stresses, there may be no serious prospect that our most immediate empirical concepts would need to be reshaped in the light of our thinking.[35] In other words, there is a certain immediacy to basic perceptual judgements that is absent from answers in an exam situation. Such judgements and the concepts they express are typically not a subject matter for an interesting interpretation or discussion. It may be this immediacy that misleads us to construe the deliverances of our sensibility as non-conceptual elements of the Given that allegedly underpin our perceptual judgements. McDowell's point is that we must refuse to construe the immediacy in question as deliverances that are intelligible independently of the whole of inferential linkages that constitute our world-view. If they were indeed non-conceptual, and thus completely foreign to this whole, then they could not function as justifications for our perceptual judgements, but only as triggers or exculpations. The deliverances of sensibility would be like Kleist's examiner prompting us to spit out answers automatically and thereby 'treating us' as parrots rather than as creatures with spontaneity. Even if all our discourse is formed as preschematisations into which we are drilled by habit, it cannot be reduced to such parrot-like repetition (*Aufsagen*). All discourse implies taking a risk, insofar as it involves an implicit or explicit positing (*setzen*) that enables implications to be developed and assessed.[36]

By using the example of colour experience to show the frame of mind termed as the Myth of the Given, McDowell implicitly refers to *Empiricism and the*

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[34] 'Da hat nun Heinrich von Kleist beschrieben, wie ein Examen vor sich geht; wie da der Professor wie aus der Pistole geschossen eine Frage stellt, und dann soll der Kandidat wie aus der Pistole geschossen eine Antwort abschießen. Nun wissen wir doch alle: Eine Frage, auf die jeder die Antwort weiß, können nur Dummköpfe beantworten. Eine Frage muß sich stellen, und dass heißt, dass sie eine Offenheit von Antwortmöglichkeiten einschließt. Daß die gegebene Antwort vernünftig ist, das ist die einzige mögliche Examensleistung, die man bewerten kann. Eine "richtige" Antwort können Computer und Papegeien mit weit größerer Schnelligkeit finden' (Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Wie weit schreibt Sprache das Denken vor? [1972]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 205. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[35] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 13. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[36] Ibid.: 206.

Philosophy of Mind, in which Sellars tells the story of John, who owns a tie shop. At one point, an electric light is installed in the shop, which creates problems. When asked by a customer as to the colour of a specific tie, John answers 'Green'. The customer takes John outside and shows him that in suitable lighting conditions, the tie is blue. Baffled, John learns to make the distinction between 'looks' and 'is', and therefore the next time he is asked in the shop about the colour of the tie, he can answer 'It looks green'. It is the status of this so-called *observation report* in which Sellars is interested. It is tempting to suppose that there is a kind of minimal fact at stake here: 'Such a minimal fact would be the fact that the necktie looks green to John on a certain occasion, and it would be properly reported by using the sentence "This necktie looks green."'[37] Allegedly, such a minimal fact can be distinguished from facts concerning what colour the tie really is. According to this line of argument, we could imagine a subject who was able to be the subject of such appearances (how the tie looks) *without* grasping the distinction between a case where it merely looked to the subject as if the tie was, say, green, and a case in which the tie was actually green. However, this would amount to assuming a version of the Myth of the Given, namely in the form of foundationally basic facts about which each subject is incorrigible. Sellars' strategy to dissolve this 'ultimate court of appeals'[38] is to insist that the concepts needed to formulate this alleged basic foundational fact depend on other concepts that are not formed at the basic level.[39] For Sellars, the traditional notion of the sense datum is therefore 'a mongrel resulting from the crossbreeding of two ideas'.[40] On the one hand, there is the idea that it is necessary to assume certain non-concept-involving episodes – i.e. episodes that can occur without any prior process of concept formation. These are allegedly episodes 'without which it would *in some sense* be impossible to *see*, for example, that the facing surface of a physical object is red and triangular'.[41] If it is taken to describe a minimal separate fact about John, this is the role played by the observation report in the tie-shop example. On the other hand, there is the perfectly sensible idea of non-inferential knowing that such-and-such is the case – for example, an observation report that a given item is red. We can therefore hold on to observation reports as an immediate (non-inferential) response to the deliverances of sensibility as long as we do not separate these from our conceptually organised world-view and think of them as expressing foundational facts.

It is important to note that Sellars and McDowell do not abandon the idea that empirical propositions in some sense rest on a level of propositions – observation

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[37] Sellars, W. 1997. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, 39. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[38] Ibid.: 69.

[39] Brandom, R. 1997. Study guide. In Sellars, W.: *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, 139. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[40] Sellars, W. 1997. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, 21. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[41] Ibid.: 22.

reports – 'which do not rest on other propositions in the same way as other propositions rest on them'.[42] However, as Sellars explains, 'the metaphor of "foundation" is misleading in that it keeps us from seeing that if there is a logical dimension in which other empirical propositions rest on observation reports, there is another logical dimension in which the latter rest on the former'.[43] The point is that rather than working with a hierarchical model in which empirical substance is infused at the bottom, Sellars proposes a two-way model. A world-view depends on perceptual knowledge that is expressed in observation reports, but equally the latter, *qua* the concepts that figure in them, depend on a world-view.[44] It is in this sense that McDowell follows Sellars' critique of foundationalism, which is most vividly expressed in the following passage from the end of *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*: '[E]mpirical knowledge, like its sophisticated extension, science, is rational, not because it has a *foundation* but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put *any* claim in jeopardy, though not all at once.'[45] Our observation reports are therefore not episodes that can occur separately from our access to concept formation if they are to play a part in empirical rationality. They need to be part of one and the same system that continually adjusts to the impacts of experience:

> [We] refuse to conceive experience's demand on a system of beliefs as imposed from outside the activity of adjusting the system, by something constituted independently of the current state of the evolving system, or a state into which the system might evolve. The required adjustments to the system depend on what we take experience to reveal to us, and we can capture that only in terms of the concepts and conceptions that figure in the evolving system. What we take experience to tell us is already part of the system, not an external constraint on it.[46]

There is a clear parallel between the idea of a two-way model for understanding the epistemology of observation reports and the idea of the hermeneutic circle as it is conceived in philosophical hermeneutics. As Gadamer understands this concept, it expresses the idea that a situation in which we understand a text without being influenced by a pre-understanding is inconceivable. An initial meaning of a text only emerges because a text is read with more or less specific expectations in regard to a certain meaning. This does not imply that the meaning is predetermined by our projection, since it is precisely our fore-projection that is constantly revised as we penetrate into the meaning of the text.[47] Still, even when we 'merely' read 'what is there' (*Lesen dessen was dasteht*), this act is not constituted by its relation to an

[42] Ibid.: 78.

[43] Ibid.

[44] McDowell, J. 2009. Kant, Sellars and intentionality. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 9. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[45] Sellars, W. 1997. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, 79. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[46] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 136. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[47] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 269. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 271. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

external foundation, but in relation to the meaning of the text as a whole. Objectivity is not a state wholly independent of subjectivity – rather, it refers to the process of confirming and revising our pre-understanding. The circle of understanding does not, therefore, belong on a methodological level, as it did in the earlier tradition of hermeneutics, but rather articulates a transcendental structure common to all under-standing. We should now begin to see why Gadamer thinks of himself as developing the transcendental notion of understanding introduced in *Being and Time*.[48]

In order to elucidate the crucial point in the critique of the Myth of the Given, it is useful to draw on a critique presented by Gail Soffer in 'Revisiting the Myth: Husserl and Sellars on the Given'. Her critique is specifically directed against Sellars' account, but the specific point upon which I would like to comment concerns a claim that also is relevant for understanding McDowell and Gadamer's position. This claim is illustrated in relation to the tie-shop example mentioned above, which Soffer reads in the following way:

> John begins with simple color concepts lacking any reference to standard conditions or standard observers. At first John does not distinguish between being and appearing and even thinks a green tie is blue when it looks blue under artificial lighting. Through imitation and selective verbal reinforcement, John learns that colors do not always look like what they are and that they look like what they are when they are in natural daylight, viewed by eyes in good condition, and so forth. That is, he learns what type of observers count as standard observers for the viewing of colors. In this way, he arrives at more sophisticated color concepts. If b_n is John's naïve concept of blue, and b_s his sophisticated blue concept, we can say that something is b_s if and only if it looks b_n to a standard observer in standard conditions. Now Sellars uses the tie salesman example to argue that noticing shades of blue requires a vast network of concepts and hence a socially reinforced language game. Yet in fact the example of the tie salesman shows only that b_s (the concept involving notions of standard observers and conditions) presupposes language and a network of other concepts, including b_n. The example does nothing at all to show that b_n (the initial, primitive concept that equates being and appearing) requires language or that noticings of individual blue-shades require any concept of blue, even a rudimentary one.[49]

According to Soffer, the example – and its distinction between different degrees of conceptual sophistication – should have motivated Sellars to question his idea that all forms of intentional experience presuppose language. In my view, Soffer's comment is illuminating because it misunderstands the transcendental point in Sellars' (and McDowell's) argument. As we have seen above, Sellars' point concerning the tie-shop example relates to the observation report: 'that looks green'. Sellars warns against understanding such an observation as a minimal fact that can be distinguished from facts concerning what colour the tie really is. Put in Soffer's terms, Sellars focuses on b_n – 'the initial, primitive concept that equates being and appearing'. Contrary to Soffer, however, Sellars wants to deny that b_n can be made sense of as a 'concept'.

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[48] Gadamer regards his account of the hermeneutic circle to be Heideggerian (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 268ff. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 270ff. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). Cf. Heidegger, M. 1993. *Sein und Zeit*, 152f. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag).

[49] Soffer, G. 2003. Revisiting the Myth: Husserl, Sellars and the Given. *The Review of Metaphysics* 57 (2): 315.

Why? Soffer gives the answer in her discussion of b_n when she says that 'it equates being and appearing'. The point is that we cannot make sense of a concept or a conceptual capacity that equates being with appearance because this would undermine the notion of normativity, which is the only way in which we can make sense of what concepts are for us. For exercises of conceptual capacities such as judgements to make sense, they must consist of attitudes that are correctly or incorrectly adopted in the light of how things are. Without this normative distinction, the idea of a judgement as a responsible act is incomprehensible. Soffer's idea of a concept of blue that equates being and appearing disregards this constraint on the notion of concepts. In other words, for Sellars, the point in the tie-shop example is that to possess a colour concept, a subject must also possess (among others) the concept of suitable lighting conditions, and thereby be able to distinguish between appearing and being. The example is not meant to illustrate two stages in a developmental story, as Soffer's interpretation suggests, but rather to articulate how the first stage – i.e. the immediate states in which there is no grasp of the distinction between being and appearing – cannot play the transcendental role it has been assigned in traditional forms of empiricism. A colour 'concept' in Soffer's sense would be like McDowell's example of a parrot that has the ability to produce the correct 'colour' words in response to inputs to its visual system, but lacks any comprehension that these are responses to facts *that it can obtain anyway* 'independently of the perturbations in its stream of consciousness'.

It might seem that Sellars' and McDowell's normative understanding of concepts is a mere stipulation rather than a requirement. The key here is to remember how Soffer's understanding of concepts violates the intuition that the entirety of our intentional life involves an irreducible aspect of responsibility, namely the responsible freedom of reason. This guiding intuition is expressed in the idea of judgements as the model on which we conceive our intentionality – and in the case of the expression of a judgement, it is especially clear that we must be responsible. We cannot, as Soffer's idea of b_n presumes, make sense of the idea of taking responsibility for an act of judgement that consists of claiming a certain state of affairs to be the case, if our support for this act of judgement means there is uncertainty as to whether the judged state of affairs really pertains or only seems to pertain.

3   Gadamer and the Socratic Paradigm of *logon didonai*

Inspired by Kant, the concept of normativity plays the key role in the understanding of meaning and intentionality in the Sellars tradition. The concept of normativity does not have pride of place in *Truth and Method*, and Gadamer only engages with Kant's philosophy to a limited extent.[50] However, this does not mean that the notion

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[50] The main target of Gadamer's criticism in the first part of *Truth and Method* is Kant's aesthetic and its history of effect (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 37–101. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 48–106. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

of normativity is foreign to philosophical hermeneutics. Rather, a strong emphasis on normativity can be found in the guise of Gadamer's re-actualisation of Plato and Aristotle's thinking.

Up until the 1990s, Gadamer planned a major work on Plato and Greek philosophy. The closest we get to such a work is volume VII of his collected works, which bears the title *Plato in Dialog*.[51] In the most ambitious of the essays collected in this volume, the so-called *Akademieabhandlung* 'Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles' from 1978, Gadamer defends what he calls the *eidos*-philosophy, the common core in Plato and Aristotle's thinking. According to Gadamer, the key to understanding this eidos-philosophy is the famous passage from *Phaedo* in which Socrates describes his so-called 'flight into the *logoi*'.[52] Prior to this passage, Socrates recounts his disappointments with earlier explanations of natural philosophy (i.e. Anaxagoras). Contrary to its promise, this type of explanation makes no use of reason (*tōi men nōi ouden chrōmenon*), but takes recourse to 'air, and ether, and water, and many other eccentricities' (*atopa*).[53] It accounts for the order of things without invoking what is the best (*beltiston*) state of existence, i.e. without relating the account to the Socratic question of virtue or the good. As Socrates continues, such an explanation is analogous to an explanation of why he is sitting in jail in terms of the makeup of his bones and muscles. In other words, it overlooks the true causes – namely 'that the Athenians have thought it better to condemn me, and accordingly I have thought it better and more right to remain here and undergo my sentence.'[54] Thus Socrates can conclude that there is a confusion of causes and conditions at work:

> It may be said, indeed, that without bones and muscles and the other parts of my body I cannot execute my purposes [*poiein ta doxanta moi*]. But to say at the same time that I act from reason, and that I do as I do because of them and not from the choice of the best, is a very careless and idle mode of speaking.[55]

It is this rejection of the explanations of natural philosophy that leads Socrates to undertake 'a second sailing' (*deuteros ploos*).[56] Rather than looking for immediate causes, we must search for them as they appear mediated in words or concepts (*logoi*) if we want to grasp the kind of causes that can make us understand why Socrates is sitting in jail. He also emphasises that what he has in mind is nothing new, but the same thing he has always been saying, both in previous conversation

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[51] Cf. Grondin, J. 1994. *Der Sinn für Hermeneutik*, 55f. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

[52] Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles [1978]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 7, 131. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). Cf. Plato. *Phaedo*, 99e. In *Platonis Opera I*, ed. Burnet, J., 1901–07. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[53] Plato. *Phaedo*, 98b8–c2. In *Platonis Opera I*, ed. Burnet, J., 1901–07. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[54] Ibid.: 98e1–4.

[55] Ibid.: 99a5–b1.

[56] Ibid.: 99d1.

and elsewhere.[57] There is certainly an element of Socratic irony at play here, since the 'very familiar subject matter', the flight into the *logoi*, represents a radical break with the tradition of Greek natural philosophy. However, on a more profound level, Socrates 'merely' reminds us what we always presuppose when we demand that another person explains their course of action. We are not only interested in a cause that may explain their behaviour or opinion, in the sense that an excuse explains a behaviour; rather, our enquiry concerns the dimension where we may find a justification for their action or belief. In this way, Socratic philosophy reminds us of what we always already acknowledge, and thereby disrupts our unquestioned reliance on abstract theories to explain our experiential life. Questioning phenomena in the light of concepts or words, and thereby in the light of what is right or best, does not therefore make reality appear in an indirect or derivative mode of presentation, but rather confronts us with the reality that is natural to us.[58] This is why Socrates is quick to add that we should not understand the mediatedness of *logoi* as an indirect or derivative medium of presentation.[59]

Now, from Gadamer's perspective, it is potentially misleading to translate *logoi* as 'thoughts' in this context. This can lead us to forget that the thoughts in which Socrates takes refuge are expressible in words or rational discourse. As Gadamer often emphasises, Plato understands thought in discursive terms, as 'the soul's inner dialogue with itself'.[60] It is in discourse that we can paradigmatically understand causes in the decisive sense of reasons, which Socrates invokes. Only by examining causes as reasons in dialogue with ourselves or others can we live up to the Socratic demand of giving an account (*logon didonai*) of our opinions and actions in the light of what is best. In relation to the crucial dimension of justification and responsibility, the causes examined by the form of natural philosophy against which Socrates reacts can only amount to what McDowell calls 'exculpations'. Citing such causes cannot justify our thoughts and actions – rather, it only ensures that we cannot be blamed for what we think and do.

Many interpreters of Plato would agree that the flight to the *logoi* in the *Phaedo* is a programmatic statement of the Platonic agenda. Gadamer, however, emphasises that Plato seeks to make the art of conducting a dialogue (*der Kunst ein Gespräch zu führen*) the paradigm of all knowing and all truth. Dialogue, with oneself or with others, is seen as the only way to overcome distorting prejudices and dominant conventions.[61] Gadamer therefore denies that Plato ought to be considered a wholly Eleatic thinker who teaches an ontological two-world doctrine. Central to Gadamer's argument is a

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[57] Ibid.: 100b.

[58] In a passage earlier in the *Phaedo,* it is emphasised that what we think of as learning is in reality 'the recollection of congenial knowledge', which we, as it were, already possess. Ibid.: 75e2–7.

[59] Ibid.: 99e–100a.

[60] Cf. Plato. *Theatetus* 99e; *Sophistes* 263e, 264a. In *Platonis Opera I*, ed. Burnet, J., 1901–07. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[61] Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles [1978]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 7, 151. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

rejection of the total separation of the dimension of ideas as an objectified realm, cut off from the sensible world. In the beginning of 'Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles', he asks rhetorically whether we should really suppose that Plato underestimated the problem of the participation of phenomena in ideas. Did he propound the idea of a total separation of the ideas until one day he recognised that, given this presupposition, the problem of participation is impossible to solve? Or do the presupposition of separation (*chorismos*) and participation (*methexis*) belong together?[62] Gadamer's interpretation is essentially an attempt to articulate a dialectical interpretation of the relation between *chorismos* and *methexis*. Such a reading challenges the dominant two-world interpretation of Plato initiated by Aristotle. Grondin sums up the point of Gadamer's reading by stating that it was Aristotle who made a straw man out of Plato's hypothesis by turning it into a dogmatic doctrine of ideas propounding an objectified noetic dimension, separated from the world as it is experienced in perception. Such a doctrine would indeed lead to an irreconcilable problem of participation. For Plato, as Gadamer understands him, the *chorismos* was never a problem, since he always presumed that the so-called sensible world participated in the noetic dimension. The main point of Gadamer's interpretation is that Plato did not teach a theory of two separate worlds. Rather, he was guided by intuition toward a mixture of the sensible and the intelligible, an idea developed further in the Platonic academy, in the doctrine of the two principles.[63]

Accordingly, Gadamer does not understand Platonic *dialectics* as a method of exposing super-sensible meaning located in a metaphysical realm, but rather as the practice of dialogue as paradigmatically exercised by Socrates.[64] As Socrates shows, it is in the process of giving an account of one's commitments (*im gange der Rechenschaftsgabe*) that the nature of dialectics is revealed.[65] Wherever knowledge and the alleged knower that professes to have such knowledge are tested, we are engaging with dialectics.[66] According to Plato, knowledge is not merely a matter of possessing a true belief concerning a given subject, but demands that the subject is able to justify that which he pretends to know in a dialogue with himself or with others. The dialectician is accordingly described as the person who insists on the practice of giving and demanding an account. Ultimately, it is claimed that a life not tested in this way is not worth living.[67]

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[62] Ibid.: 131.

[63] Grondin, J. 1994. *Der Sinn für Hermeneutik*, 67. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

[64] Cf. my interpretation of the relation between dialogue and dialectics in relation to Plato's *Lysis*. Thaning, M.S. 2012. Dialectic and dialogue in the *Lysis*. In *The Development of Dialectic from Plato to Aristotle*, ed. Fink, J. L., 115–138. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[65] Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles [1978]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 7, 152. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[66] Ibid.: 151.

[67] Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Sokrates' Frömmigkeit des Nichtwissens [1990]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 7, 83. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). Cf. Plato. *Apologia Socratis*, 38a. In *Platonis Opera I*, ed. Burnet, J., 1901–07. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gadamer seeks to understand all of the Platonic dialogues from this Socratic point of departure, as an expression of unlimited *Rechenschaftsgabe*. He is, of course, aware that in many of the middle and late dialogues, Socrates does more than simply demand that his partners give an account. The dialogues are not merely protreptic, i.e. designed to make the reader engage in philosophy, but express the attempt to give an account by seeking an answer to the question 'what is the good?' – in other words, how should we live? According to Gadamer, the aim is not to articulate definitive or ultimate knowledge, but to lead the reader to an insistence (*Bestehen*) on the search for knowledge as such. Gadamer can therefore also say that the readiness (*Bereitschaft*) to give an account of what is best *is* the way in which we know of the good.[68] In many of the dialogues (*Phaedo, Symposium, Res Publica*, etc.), Socrates speaks as somebody who possesses knowledge, although he claims to be ignorant. It is decisive, however, that he remains in a mode of questioning, although these questions are stubbornly developed into proper investigations. Even in these contexts, knowledge remains tied to the practice of giving and demanding an account. Such a dialogue must keep its focus in order to persistently question the true and the good in the face of all objections and aberrations, which explains Socrates' role as the seemingly supreme conductor of the conversation.[69]

It should be noted that Gadamer's approach to Plato, with its emphasis on normativity in the Socratic sense, is not the result of a late development of his thinking. Even in his first book, the idea of Socratic dialogue is the methodological guiding thread of his investigation of the Platonic concept of dialectics, and the practice of *logon didonai* is claimed to be the backbone of all the Platonic dialogues.[70] The paradigmatic role of language also guides this early work. Socrates' flight into the *logoi* is explicitly conceived as a turn to language, understood in a fundamental sense as the medium of understanding the self and the world.[71]

Gadamer's Socratic interpretation of Plato is extended into the practical philosophy of Aristotle. More specifically, the Aristotelian notion of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) is claimed to be the conceptualisation of the model of understanding that Socrates advocates in Plato's dialogues.[72] In a conversation from 2000 with Riccardo Dottori, Gadamer makes a connection between Plato and the Aristotelian concept of *phronēsis* by describing the latter in terms of 'true rhetoric' (*wahre Rhetorik*), a characterisation used by Socrates to describe his practice of dialectics

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[68] Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Sokrates' Frömmigkeit des Nichtwissens [1990]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 7, 106. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[69] Ibid.: 107.

[70] Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. *Platos dialektische Ethik* [1931]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 5, 38f. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[71] Ibid.: 26–27.

[72] Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles [1978]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 7, 146. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

in the *Gorgias*.[73] While there is no *method* of practical reason, this does not imply that our discursive justifications (*Begründungen*) amount only to instruments for persuasion. On the one hand, we must separate rhetoric in this sense from a strict apodictic ideal of proof, as is found in mathematics.[74] On the other hand, we must not reduce true rhetoric as propounded by the Platonic Socrates, e.g. in the *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus,* to a mere instrument of (sophistic) persuasion. Dialectic, in the Socratic sense, is true rhetoric, because it searches for truth and seeks to convince others of the truth without being able to provide definitive proofs in the same way that a mathematical proof can be demonstrated.[75]

Crucial to Gadamer's Socratic interpretation of practical wisdom is a strong emphasis on personal responsibility. He claims that with this concept, Aristotle expresses the insight that the acting person, in order to act responsibly, must attempt to let good reasons be the causes of his actions – and in this sense, he is implicitly obligated to give an account of his actions when one is demanded. This means that in the situation of acting, one cannot appeal to the authority of traditions or the opinions of others, but is thrown back upon one's own critical use of reason and personal responsibility (*Selbstverantwortung*).[76] This point is articulated in an early essay, in which Gadamer claims that *phronēsis* is characterised by dialogue, deliberation and scrutiny, because knowledge of how we should live is never presented as an object at our disposition.[77]

McDowell, for his part, echoes this emphasis on *Selbstverantwortung* in his interpretation of the modern concept of autonomy, as developed by Rousseau and, especially, Kant. In one passage, he emphasises why autonomy is a responsibility that sits on individuals:

> One may be confident that the practices of giving reasons that one has been brought up into correspond to reasons as they really are. Even so, it would be a way of giving up one's autonomy if one equated the question whether something that initially strikes one as a reason really is a reason with the question whether acknowledging it as a reason conforms to the conception of what is a reason for what that is embodied in the practices one has been brought up into. On such a question, "This is how my community thinks," or "This is how I

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[73] Gadamer, H.-G. 2002. *Die Lektion des Jahrhunderts. Ein philosophischer Dialog mit Riccardo Dottori,* 59f. Münster: LIT Verlag. Cf. Plato. *Gorgias*, 503a–b. In *Platonis Opera* III, ed. Burnet, J., 1901–07. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[74] Gadamer's connection between phronesis and rhetoric harks back to Aristotle's remarks on the exactness of his investigation in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle. *Ethica Nicomachea*, ed. Bywater, L. 1962, I 3 1094b, 11–28. Oxford: Oxford University Press). He contrasts the expectations of exactness in mathematics with those in rhetoric. It is implied by his argument that the domain of ethics is closer to the latter.

[75] Gadamer, H.-G. 2002. *Die Lektion des Jahrhunderts. Ein philosophischer Dialog mit Riccardo Dottori*, 61. Münster: LIT Verlag.

[76] Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles [1978]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 7, 221. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[77] Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Praktisches Wissen [1930]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 5, 241. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

have been brought up to think," is not to the point. One has to resolve for *oneself* the question whether the way one finds oneself inclined to think is the right way to think.[78]

Now, as regards the Aristotelian concept of *phronēsis*, McDowell views it as an important precursor to the modern concept of autonomy. In a programmatic passage in *Mind and World*, he claims that *phronēsis* is the model for his interpretation of the Kantian concept of 'understanding', 'the faculty that enables us to recognize and create the kind of intelligibility that is a matter of placement in the space of reasons'.[79] Like Gadamer, he emphasises the possibility of fundamental reflective criticism and radical revisions within the framework of the paradigm of *phronēsis*.[80] Although we are able to reject and discard important parts of our tradition, we can only perform such critical revisions from within the way of thinking that we are evaluating. The model of *phronēsis* allows for drastic revisions, but at the same time it rejects the idea of external criteria for evaluation; it insists that our reflections remain provisional and inconclusive, but it also maintains that this need not tempt us to indulge in the 'fantasy of an external validation'.[81]

Jean Grondin has aptly termed Gadamer's interpretation of ancient Greek philosophy a 'Socratic *Destruktion*'.[82] This Heideggerian term implies a radical questioning of an aspect of tradition – in this case, particularly the conception of Plato as a Platonist – with the immediate aim of demonstrating that our traditional, self-evident conception is misleading. However, the further goal of the *Destruktion* is constructive, namely to uncover an unrecognised potential of the truth behind the distorting façade of tradition. In Gadamer's interpretation, the positive aim is to shed new light on the fundamental Socratic motive of Plato's thinking and confront us with its continued philosophical relevance. From the point of view of the hermeneutic tradition and this concept of *Destruktion*, McDowell's work can be seen as performing a parallel *Destruktion* of the Kantian tradition of transcendental philosophy. Rejecting the traditional *sideways-on* interpretation of transcendental philosophy as a hopeless and misguided project, McDowell instead, following Sellars' work, rearticulates the philosophical motivations behind Kant's project by focusing on the conception of intentionality in terms of the intrinsic link between normativity, concepts and language. At the heart of this interpretation is the idea that our intentional life is lived within the sphere of responsibility. By exercising our power to judge, we also pretend to express our capacity to be responsibly free. The authority towards which we are responsible in such acts must be one that we critically scrutinise in the game of giving and asking for reasons – and it is for this reason that McDowell rejects the idea that we can be constrained by non-conceptual

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[78] McDowell, J. 2010. Autonomy and its burdens. *Harvard Review of Philosophy,* Vol. XVII: 12.

[79] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 79. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[80] Although he suggests that Aristotle himself may have been 'less than duly sensitive' to these possibilities in his philosophical practice (ibid.: 81).

[81] Ibid.: 82.

[82] Grondin, J. 1994. *Der Sinn für Hermeneutik*, 57. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

content. The non-conceptualist has to sever this tie 'between reasons for which a subject thinks as she does and reasons she can give for thinking that way'.[83] He traces this line of thought back to the Platonic concept of *logos,* which expresses precisely the idea of an intrinsic connection between reason and discourse.[84]

As we have seen, this connection is also a cornerstone of Gadamer's Socratic interpretation of ancient philosophy. As Gadamer emphasises, for the Platonic Socrates, discourse is the medium by which we understand ourselves, our actions and the world, precisely because it is in discourse that we can examine causes in terms of whether they are better or worse, i.e. insofar as they are not mere causes, but reasons that are constituted normatively. This Socratic tradition of normativity also emphasises the idea of giving and seeking an account, as expressed in the connection between dialogue and dialectics. In Gadamer's view, the Socratic ideal of unlimited *Rechenschaftsgabe* shapes the idea of the true rhetoric that we find in Plato and in the Aristotelian notion of practical wisdom. The Socratic paradigm of *logon didonai* – as developed in the Platonic idea of dialectic as true rhetoric, as well as in the Aristotelian concept of *phronēsis* – provides the conceptual framework in which we should place Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in order to insist that it is an advocate of a form of truth that is irreducible to the pragmatic criterion of use, but also an alternative to the methodologically grounded explanations of science.[85]

In *Truth and Method,* however, the Socratic paradigm of *logon didonai* is absent even in the important sections on practical wisdom and the logic of questions and answers.[86] In this work, Gadamer is less intent on emphasising the unbounded and transcendental character of free reason, but is instead more interested in stressing its situated character by developing such notions as play, event, tradition and language. These concepts are all supra-subjective notions in some sense, and it can therefore seem as if Gadamer belongs to a dominant trend in post-Hegelian philosophy that seeks to undermine or question the very idea of the transcendental character of the 'space of reasons' by appealing to a layer of non-conceptual content that constitutes

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[83] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 79. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Cf. his programmatic statement in the discussion with Habermas: 'Woran sonst sollte sich auch die theoretische Besinnung auf das Verstehen anschließen als an die Rhetorik, die von ältester T[r]adition her der einzige Anwalt eines Wahrheitsanspruches ist, der das Wahrscheinliche, das eikos (verisimile), und das der gemeinen Vernunft Einleuchtende gegen den Beweis- und Gewißheitsanspruch der Wissenschaft verteidigt? Überzeugen und Einleuchten, ohne eines Beweises fähig zu sein, ist offenbar ebenso sehr das Ziel und Maß des Verstehens und Auslegens wie der Rede- und Überredungskunst [...]' (Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Rhetorik, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik. Metakritische Erörterungen zur Wahrheit und Methode [1967]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 236. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[86] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 309–321; 355–363. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 317–329; 368–375. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

our intentional life but is inaccessible to subjective reflection.[87] In the next two chapters, I want to show that such an interpretation is misleading. In the present chapter, the constraints of the Socratic paradigm as articulated by McDowell have been described, and I have argued that this model is congenial with Gadamer's interpretations of ancient philosophy. The core of this paradigm is to conceive of intentionality in terms of the possibility for external constraint – in other words, guidance from the objects of the world. The aim of the following chapter is to explore how the necessary ontological implications of philosophical hermeneutics can also be developed according to the same model. On that basis, Gadamer's supra-subjective notions can then be re-examined and it will be possible to show that they do not stand in opposition to the Socratic paradigm. Concepts like tradition and event are ways to explicate *how* the free exercise of judgement constrained objectively by its subject matter is possible, rather than an attempt to undermine the very possibility of such acts taking place.

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[87] This is the diagnosis suggested by Robert Pippin. Pippin, R. 2002. Gadamer's Hegel. In *Gadamer's Century*, ed. Malpas, J. et al., 217–238. Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press.

Chapter 4
Perceptual Experience and the Ontology of Self-Presentation

Truth and Method begins with an excerpt from one of Rainer Marie Rilke's late poems:

> Catch only what you've thrown yourself, all is
> mere skill and little gain;
> but when you're suddenly the catcher of a ball
> thrown by an eternal partner
> with accurate and measured swing
> towards you, to your center, in an arch
> from the great bridge-building of God:
> why catching then becomes a power –
> not yours, a world's.[1]

Gadamer does not comment upon this poem, but I believe it can be interpreted as a condensed expression of the hermeneutic notion of meaning (*Sinn*) as world-involving, originating in a 'dialogue' between subject and world. Meaning understood as originating in subjectivity, as an embrace of what it has itself projected (*geworfen*) into the world, is rejected. In a case such as this, meaning would be little gain (*lässlicher Gewinn*) – the kind of 'frictionless spinning in a void' that results from disallowing any true exteriority. Instead, we should recognise that meaning unfolds in the dialogical structure of play. This structure is of divine origin (*aus Gottes grossen Brückenbau*), which means that it ultimately cannot be explained, since it is always already presupposed. If we can achieve an understanding of meaning as dialogue or play, the poem continues, then (*erst dann*) our responsiveness (*Fangen-können*) to meaning can be understood as a true power or faculty

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[1] 'Solang du Selbstgeworfenes fängst, ist alles / Geschicklichkeit und lässlicher Gewinn –; / erst wenn du plötzlich Fänger wirst des Balles, / den eine ewige Mitspielerin / dir zuwarf, deiner Mitte, in genau / gekonntem Schwung, in einem jener Bögen / aus Gottes grossen Brückenbau: / erst dann ist Fangen-können ein Vermögen, – / Nicht deines, einer Welt' (Rilke, R. M. 1986. *Die Gedichte*, 918. Frankfurt: Insel Verlag).

(*Vermögen*), rather than the result of an idle self-projection. However, as the final line emphasises, the dependency on exteriority makes such responsiveness as much a power of the world as a power of subjectivity.

In the following chapter, I want to elucidate the ontological dimension of hermeneutics by focusing on our perceptual relation to the world as a 'dialogical' relation. It will become clear that meaning, according to a hermeneutic account, originates in what McDowell terms the *equipoise* between subjective and objective.

I will take my point of departure in Gadamer's claim that language is the medium in which the original belongingness between man and world presents itself (Sect. 1). This ontological thesis complements Gadamer's transcendental claim, which I examined in the previous chapter: that language comprehends 'everything that can ever be an object'. As has become clear, this claim springs from the conception of our intentional life as characterised by the challenge of responsibility. This challenge, which is implicit in human intentionality, is given its paradigmatic expression in the Socratic demand to give an account, and an explicit transcendental formulation in Sellars' idea that our intentional life takes place within the space of reasons.

The idea that language is the medium in which the original belongingness between man and world presents itself obviously questions the idea of the world in itself, and thus opens the ontological dimension of hermeneutics. However, as clearly indicated by the examples of Davidson and Brandom, there remains a troubling ambiguity that threatens Gadamer's insistence on the world-involvement of what he terms linguisticality (*Sprachlichkeit*) (Sect. 2). Davidson and Brandom are both determined to reject any futile attempts at immediacy or Givenness in their account of our intentional life. They argue that ineffable bits of Given cannot play the role they are supposed to in traditional empiricism, namely acting as rational constraints on our beliefs. Hence they endorse a transcendental conception of language. However, according to Brandom and Davidson, the insight into the mythical character of Givenness undermines the idea of perceptual experience as such. According to traditional empiricism, the role of sensibility was to provide immediate sense data for higher cognitive faculties, but this role is undermined, thereby rendering suspect the very notion of perceptual or sensuous experience. 'Experience' is not, as Brandom himself put it, 'one of my words'.[2] In such a conception, experience only names the states or events where the world exercises a merely causal influence on us, with the consequence that any rational or meaning-involving influence is denied. This wholesale rejection of empiricism, however, seems fundamentally at odds with Gadamer's thinking. It is inconceivable that Gadamer, a vehement critic of any tendency of the natural sciences to claim ontological monopoly, should presuppose that one of our most intimate ways of being-in-the-world – perceptual experience – would be a matter of merely causal influence. Rather than eradicating the notion of perceptual experience as such,

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[2] Brandom, R. 2000. *Articulating Reasons: An introduction to inferentialism*, 205 n. 7. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Gadamer seems to assume that the meaning inherent in perception is always already embraced by linguisticality.

However, the lack of a positive account of the status of perceptual experience makes Gadamer's claim that language is the transcendental and ontological dimension of hermeneutics ambiguous and fragile. Should we respect the transcendental dimension of hermeneutics, which is fleshed out and supported by the attack on the Myth of the Given, and admit that hermeneutics must be understood, against Gadamer's self-understanding, as an anti-empiricist position supported by a scientific naturalist ontology and a corresponding account of perception? Or should we rather emphasise the ontological dimension of hermeneutics and insist that verbal meaning presupposes a more basic, meaning-involving form of world-disclosure, namely perceptual experience? But how could such an account avoid reinstalling a mythical layer of Givenness in our experiential life? How could it avoid rehabilitating the kind of appeal to a foundational level of pure perception, such as we find in Husserl's phenomenology, which Gadamer *also* rejects? We should be clear that the latter interpretation would entirely undermine the project to universalise hermeneutics undertaken in the third part of *Truth and Method*. At most, philosophical hermeneutics could articulate a regional ontology of the objects of the human sciences by presupposing the basic level of experiential life uncovered by Husserlian phenomenology, which insists that language is a founded phenomenon. In short, we are faced with an alternative that is both exegetically and systematically unacceptable.

Regarding this fundamental issue, McDowell's thinking can have profound significance for philosophical hermeneutics. His diagnosis in *Mind and World* of the aporetic oscillation between coherentism and the Myth of the Given as a symptom of a profound problem in modern philosophy, alongside his attempt to articulate a notion of perception that can dissolve this problem, is crucial for explaining the universal aspirations of philosophical hermeneutics.

There is, however, an important feature of McDowell's model of perceptual experience as it is developed in *Mind and World* that makes it problematic from the point of view of hermeneutics – namely, McDowell propounds an *apophantic* or propositional conception of perception. If perceptual experiences have propositional content, then there is of course no problem regarding how they might rationally underpin our propositionally structured beliefs. The difficulty with this model is that it construes our perceptual experience in an intellectualist and un-phenomenological way. Any reflection on our perception that is not inhibited by theoretical pre-understanding reveals that, when we perceive, we do not take in already defined propositional structures. Furthermore, the approach to meaning expressed in the apophantic model is radically questioned by hermeneutics. Following Heidegger, Gadamer has criticised the idea that meaning can be isolated in propositions (*Aussagen*) as a symptom of deep metaphysical prejudice. Recently, McDowell has modified his position on this point.[3] He now views the content of

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[3] McDowell, J. 2009. *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 256–272. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

perception as conceptual, while explicitly revoking that it is propositional. With this move, he believes himself able to avoid the Myth of the Given without committing himself to an intellectualist picture of our perception. In Chap. 6, I will critically examine this revision of McDowell's position in light of the hermeneutic conception of meaning. However, in this chapter I want to show the fruitfulness of a McDowellian picture of perception for hermeneutics while avoiding the apophanticism of *Mind and World*. I will do this by focusing on McDowell's idea of sensibility as a moment in the *self-presentation of the Concept*, which he develops in series of interpretations of Kant and Hegel (Sects. 3, 4, 5, and 6).[4] In these readings, there is no commitment to an apophantic picture of perception.

In Sect. 7, I stress the crucial emphasis on *passivity* in McDowell's account of perception. I argue that this emphasis might distance McDowell more from Kant and Hegel than he likes to acknowledge, but at the same time this emphasis precisely makes it possible to integrate McDowell's account with philosophical hermeneutics. An important point, therefore, is that McDowell's idea of sensibility as a moment in the self-presentation of the concept does not import a foreign philosophical agenda into Gadamer's work. In order to further substantiate this crucial thesis, I will show how this conception *both* corresponds to the account Gadamer gives of meaning in the experience of art and in the human sciences, *and* explains the universal intention expressed inadequately in the third part of *Truth and Method* (Sects. 8). In the two last sections of this chapter (Sects. 9 and 10), I discuss two important consequences of the revised transcendental and ontological dimension of hermeneutics. First, I attempt to show that self-presentation, not interpretation, is the most fundamental term in philosophical hermeneutics. Secondly, I focus on how McDowell's approach to self-presentation can counter a critique of this notion put forward by Figal. In his critique, Figal claims that the notion of self-presentation is a substantialist doctrine that marginalises the role of subjectivity and freedom. Figal's critique rightly rejects a certain tendency in Gadamer's account of self-presentation. I argue, however, that this tendency is inessential and that the concept of self-presentation can be articulated so as to be immune to Figal's critique. Basically, I emphasise that if one conceives the realm of spontaneity – responsible, self-conscious freedom – as unbounded, then it becomes necessary to understand perceptual experience and reality in terms of self-presentation. The concept of self-presentation does not, therefore, imply a denouncement of subjectivity and freedom, since self-presentation, in Hegelian terms, is considered the free self-realisation of the Concept. In other words, reality

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[4] These interpretations are collected in McDowell, J. 2009. *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. McDowell's attempt to trace a path from Kant to Hegel concerning the question of the transcendental role of sensibility is, as he emphasises, indebted to Pippin, R. 1989. *Hegel's Idealism: The satisfaction of self-consciousness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Cf. McDowell, J. 2009. *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 69. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Below, I will discuss one central disagreement between McDowell and Pippin in relation to my interpretation of Gadamer's notion of tradition (cf. Sect. 4 in Chap. 5 below).

does not 'just' present itself in experience, imposing its structure on us in an immediate way. Rather, reality is always already mediated by conceptual capacities that are open to further investigation, clarification and revision by subjective reflection. In this way, philosophical hermeneutics is able to avoid a substantialist pitfall and achieve what McDowell terms an *equipoise* between subjective and objective, or what Gadamer calls a dialogical understanding of the relation between the interpreter and the object of interpretation.

1 Language and the World

In the final section of the third part of *Truth and Method*, 'Sprache als Horizont einer hermeneutischen Ontologie', Gadamer attempts to explain the ontological implications of his position. He develops the idea that language is a medium (*Mitte*) in which I and world manifest their original belonging together (*ursprünglichen Zusammengehörigkeit darstellen*).[5]

If the world is linguistically constituted (*sprachverfaßt*), then the idea of a *world-in-itself* becomes problematic. The criterion for the expansion of our world-view cannot be a *world-in-itself* beyond all language. This would imply the idea of a position outside our human, linguistically constituted world, from which this pure *world-in-itself* would be accessible, at least in principle. Rather, we must say that every world-view as such intends the *world-in-itself* not as an object, but rather as the whole to which our verbal experience relates. In this sense, the world is not different from the views in which it presents itself.[6]

A consequence of Gadamer's view that the world presents itself in language is that he denies a radical incommensurability between different languages and between historical epochs. Even if people brought up in a different linguistic and cultural context see the world differently, this does not mean that they live in another world that is radically inaccessible to us. And even if drastically different epochs have succeeded each other throughout history, and therefore we may speak of different 'worlds', this is only colourful imagery:

> It is true that those who are brought up in a particular linguistic and cultural tradition see the world in a different way from those who belong to other traditions. It is true that the historical "worlds" that succeed one another in the course of history are different from one another and from the world of today; but in whatever tradition we consider it, it is always a human – i.e. verbally constituted – world that presents itself to us. As verbally constituted,

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[5] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 469. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 478. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[6] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 444. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 451. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

> every such world is of itself always open to every possible insight and hence to every expansion of its own world picture, and is accordingly available to others.[7]

McDowell makes a connection between Gadamer's idea of the intrinsic world-involvement of linguistic experience and Donald Davidson's critique of the dualism between scheme and content.[8] Specifically, McDowell is interested in pointing out an important convergence between Gadamer's and Davidson's strategy to avoid relativism. As for Gadamer, McDowell emphasises that relativism is not implicated by denying that we are able to distinguish between the world itself and the topic of our world-view. On the contrary, Gadamer wants to maintain that in every world-view the existence of the *world-in-itself* is intended. Given the plurality of world-views, he can only uphold this idea by saying that world-views are not irreducibly closed off from each other. Each world-view potentially contains, and therefore can be extended into, every other.[9] The historical horizon in which we are situated is not a prison but can be extended into or fused with other horizons constituted by a different historical situatedness. McDowell writes:

> Our worldview, precisely because it is, qua worldview, open to every other, has as its topic the world itself, not some supposed item constituted by just what we think. [...] Our worldview includes its own receptiveness to the possibility of correction, not only by efforts at improvement that are internal to our practices of inquiry but also through coming to appreciate insights of other worldviews in the course of coming to understand them.[10]

In Davidson's work, this fundamental point is formulated in terms of the rejection of 'a repertoire that is meaning-involving, and so intelligible, but not intelligible to us.'[11] Davidson rejects this idea of the world as 'something neutral and common that lies outside all schemes.'[12] He rejects that we can understand the world that we confront through the conceptual scheme as different from the world with which we

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[7] 'Gewiß sehen die in einer bestimmten sprachlichen und kulturellen Tradition Er-zogenen die Welt anders als anderen Traditionen Angehörige. Gewiß sind die geschichtlichen "Welten", die einander im Laufe der Geschichte ablösen, vonei-nander und von der heutigen Welt verschieden. Gleichwohl ist es immer eine menschliche, d. h eine sprachverfaßte Welt, die sich, in welcher Überlieferung auch immer, darstellt. Als sprachlich verfaßte ist eine jede solche Welt von sich aus für jede mögliche Einsicht und damit für jede Erweiterung ihres eigenen Weltbildes offen und entsprechend für andere zugänglich' (ibid.).

[8] McDowell, J. 2009. Gadamer and Davidson on understanding and relativism. In *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical essays*, 134–151. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Cf. Davidson, D. 2001. On the very idea of a conceptual scheme. In *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 183–198. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

[9] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 445. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 452. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[10] McDowell, J. 2009. Gadamer and Davidson on understanding and relativism. In *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical essays*, 137f. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[11] Ibid.: 136.

[12] Davidson, D. 2001. On the very idea of a conceptual scheme. In *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 190. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

understand our own practice to be engaged.[13] We simply cannot make sense of the idea of a *world-in-itself*. Since it is the always already familiar that turns out to be presupposed, Davidson can conclude that by giving up the dualism of conceptual scheme and a common and neutral world behind this scheme, '[. . .] we do not give up the world, but re-establish unmediated contact with the familiar objects whose objects make our sentences true or false'.[14] This insistence on the world-involvement of thought and language is quite congenial with Gadamer's approach.

2 The Problem of Perceptual Experience

There is, however, another aspect of Davidson's thinking about the relation between self and world that reveals a potential ambiguity in the hermeneutic understanding of language as world-view. Davidson also describes the dualism he questions as one between *conceptual scheme* and (*sensory*) *experience*. According to such a line of thought, conceptual schemes either *organise* or *fit* a stream of pure experience (which can be construed in different ways, as sense data, surface irritations, sensory promptings etc.).[15] Putting the rejected dualism in these terms makes it clear that Davidson's target is a dogma of empiricism. In fact, Davidson's attack on the 'dualism of scheme and content, of organizing system and something waiting to be organized' denounces empiricism as such, because if we give up this idea '[. . .] it is not clear that there is anything distinctive left to call empiricism'.[16]

This general denouncement of empiricism has radical consequences, which are apparent in Davidson's view on the epistemology of perception. Quoting Rorty, he claims that 'empirical content can be intelligibly in the picture even though we carefully stipulate that the world's impact on our senses has nothing to do with justification'.[17] For such a position, perceptual experience is no longer a viable term if it is supposed to denote that the relation between our bodies and the world refers

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[13] McDowell, J. 2009. Gadamer and Davidson on understanding and relativism. In *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical essays*, 136. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[14] Davidson, D. 2001. On the very idea of a conceptual scheme, In *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 198. Oxford: Clarendon Press. As McDowell remarks, Davidson's talk of 'unmediated contact' should not fool us here. It is directed against 'epistemic intermediaries' such as sense data, 'objects of direct awareness that yields indirect awareness of things in the environment' (McDowell, J. 2009. Gadamer and Davidson on understanding and relativism. In *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical essays*, 137 n. 7. Cambridge: Harvard University Press). Since the immediate contact described here is made possible by being introduced to language, it is a mediated immediacy.

[15] Davidson, D. 2001. On the very idea of a conceptual scheme, In *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 191f. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

[16] Ibid.: 189.

[17] Davidson, D. 2005. Appendix: Replies to Rorty, Stroud, McDowell and Pereda. In *Truth, Language and History*, 321. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Davidson quotes from an unpublished paper by Rorty.

to any interaction other than the purely causal, as it is described by the natural sciences (ibid.). There is no relation of intelligibility at play in our perceptual experience, and hence no question of our impressions playing any justificatory role: 'The relation between a sensation and a belief cannot be logical, since sensations are not beliefs or other propositional attitudes. What then is the relation? The answer is, I think, obvious: the relation is causal. Sensations cause some beliefs and in this sense are the basis or the ground of those beliefs. But causal explanation of a belief does not show how or why the belief is justified.'[18] In short, Davidson cannot allow our experiences to rationally constrain our thinking, but only to causally influence it.[19] Therefore, it is only natural that Davidson develops a *coherence* theory of truth and knowledge, which entails that what our experiences reveal cannot count as a reason for holding a belief. The essence of this theory is expressed in the (in)famous slogan: 'nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief'.[20]

How does this compare with Gadamer? In accordance with his point of departure in the human sciences, Gadamer's notion of experience targets our encounters with history, art, texts and other persons rather than the question of our perceptual interaction with the world. But can such a notion of experience be viable without presupposing a picture of how our perception works? Gadamer is remarkably silent on the topic of perceptual experience (*Wahrnehmung*). The reason for this is that he sees the modern tradition of philosophical or phenomenological hermeneutics as being inaugurated by Heidegger's scathing critique of the Husserlian idea of pure perception.[21] As Gadamer views it, this critique paved the way for a hermeneutic understanding of our fundamental being in the world. Disregarding the question whether this critique of Husserl is fair, Gadamer's neglect of perceptual experience is itself questionable. It is irrefutable that our encounters with works of art or other persons include an essential perceptual aspect – and, given Gadamer's critique of Husserl's account of perception, we might ask what such an aspect could amount to in a hermeneutic theory of understanding. Even stranger is the total absence of a discussion of perception in connection with the discussion of the relation between language and world-view in the third part of *Truth and Method*, which ultimately underpins the universality claim of hermeneutics. How can Gadamer – given his claims – ignore what is *prima facie* our most direct relation with the world, namely perceptual experience? It is clear that Gadamer would reject Davidson's proposal, a purely causal account of what takes place between our bodies and the world. In

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[18] Davidson, D. 1986. A coherence theory of truth and knowledge. In *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. Lepore, E. 311. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

[19] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 14. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[20] Davidson, D. 1986. A coherence theory of truth and knowledge. In *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. Lepore, E. 310. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

[21] Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Text und Interpretation [1983]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 339. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

contrast to Davidson, Gadamer does not privilege the perspective of the natural sciences. Like Davidson, however, he is also critical of a traditional empiricist notion of sense experience in terms of uninterpreted content. This criticism is perhaps most clearly expressed in the following passage:

> Experience is not wordless to begin with, subsequently becoming an object of reflection by being named, by being subsumed under the universality of the word. Rather, experience of itself seeks and finds words that express it. We seek the right word – i.e. the word that really belongs to the thing – so that in it the thing comes into language.[22]

However, Gadamer never, in *Truth and Method* or elsewhere, discusses an alternative account of perception. Given this lack of interest on Gadamer's behalf, a phenomenologically inclined reader might be excused for expressing distrust that Gadamer actually achieved his goal of giving a convincing description of the ontological and world-constituting character of language. Is Gadamer not after all relying on accounts of a more primitive or basic level of our being in the world – paradigmatically, accounts of our perceptual experience – which, if properly considered, would substantially modify his emphasis on language as world-constituting? Is philosophical hermeneutics after all perhaps not better conceived of as a 'regional ontology' in the Husserlian sense, dealing with certain categories of phenomena such as artworks and texts, but lacking any universal implications? Alternatively, from a naturalist approach, one might consider Gadamer's hermeneutics as a more or less useful piece of description of a type of experience that has merely an epiphenomenal status: beneath – and, ultimately, determining – the structures of hermeneutic experience is a reality that can be approached and described only within the framework of the natural sciences. As long as hermeneutics cannot account for the status of our perceptual relation to the world, then the ontological dimension of its endeavour is undermined; it is therefore vital to address the problem of perceptual experience.

In *Mind and World*, McDowell questions Davidson's demolition of empiricism, in what may be seen as an expression of discomfort with Davidson's conclusion. How, McDowell asks, can the rejection of the idea that our language schematises 'material waiting to be organized' or 'uninterpreted content' lead both to the denial of anything but pure causality in our perceptual interaction with the world and to the claim that we 're-establish unmediated contact' with the objects of the world? In other words, McDowell is suspicious of Davidson's 'bland confidence' that empirical content is a meaningful notion when we have ruled out that the world's impact on our senses has nothing to do with justification.[23] As an alternative, McDowell investigates the possibility of embracing the world-involving consequence of

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[22] 'Die Erfahrung ist nicht zunächst wortlos und wird dann durch die Benennung zum Reflexionsgegenstand gemacht, etwa in der Weise der Subsumtion unter der Allgemeinheit des Wortes. Vielmehr gehört es zur Erfahrung selbst, daß sie die Worte sucht und findet, die sie ausdrücken.' Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 417. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 421. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[23] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 15. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Davidson's critique of the dogma of conceptual scheme and empirical content, without accepting the result that experience has to be accounted for in purely causal terms.

It is important to be aware of the relative closeness of Davidson's position to McDowell's own conception. According to McDowell, Davidson's rejection of the dualism between conceptual scheme and empirical content is a different expression of the very same insight found in Sellars' attack on the Myth of the Given.[24] But even if Sellars' student, Brandom, draws similar consequences from the denouncement of immediacy as Davidson, McDowell does not.[25] Brandom takes the implications of the attack on the Myth of the Given to be an undermining of the very idea of experience, and thus arrives at a position congenial to Davidson: a complete rejection of empiricism. In the terms of the previous chapter, we may therefore say that for Brandom it is exactly the eradication of immediacy implicated in the essential link between concepts, normativity and language that demolishes empiricism, and with it the very idea of experience. Brandom writes:

> "Experience" is not one of my words. [. . .] I do not see that we need – either in epistemology or, more important, in semantics – to appeal to any intermediaries between perceptible facts and reports of them that are noninferentially elicited by the exercise of reliable differential responsive dispositions. There are, of course, many *causal* intermediaries, since the noninferential observation report is a propositionally contentful commitment, the acknowledgement of which stands at the end of a whole causal chain of reliably covarying events, including a cascade of neurophysiological ones. But I do not see that any of these has any particular conceptual or (therefore) cognitive significance.[26]

For Brandom (and for Davidson), the content of experiences is taken – as in 'classical' forms of empiricism – to be immediate or non-conceptual (sensory) content. As the attack on the Myth of the Given shows, this entails that the relevant content is beyond what can be linguistically articulated, and therefore cannot be of any use in our account of knowledge and intentionality. This renders suspicious the very idea of experiences making possible our access to the world. Within this framework, it is only natural that Brandom cannot see any explanatory value in the concept and, much like Davidson, confines himself to the level of beliefs. In Brandom's picture, we do not have experiential access to our surroundings in any meaning-involving sense of the term – rather, we find ourselves with beliefs.

It is precisely Brandom's and Davidson's idea that we are confined to the level of belief that McDowell finds deeply problematic. As we have seen, McDowell, like Brandom, follows the Kantian lead expressed in the notion of spontaneity. However, in McDowell's view, Brandom's rejection of the explanatory value of the

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[24] Ibid: 158.

[25] According to McDowell, Sellars doesn't either. Cf. Kant, Sellars and intentionality and Why is Sellars' essay called *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind?* in McDowell, J. 2009. *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 3–65; 221–238. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[26] Brandom, R. 2000. *Articulating Reasons: An introduction to inferentialism*, 205 n. 7. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

concept of experience represents 'the operations of spontaneity as a frictionless spinning in a void'.[27] In fact, McDowell thinks this position is so unstable that it is likely to trigger a recoil into an appeal to the Given. Thus, he diagnoses an unhappy oscillation between fruitless appeals to immediacy and an unsatisfactory confinement to the level of belief that 'loses the world'.[28] I think Gadamer's 'ontological turn', as it is developed in the third part of *Truth and Method*, is in fact susceptible to this oscillation precisely because he does not flesh out how he conceives the status of our perceptual experience. In the following, I want to examine McDowell's approach to perceptual experience and see if it may provide philosophical hermeneutics with a robust ontological dimension.

3 Kantian Intuitions as Conceptual Shapings of Sensory Consciousness

In order to overcome the *aporia* sketched above, McDowell seeks to make the idea of a so-called *minimal empiricism* intelligible, thereby attempting to rehabilitate the idea that the concept of experience can play a transcendental role.[29] At issue is the

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[27] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 11. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[28] It should be noted that in *Mind and World*, McDowell only criticises Davidson and not Brandom. However, in a later paper, he claims that both Brandom and Davidson reject empiricism precisely due to their view that 'if there is anything that deserves to be called "experience", it figures not in the credentials of empirical knowledge but at most in its causation' (McDowell, J. 2009. Self-Determining subjectivity and external constraint. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 91. Cambridge: Harvard University Press). McDowell's most detailed attack on the problematic consequences of Brandom's renunciation of empiricism is in McDowell, J. 2010. Brandom on observation. In *Reading Brandom*: *On making it explicit*, ed. Weiss, B. et al. London: Routledge. It has also been disputed whether McDowell actually succeeds in overcoming Davidson's coherentism. A number of commentators have expressed doubts regarding whether McDowell is able to secure a fundamental difference to Davidson (Wright, C. 1998. McDowell's oscillation. In *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58 (2): 395–402; Wright, C. 2002. Postscript to Chapter 8. In *Reading McDowell: On Mind and World*, ed. Smith, N.H. 160–173; Cf. also Christensen, C.B. 2008. *Self and World – From Analytic Philosophy to Phenomenology*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter; Ginsborg, H. 2006. Empirical concepts and the content of experience. In *European Journal of Philosophy* 14 (3): 349–372). To a certain extent, McDowell acknowledges the validity of this critique, but he has recently modified his position in a way that he thinks accommodates it. In Chap. 6, I shall return to this modification (cf. Sect. 4 in Chap. 6 below). One of the reasons why I, in the following, choose to present McDowell's position through his interpretation of the Kant-Hegel relation rather than go straight to *Mind and World* is that in this way I can avoid the elements of McDowell's argument that he has now renounced and which would, according to McDowell himself, make his position difficult to separate from coherentism.

[29] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, xii. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. McDowell also speaks of a 'transcendental empiricism' (e.g. McDowell, J. 2009. Experiencing the world. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 243–256. Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

attempt to reinstate experience as a 'tribunal' that can pass verdict on our thinking. Now, according to McDowell, 'no one has come closer than Kant in showing us how to find intentionality unproblematic, and there is no better way for us to find intentionality unproblematic than by seeing what Kant was driving at'.[30] Therefore, to get a grip on McDowell's account of experience, we should focus on his interpretation of Kant.

In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, at the very beginning of the Transcendental Logic, Kant famously distinguishes the mind's two main sources for knowledge (*Gemüt*): receptivity and spontaneity. He applies the term *sensibility* to the receptivity of the mind to impressions, 'in so far as it is in some way affected'. And he uses the term *understanding* to refer to spontaneity of knowledge, 'the mind's power to produce representations from itself' (*das Vermögen Vorstellungen selbst hervorzubringen*).[31] He then continues: 'To neither of these powers may a preference be given to the other. Without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.'[32]

The guiding Kantian idea is therefore that the transcendental question of the possibility of representational content, the question of the possibility of thought being directed at the objective world, must be answered in terms of an intrinsic interplay between spontaneity and receptivity, concepts and intuitions (*Anschauungen*).[33] It is this basic approach to which McDowell, against Brandom and Davidson, commits in order to retain a transcendental role for the intuitional content of sensory receptivity and thus 'save' the notion of experience.

McDowell is well aware that the Kantian conception can easily be seen as an empiricist version of the Myth of the Given:

> In this interpretation, sensory receptivity yields immediately given cognitions. Conceptual capacities, which belong to the spontaneous understanding, come into play only subsequently, in basic empirical judgments, conceived as directly warranted by those immediately given cognitions and in turn warranting the further reaches of a world view.[34]

But the supposed immediately given cognitions could not justify our basic empirical judgements, and therefore could not underpin our world-view. Conceiving them as non-conceptual bits of Given ensures that they could at most function as triggers, promptings or exculpations, rather than justifications. In fact, by excluding

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[30] McDowell, J. 2009. Sellars, Kant and intentionality. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 3. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[31] Kant, I. 1929. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 50f/B 74f. Translated by N.K. Smith. London: Macmillan. Kant, I. 1911. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. In *Kant's gesammelte Schriften* III. Berlin: Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

[32] 'Keine dieser Eigenschaften ist der andern vorzuziehen. Ohne Sinnlichkeit würde uns kein Gegenstand gegeben, und ohne Verstand keiner gedacht werden. Gedanken ohne Inhalt sind leer, Anschauungen ohne Begriffe sind blind.' Ibid.: A 51/B 75.

[33] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 4. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[34] McDowell, J. 2009. Self-Determining subjectivity and external constraint. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 92. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

the supposed immediate cognitions from rational relatedness to a world-view, we make it impossible to understand them as *cognitions* at all.[35] Such a reading of Kant is what McDowell, following Sellars, sees as an instance of the Myth of the Given: the idea that sensibility *by itself* could make things available for the sort of cognition that draws on the subject's rational power.

McDowell offers an alternative to this doomed interpretation of the Kantian duality between spontaneity and receptivity, understanding and sensibility.[36] In the following (Sects. 3, 4, 5, and 6), I will present what I take to be the main steps in McDowell's reading of Kant. McDowell's alternative is developed in an ingenious interpretation of the B version of the Transcendental Deduction. McDowell finds the guiding thread for his interpretation in a remark expressed in Sect. 2, leading up to the Transcendental Deduction:

> The same function which gives unity the various representations *in a judgment* also gives unity the mere synthesis of various representations *in an intuition*, and this unity, in its most general expression, we entitle the pure concept of the understanding. The same understanding, through the [very] same operations by which in concepts, by means of analytic unity, it produced the logical form of a judgment, also introduces a transcendental content into its representations, by means of the synthetic unity of the manifold in intuitions in general.[37]

The remark that functions as a 'guiding thread' for McDowell is located in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in the chapter 'The clue to the discovery of all pure concepts of the understanding' (*Von dem Leitfaden der Entdeckung aller reinen Verstandesbegriffe*). Accordingly, McDowell emphasises the importance of the idea that Kant expresses in his remark concerning the attempt to enumerate the categories. The idea that intuitions have the same logical structures as judgements is the reason why 'an inventory of the logical structures possessed by judgments can be a clue, a guiding thread, in arriving at the enumeration of the categories – the pure concepts of the understanding – in their guise as the logical structures of intuitions'.[38] McDowell adds that by speaking, rather abstractly, of 'logical

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[35] Ibid.

[36] There is a sharp contrast here to Brandom's interpretation of Kant, who attempts to reconstruct a Kantian approach to intentionality without invoking receptivity, sensibility and intuitions at all (Brandom, R. 2009. *Reason in Philosophy: Animating ideas*, 27–51. Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

[37] 'Dieselbe Funktion, welche den verschiedenen Vorstellungen in einem Urteile Einheit gibt, die gibt auch der bloßen Synthesis verschiedene Vorstellungen in einer Anschauung Einheit, welche, allgemein ausgedruckt, der reine Verstandesbegriff heißt. Derselbe Verstand also, und zwar durch eben dieselben Handlungen, wodurch er in Begriffen, vermittelst der analytischen Einheit, die logische Form eines Urteils zu Stande brachte, bringt auch, vermittelst der synthetischen Einheit des Mannigfaltigen in der Anschauung überhaupt, in seine Vorstellungen einen transzendentalen Inhalt [...]' Kant, I. 1929. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 79/B 104. Translated by N.K. Smith. London: Macmillan. Kant, I. 1911. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. In *Kant's gesammelte Schriften* III. Berlin: Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

[38] McDowell, J. 2009. Self-determining subjectivity and external constraint. In *Having the World in View. Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 94. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

structures', we do not commit ourselves to the 'specific inventory of logical forms that Kant works with'.[39]

The crucial point, however, is that McDowell interprets[40] Kant's remark as claiming that intuitions (*Anschauungen*) have logical structures, and that these structures are the same as the logical structures possessed by judgements. In this way, we can make sense of how intuitions present objects to us by seeing intuitions as possessing logical structures.[41] In other words, to avoid the Kantian duality becoming an unbridgeable dualism, which will eventually undermine the idea of a transcendental role for receptivity or sensibility, McDowell insists that our intuitions are imbued with conceptual content.[42]

McDowell uses the example of a visual experience of a red cube to illustrate his interpretation of the relation between intuitions and judgements in a Kantian account of intentionality.

> Here the fact that, say, "cube" figures in a specification of the content of an intuition – the intuition represents its object as that red *cube* – reflects the fact that for one to be the subject of such an intuition is in part for there to be actualized in one's sensory consciousness the very same *conceptual* capacity – possession of the concept of a cube – whose exercise

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[39] Ibid. Furthermore, McDowell points out the relevance of the quoted remark as '[...] a key to how, in the Transcendental Deduction, Kant undertakes to vindicate the "objective validity" of the categories. The idea is to display the categories as unities that can account for the objective purport of both empirical judgments and intuitions' (ibid.). Basically, McDowell reads the first half of the second edition of the Transcendental Deduction (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B 129–142) as an elaboration of 'a conception of intuitions as instantiations of forms required by the pure understanding in sensory receptivity'. This is for Kant an important move toward 'showing that those forms provide for objective purport. If he can entitle himself to suppose that the categorical form of intuitions enters into their making objects immediately present to the subject, that will display those forms as essential to what can be conceived as the ground level case of objective purport' (McDowell, J. 2009. On Pippin's postscript. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 191. Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

[40] It should be noted that McDowell develops his reading of Kant from an interpretation of Sellars' reading of Kant. For McDowell's most recent attempt to articulate the difference between his and Sellars' reading, cf. McDowell, J. 2009. Sensory Consciousness in Kant and Sellars. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 108–126. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[41] McDowell, J. 2009. Hegel's idealism as radicalization of Kant. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 84. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Contrast McDowell's emphasis on the passage from 'Von dem Leitfaden...' with the interpretation of, for example, Allison. He writes: 'Kant defines an intuition as "singular representation" [...] and he contends that it refers "immediately to its object" (*bezieht sich unmittelbar auf den Gegenstand*) (A320/B377) [...] it is precisely in virtue of its "immediacy", that is, its direct, nonconceptual mode of representing, that an intuition can present a singular object to the mind and, therefore, serve as a [singular representation]' (Allison, H. 1983. Kant's transcendental idealism. An interpretation and defence, 67. New Haven: Yale University Press).

[42] Kant of course does not connect conceptual capacities to language acquisition. So according to McDowell, we must add a 'twentieth-century element', namely that the capacity to enjoy intuitions, i.e. having the world in view, 'comes with being initiated into language' (McDowell, J. 2009. Kant, Sellars and intentionality. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 6. Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

would partly determine the predicative element in the content of a judgment whose content we could specify with [an] imagined occupancy of the subject's viewpoint, in the form "That is a red cube".[43]

McDowell describes the relation between different conceptual capacities in intuitions and in judgements as a specific '"logical" togetherness'. This specification is necessary in order to distinguish how the same conceptual capacity is actualised in different intuitions or judgements. For example, the same conceptual capacity ('cube') is actualised in an intuition of a red cube and in an intuition of a blue cube. Likewise, there is a conceptual capacity actualised in the intuition of both a red pyramid and a red cube. In the case of the intuition of a red cube, at least two conceptual capacities ('cube' and 'red') are actualised together. According to McDowell, 'together' does not just mean actualised in the same intuition. In this case, we could not distinguish enjoying an intuition of a red cube from an intuition of a red pyramid and a blue cube, where the same conceptual capacities are also actualised in an intuition. Rather, the two conceptual capacities have to be actualised with the same 'logical or semantical togetherness' as when we express the judgement with the words 'That is a red cube'.[44] Therefore, following Kant's remark from 'The clue to the discovery...', we can say that in the example given in the quote, the judgement 'That is a red cube' is an exercise of the *same conceptual capacities* with the *same logical togetherness* as are actualised in the intuition.[45]

It is worth noticing how McDowell comments upon Kant's characterisation of intuitions as *immediate sensible representations of objects* at the beginning of the Transcendental Aesthetic: 'In whatever manner and by whatever means a mode of knowledge may relate to objects, *intuition* is that through which it is in immediate relation to them, and from which all thought gains its material.'[46] Following Sellars, McDowell glosses this description in terms of intuitions being representations of '*thises* (or *thats*); more fully of "*this-suches*" or "*that-suches*"'.[47] McDowell acknowledges that Kant connects concepts with generality. For example, at one point he says that whereas an intuition 'relates immediately to the object and is single, [a concept] relates to it mediately by means of a feature which several things have in common'.[48]

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[43] Ibid.: 33f.

[44] Ibid.: 10f.; 30ff.

[45] Ibid.: 33f.

[46] 'Auf welche Art und durch welche Mittel sich auch immer eine Erkenntnis auf Gegenstände beziehen mag, so ist doch diejenige, wodurch sie sich auf dieselbe unmittelbar bezieht, und worauf alles Denken als Mittel abzweckt, die *Anschauung*' Kant, I. 1929. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 19/B 33. Translated by N.K. Smith. London: Macmillan. Kant, I. 1911. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. In Kant's gesammelte Schriften III. Berlin: Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

[47] McDowell, J. 2009. Kant, Sellars and intentionality. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 32. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[48] 'Jene [die Anschaung] bezieht sich ummittelbar auf den Gegenstand und ist einzeln; dieser [der Begriff] mittelbar, vermittelst eines Merkmals, was mehreren Dingen gemein sein kann' Kant, I. 1929. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 320/B 377. Translated by N.K. Smith. London: Macmillan. Kant, I. 1911. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. In Kant's gesammelte Schriften III. Berlin: Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

Still, the example of an intuition of *that* red cube does not fall outside of Kant's scope. Even though the example refers to 'the particularity of a subject's experiential situation, [. . .] a capacity to mean determinate objects by utterances of "that. . ." or non-overt counterparts [. . .] is not restricted to the particular actualization of it we are imagining.'[49] In this sense, such context-specific actualisations of conceptual capacities still have a generality.[50]

The interpretation of intuitions developed by McDowell in his readings of Kant and Hegel supports the Kantian line of argumentation that is already present in *Mind and World*. Here, McDowell emphasises how the function of receptivity in the Kantian framework is to secure the necessary external constraint on our exercises of spontaneity. This is a crucial function if we are to retain the idea that freedom of thought is answerable to an external reality, and thereby recognisable *as* freedom rather than pure arbitrariness. The alternative is that our emphasis on the intrinsic relation between rationality and freedom makes experience degenerate into a self-contained game.[51] The approach recommended by McDowell in *Mind and World* is to understand experiential intake not as a bare confrontation with a piece of an extra-conceptual given, but as an episode that already possesses conceptual content.[52] If the impingements by the world on the receptivity of our senses are conceived as already having conceptual content, the level of bare immediacy presupposed in the Myth of the Given is eradicated. On the other hand, the demand for rational constraint by receptivity on our operations of spontaneity is maintained, and not dismissed in favour of mere causal influence, as is the case in Brandom's and Davidson's account. In one passage, McDowell writes:

> We must not suppose that spontaneity first figures only in judgements in which we put a construction on experiences, with experiences conceived as deliverances of receptivity to whose constitution spontaneity makes no contribution. Experiences are indeed receptivity in operation; so they can satisfy the need for an external control on our freedom in empirical thinking. But conceptual capacities, capacities that belong to spontaneity, are already at work in experiences themselves, not just in judgements based on them; so experiences can intelligibly stand in rational relations to our exercises of the freedom that is implicit in the idea of spontaneity.[53]

McDowell's interpretation of Kant and Hegel can be seen as a way to flesh out the thought expressed in this programmatic passage.

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[49] McDowell, J. 2009. Kant, Sellars and intentionality. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 33 n. 18. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[50] I shall return to the context-specific notion of rationality that this account of intuitions implies. Cf. Sects. 7, 8, and 9 in Chap. 5.

[51] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 5. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[52] Ibid.: 9.

[53] Ibid.: 26.

4   The Unity of the Forms of Sensibility

The second point that I want to emphasise in McDowell's reading of Kant concerns his interpretation of the unity of the forms of sensibility. On the rejected reading, Kant's leading question in the Transcendental Deduction is whether or not the forms of our understanding 'fit' with that which is presented to us by our senses. According to McDowell, however, Kant's question is how we can be certain that our understanding enables us to direct thought at reality at all, in order to have so-called 'objective purport'.[54] This objective purport is a function of conceptual structures that unifies our intuitions.

Now, in some passages in the *preamble* to the Transcendental Deduction, Kant seems to question such a 'conceptualism':[55] 'For appearances can certainly be given in intuition independently of functions of the understanding.'[56] Further, he writes: 'Objects may, therefore, appear to us without their being under the necessity of being related to the functions of understanding.'[57] Finally, there is this passage, also from the preamble:

> Appearances might very well be so constituted that the understanding should not find them to be in accordance with the conditions of its unity. Everything might be in such confusion that, for instance, in the series of appearances nothing presented itself that might yield a rule of synthesis and so answer to the concept of cause and effect. This concept would then be altogether empty, null, and meaningless. But since intuition stands in no need whatsoever of the functions of thought, appearances would none the less present objects to our intuition.[58]

These passages might seem to contradict McDowell's interpretation of intuitions as possessing conceptual structures, as Kant seems to claim that intuitions are non-conceptual episodes in the mental life of the subject.[59] Now, McDowell

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[54] McDowell, J. 2009. On Pippin's postscript. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 191. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[55] Cf. Hanna, R. 2006. Kant and non-conceptual content. In *European Journal of Philosophy* 13 (2): 247–290.

[56] '[…] ohne Funktionen des Verstandes können allerdings Erscheinungen in der Anschauung gegeben werden' (Kant, I. 1929. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 90/B 122. Translated by N.K. Smith. London: Macmillan. Kant, I. 1911. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. In Kant's gesammelte Schriften III. Berlin: Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften).

[57] '[…] mithin können uns allerdings Gegenstände erscheinen, ohne daß sie sich notwendig auf Funktionen des Verstandes beziehen müssen' (ibid.: A 89/B 122).

[58] '[…] es könnten wohl allenfalls Erscheinungen so beschaffen sein, daß der Verstand sie den Bedingungen seiner gar nicht gemäß fände, und so alles in Verwirrung läge, daß z.B. in der Reihenfolge der Erscheinungen sich nichts darböte, was eine Regel der Synthesis an die Hand gäbe, und also dem Begriffe der Ursache und Wirkung entspräche, so daß dieser Begriff also ganz leer, nichtig und ohne Bedeutung wäre Erscheinungen würde nichts destoweniger unserer Anschauung Gegenstände darbieten, *denn die Anschauung bedarf der Funktionen des Denkens auf keine Weise*' (ibid.: A 91–92/B 123; emphasis added).

[59] Cf. Hanna, R. 2006. Kant and non-conceptual content. In *European Journal of Philosophy* 13 (2): 247–290.

acknowledges that the text expresses a challenge to the conception of intuitions that he ascribes to Kant. Yet he emphasises that the challenge expressed by these passages is found in the *preamble* to the Transcendental Deduction; that the Deduction should be read as responding to that challenge; and, crucially, that everything depends on *how* we understand the status of that response. These passages appear to open up a gap between understanding and sensibility, but it is important not to see the response of the Transcendental Deduction as an attempt to *bridge this gap*. Rather, Kant's B-Deduction offers a way of conceiving the relation between sensibility and understanding where there is no intelligible motivation for the objection expressed in the passages to arise at all. Thus, Kant entertains a possible challenge in the preamble, only to then show how this possibility can be ruled out or 'nipped in the bud'. In this sense, McDowell's reading of the Transcendental Deduction is *gap-denying* rather than *gap-bridging*. The passages in the preamble that seem to express a non-conceptual view of intuitions in fact articulate a seeming problem that the Transcendental Deduction is meant to discharge.[60]

As far as I can see, there are two steps in how McDowell handles the challenge presented by Kant in the preamble. First, he brings attention to the claim made in the B Deduction that objects cannot be thought (*gedacht*) except through the powers of the understanding.[61] This means that the content that is beyond the scope of the understanding because it is not categorically unified would be either impossible or 'nothing to us' (*für mich nichts sein*).[62] In other words, we can 'refuse to count a state of a subject as an intuition, a case of having an object available for cognition, unless the state has categorical unity'.[63]

This point, however, only partly answers the objection phrased in the preamble. The challenge with which Kant presents himself goes beyond the issue of whether the content of intuitions is thinkable. It pertains to the transcendental issue of whether an intuition can be directed at the object as such, whether it can have objective purport. On McDowell's account, the challenge that Kant must meet concerns the difference between the condition that ensures thinkability and the question of whether objects can be given to the senses at all independently of powers of the understanding. In particular, it seems that:

> [. . .] the Transcendental Aesthetic has already supplied an independent necessary, if not sufficient, condition for objects being given to our senses: they must be spatially and

[60] Pippin, R. 2007. McDowell's Germans: Response to 'On Pippin's postscript'. In *European Journal of Philosophy* 15 (3): 415ff.

[61] Kant, I. 1929. *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 132. Translated by N.K. Smith. London: Macmillan. Kant, I. 1911. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. In Kant's gesammelte Schriften III. Berlin: Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

[62] Ibid. Cf. McDowell, J. 2008. Responses. In *John McDowell: Experience, norm and nature*, ed. J. Lindgaard, 240. London: John Wiley.

[63] McDowell, J. 2009. Hegel's idealism as radicalization of Kant. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 73. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

temporally ordered. For all Kant can show, objects could satisfy that condition for being present to our senses without conforming to the requirements of the understanding.[64]

If this possibility is conceded, then the requirement that the content of intuition must be thinkable does not ensure that the categories of the understanding can have objective purport. Rather '[. . .] it can seem that categorial unity is no better than a subjective imposition, filtering out what human understanding can cope with from what is anyway present to our senses.'[65] In other words, the categorial unity, referred to in the remark from 'Von dem Leitfaden. . .' in this watered-down version, could only guarantee that the objects presented in the sensory states which Kant terms 'intuitions' are thinkable. It could not address the transcendental question of whether states of our sensory consciousness are able to relate to objects at all.[66]

In McDowell's reading, the function of the second half of the B-version of the Transcendental Deduction (B 143–169) is precisely to disarm the potential threat that our forms of sensibility – namely, space and time – structure and present content independently of the conceptual capacities of the understanding. Kant addresses this issue at the beginning of the second half of the B Deduction in Section 21, when he emphasises that, while the specific forms of our sensibility were not in focus in the first half of the B Deduction, they will be now.[67] Kant continues:

> In what follows (cf. §26) it will be shown, from the mode in which the empirical intuition is given in sensibility, that its unity is not other than that which the category (according to §20) prescribes to the manifold of any given intuition. Only thus, by the demonstration of the *a priori* validity of the categories in respect of all objects of our senses, will the purpose of the deduction be fully attained.[68]

Kant's aim in Section 26, to which he alludes in this quote, is to show how the unity of empirical intuitions given according to our forms of sensibility (as discussed in the second half of the B Deduction) is identical to the unity prescribed to intuitions

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[64] Ibid.

[65] McDowell, J. 2009. Self-determining subjectivity and external constraint. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 100. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[66] McDowell, J. 2009. On Pippin's postscript. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 191. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Cf. McDowell, J. 2008. Responses. In *John McDowell: Experience, norm and nature*, ed. J. Lindgaard, 240. London: John Wiley.

[67] Kant, I. 1929. *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 144f. Translated by N.K. Smith. London: Macmillan. Kant, I. 1911. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. In Kant's gesammelte Schriften III. Berlin: Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Cf. Ibid. Cf. McDowell, J. 2008. Responses. In *John McDowell: Experience, norm and nature*, ed. J. Lindgaard, 240. London: John Wiley.

[68] 'In der Folge (§26) wird aus der Art, wie in der Sinnlichkeit die empirische Anschauung gegeben wird, gezeigt werden, daß die Einheit derselben keine Andere sei, als welche die Kategorie nach dem vorigen §20 dem Mannigfaltigen einer gegebenen Anschauung überhaupt vorschreibt, und dadurch also, daß ihre Gültigkeit a priori in Ansehung aller Gegenstände unserer Sinne erklärt wird, die Absicht der Deduktion allererst völlig erreicht werden' (Kant, I. 1929. *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 145. Translated by N.K. Smith. London: Macmillan. Kant, I. 1911. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. In Kant's gesammelte Schriften III. Berlin: Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften).

viewed in abstraction from the way they are given according to the forms of our sensibility (as discussed in the first half of the B Deduction). Both kinds of intuitions are unified by categorial structures. McDowell is therefore justified in claiming that Kant's intention is to reject the idea that our specific forms of sensibility can provide content independently of the understanding. In order to further support this reading, McDowell points to the beginning of §26, where Kant describes his aim as showing that 'everything that may present itself to our senses' (*alles, was unseren Sinnen nur vorkommen mag*) is subject to the capacities of the understanding. Everything in our sensory consciousness is to be conceived as being given in intuitions with their categorial form.[69]

Kant seeks to achieve this goal in §26 by introducing the notion of formal intuition (*formale Anschauung*).[70] He distinguishes between space and time as the forms of our sensibility – as the forms of our inner and outer sensible intuition – and space and time as formal intuitions themselves. In a footnote in §26, Kant writes:[71]

> Space, represented as *object* (as we [indeed] are required to do in geometry), contains more than mere form of intuition; it also contains *combination* of the manifold, given according to the form of sensibility, in an *intuitive* representation, so that the *form of intuition* gives only a manifold, the *formal intuition* gives unity of representation. In the Aesthetic I have treated this unity as belonging merely to sensibility, simply in order to emphasise that it precedes any concept, although, as a matter of fact, it presupposes a synthesis which does not belong to the senses but through which all concepts of space and time first become possible. For since by its means (in that the understanding determines the sensibility), space and time are first *given* as intuitions, the unity of this a priori intuition belongs to space and time, and not to the concept of the understanding (cf. §24).[72]

McDowell's interpretation of this footnote can be divided into two steps. First, he draws attention to Kant's claim that the unity of the formal intuition of space does not only belong to sensibility, as one might be led to believe by the Transcendental

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[69] Ibid. B 159.

[70] Ibid. B 159–161.

[71] McDowell takes this footnote to 'encapsulate the drift of Kant's argument' (McDowell, J. 2008. Responses. In *John McDowell: Experience, norm and nature*, ed. J. Lindgaard, 241. London: John Wiley).

[72] 'Der Raum, als *Gegenstand* vorgestellt (wie man es wirklich in der Geometrie bedarf), enthält mehr, als bloße Form der Anschauung, nähmlich *Zusammenfassung* des Mannigfaltigen, nach der Form der Sinnlichkeit Gegebenen, in eine *anschauliche* Vorstellung, so daß die *Form der Anschauung* bloß Mannigfaltiges, die *Formale Anschauung* aber Einheit der Vorstellung gibt. Diese Einheit hatte ich in der Ästhetik bloß zur Sinnlichkeit gezählt, um nur zu bemerken, daß sie vor allem Begriffe vorhergehe, ob sie zwar eine Synthesis die nicht den Sinnen angehört, durch welche aber alle Begriffe von Raum und Zeit zuerst möglich werden, voraussetzt. Denn da durch sie (indem der Verstand die Sinnlichkeit bestimmt) der Raum oder die Zeit als Anschauungen zuerst *gegeben* werden, so gehört die Einheit dieser Anschauung a priori zum Raume und der Zeit, und nicht zum Begriffe des Verstandes (§24)' (Kant, I. 1929. *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 160 n. Translated by N.K. Smith. London: Macmillan. Kant, I. 1911. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. In Kant's gesammelte Schriften III. Berlin: Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften).

Aesthetic. Instead, it presupposes a synthesis through which intuitions of space and time are first made possible. In parenthesis in the last sentence, Kant emphasises that this synthesis is a case of the understanding determining sensibility. As McDowell points out, this idea of a synthesis operating under licence from the understanding should be seen in connection with the 'principle' established at the beginning of the Transcendental Deduction. Here, Kant emphasises how the combination (*Verbindung*) of a manifold can never come to us through the senses, but is an act of the spontaneity of the faculty of representation.[73] Since space and time, conceived as formal intuitions, *are* precisely combinations of the manifold given in sensuous consciousness to a single intuition, the synthesis producing these intuitions must belong to the understanding.

The second, crucial, step in McDowell's interpretation is to point out that we cannot isolate the unity of the formal intuition, which presupposes the capacities of the understanding, from the organising principle of the forms of our sensibility. The unities of the formal intuitions of space and time *are* articulations of the unities of space and time as forms of sensibility. Hence McDowell paraphrases Kant as saying that '[...] there is a unity implicit in the idea of space, say, as a form of our sensibility, and it is that unity that is made explicit in an account of the unity of the formal intuition, space.'[74] Therefore, the unity in our forms of sensibility is not intelligible, apart from appealing to the understanding.[75] Rather, these forms are formal features of how objects are presented in intuitions that are informed by the understanding.[76] In this way, McDowell wants to claim that there is only one unity common to the Aesthetic and the Analytic, rather than two separate and independent unities.[77]

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[73] Kant, I. 1929. *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 129f. Translated by N.K. Smith. London: Macmillan. Kant, I. 1911. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. In Kant's gesammelte Schriften III. Berlin: Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Cf. McDowell, J. 2009. The apperceptive I and the empirical self: Towards a heterodox reading of 'Lordship and Bondage' in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 149. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[74] McDowell, J. 2008. Responses. In *John McDowell: Experience, norm and nature*, ed. J. Lindgaard, 241. London: John Wiley.

[75] McDowell, J. 2009. The apperceptive I and the empirical self: Towards a heterodox reading of 'Lordship and Bondage' in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 149. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[76] McDowell, J. 2009. Self-determining subjectivity and external constraint. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 99. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[77] In one place, using the example of an intuition of a red cube, McDowell remarks that the faculty of understanding not only accounts 'for the unity with which certain content figures in such an intuition, but also, in the guise of the productive imagination, to provide for part of the content itself – *supplying, as it were, the rest of the cube, behind the facing surfaces*' (McDowell, J. 2009. Avoiding the Myth of the Given. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 262. Cambridge: Harvard University Press). This appeal to Kant's transcendental synthesis of the power of imagination (*transzendentale Synthesis der Einbildungskraft*) could seem to invoke the productive imagination as merely belonging to the understanding and thereby conceive it as a cognitive power, whereas it appears that the structures described by McDowell are *intrinsic* to our

In order to better understand McDowell's interpretation of the relation between formal intuitions and the forms of sensibility (forms of intuition), it is illuminating to look at Robert Hanna's contrasting reading of the footnote to B 160. Hanna claims that formal intuitions are connected to conceptual capacities and demand the capacity for self-conscious rational thought.[78] Forms of intuition, on the other hand, are 'involved in rational and *sub-rational* cognition (say, of pre-linguistic human children or non-human animals) alike' and are as such non-conceptual.[79] Hanna speaks of forms of intuition as a common layer in the mental architecture that we share with pre-linguistic human children and non-human animals. We share this basic access of sensibility, but we have something more, namely the capacity for 'self-conscious rational cognition', which is tacked on, so to speak, to the non-conceptual, perceptual level. The ability to enjoy formal intuitions is an expression of this extra layer that is peculiar to our cognition.

Now, McDowell agrees that, as rational *animals*, we share perception with other animals, and that we should not deny that non-rational animals also have objects given to them. The question is, however, how we should interpret this commonality between us and other animals. One possibility is, like Hanna, to employ a layer model that attempts to isolate what we have in common with non-rational animals in order to arrive at a residue or core. However, there is an alternative model that does not accommodate both the commonalities and striking differences in this factorising manner.[80] According to this model, which McDowell recommends, we can conceive our case of perceptual givenness of objects as an *irreducibly distinct species* in comparison with the one that characterises the mental life of non-rational animals. According to this second model, the relation of perceptual

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perceptual experience. McDowell, however, emphasises that what is generated by the productive imagination belongs to both sensibility and understanding – which echoes Kant's view of the productive imagination in the B Deduction (Kant, I. 1929. *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 151ff. Translated by N.K. Smith. London: Macmillan. Kant, I. 1911. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. In Kant's gesammelte Schriften III. Berlin: Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften). In other words, we must view structures like 'front side/back side' as belonging within such a unity of sensibility and understanding. In McDowell's account, structures like front side and back side are an intrinsic part of the *conceptual shaping of sensory consciousness* that forms the intuition of a red cube, rather than a *non-conceptual contribution of our sensibility*. This model seems to incorporate the phenomenology of perception. When I see the visible front side of a red cube as 'entailing' a back side, it is exactly because I see it as a specific type of object; I have a specific *conceptual* shaping of my sensory consciousness, which entails specific implications. I intuit it as an object that acts *upon* me by presenting itself with such intrinsic structures. It seems natural and unproblematic to say that such a how-aspect of perception cannot be separated from the what-aspect. Of course it can be *abstracted* from the unity of experience – as Husserl seems to do in his analyses of perceptual experience – but this does imply that in our perceptual experience it expresses a separable, non-conceptual input of sensibility. Cf. Husserl, E. 1999. *Erfahrung und Urteil*, 87–94. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag.

[78] Cf. Hanna, R. 2006. Kant and non-conceptual content. In *European Journal of Philosophy* 13 (2): 277.

[79] Ibid.

[80] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 64. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

givenness has a special *form* when objects are perceptually given to rational animals. *In the case of rational animals, operations of capacities that belong to the understanding enter into the constitution of the relation of perceptual givenness itself.*[81] McDowell recommends this model because the layer-model forces us into the Myth of the Given. If we accept the layer-model, we presuppose that perception can relate to us something that is able to exert legitimate authority on our judgements and thought, while at the same time we deny that such a perceptual relation depends on the actualisation of the rational capacities, which is the presupposition for the relation to be able to exercise such legitimate authority on our thought.[82] In other words, the layer-model would render incomprehensible the idea that our judgements could be an act of free responsibility in response to the constraint manifested in perception.

This is an appropriate framework with which to understand what is at stake in the two different readings of Kant's footnote to B 160. According to Hanna, the footnote does not articulate requirements for the forms of sensibility but only for the formal intuitions. Whereas the formal intuitions of space and time have a certain kind of unity, the sensory content presented by the forms of intuitions alone – which we share as a common core with non-rational animals – has a 'unit-free phenomenal character'.[83] According to Hanna's reading, the purpose of the footnote would not be to claim that the forms of sensibility are subject to categorial unity. Instead, its aim would (only) be to point out that our representations of space and time as objects require that a certain kind of unity is captured in the formal intuitions, and that this unity is not provided by the senses alone but presupposes a synthesis that belongs to the understanding. The formal intuition of space, as it is described in this footnote, concerns the form of intuition or form of sensibility *only* insofar as it is represented as an object (*als Gegenstand vorgestellt*) – as required in geometry, according to Kant.[84] This would still leave open the possibility that the form of our sensibility, abstracted from how it was objectified in the formal intuition of space, is structured 'independently of any condition involving thinkability'.[85] Thus, a reading along these lines would question that this footnote shows anything about whether categories pertain to our forms of sensibility as such.

I have already indicated that, on a systematic level, this interpretation is unacceptable because it installs a mythical layer of Givenness that undermines the responsibility of our intentional life. A reading such as Hanna's seems attractive because of the consideration it pays to the intuition that non-rational animals also

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[81] McDowell, J. Forthcoming.

[82] Cf. Sect. 2 in Chap. 3 above.

[83] Hanna, R. 2006. Kant and non-conceptual content. In *European Journal of Philosophy* 13 (2): 287 n. 63.

[84] Although Hanna's article is in general directed against McDowell's conceptualist interpretation of Kant, he does not explicitly deal with McDowell's reading of the footnote to B 160 – most of the articles where McDowell discusses the footnote are published after Hanna's article.

[85] McDowell, J. 2009. On Pippin's postscript. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 192. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

have access to the world through perception, and for the weight it gives to the equally obvious intuition that perception is something we share with non-rational animals. If the forms of intuition present us with the kind of content that we share with some non-rational animals, then it is easy to understand how we have something in common with them. As we have seen, McDowell attempts to accommodate both of these intuitions with his idea that the relation of perceptual givenness has a special form in the case of rational animals. This model does not deny perceptual givenness to non-rational animals, nor does it claim that we do not share perception with such animals. It only claims that our perceptual givenness is an irreducibly distinct species.

On a more exegetic level, Hanna's reading owes an answer as to how we should interpret the passages discussed above, in which Kant describes his aim in Section 26 as an attempt to show that our forms of sensibility do not organise sensuous content independently of the powers of the understanding. If Kant's goal in the abovementioned section, which introduces the idea of formal intuitions, is to demonstrate that everything that 'may present itself to our senses' is subject to categorial unity, then how would it help him to articulate formal intuitions in a way that leaves open the question of whether such unity pertains to the forms of sensibility as such – as Hanna claims he does? McDowell admits that if the footnote is read in isolation, then the form of outer intuition, which Kant here distinguishes from formal intuition, could still, 'for all the footnote says, be a topic for an autonomous inquiry into sensibility considered in abstraction from the understanding'.[86] Yet such an interpretation ignores the question of how it is possible to separate the possibility of a formal intuition from spatiality as a form of intuition, given Kant's own description of the aim of this part of his Deduction.

McDowell's reading ultimately rests on the systematic premise that such a separation would undermine Kant's attempt to show that intuitions have objective purport. In McDowell's own terms, it would reduce categoriality to a subjective imposition. If we instead accept McDowell's interpretation, then the concern that the second half of the Deduction addresses, namely whether the forms of sensibility constitute conditions for the manifestation of objects that are in place independently of the contribution of the capacities belonging to spontaneity, is revealed as ungrounded and categorial unity is not something merely subjectively imposed. Rather, whatever objects may present themselves to our senses, we know *a priori* that they are given to us in intuitions with their categorial structure. The danger of a gap between sensibility and understanding, as invoked in the preamble to the Transcendental Deduction, and which if it were real would need to be bridged, has turned out to be a product of an assumption that we do not have to accept: that the unity of the forms of sensibility is constituted independently of the understanding.

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[86] McDowell, J. 2009. Kant, Sellars and intentionality. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 28 n. 10. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

5   The Lapse into Subjective Idealism

Whereas the reading of Kant's Transcendental Deduction rejected by McDowell attempts to bridge a supposed gap between sensibility and understanding, McDowell's reading has Kant deny that there is a gap to be bridged at all. McDowell thus emphasises that the *Critique of Pure Reason* does not express a theory of knowledge that seeks to connect mind and world. Such an epistemology expresses 'a dead-end skeptical program' that we should not burden Kant with.[87] If we begin the project of gap-bridging, we have entered an idle game defined by scepticism, and we should therefore regard such an approach as a non-starter. We can avoid it if we can hold on to the thought that even our most intimate perceptual contact with the world is always already imbued with conceptual content.

McDowell's reconstruction of Kant cannot succeed entirely, however, because Kant holds that space and time are transcendentally ideal, which means that the forms of sensibility themselves – rather than categorial structure – become mere subjective 'peculiarities' rather than necessary features of any discursive take on reality:

> In the second half of the B Deduction, Kant contrives to represent the combination of manifolds into the "formal intuitions", space and time, as the work of apperceptive sponta- neity. But he leaves it a separate fact about us, a reflection of the specific character of our sensibility, that what are so unified, in our case, are manifolds that are specifically spatial and temporal. The Aesthetic encourages us to entertain the thought that there could be differently formed sensibilities, which would be associated with different "formal intuitions".[88]

Here, McDowell is criticising important passages from the Transcendental Aes- thetic. In one paradigmatic place, Kant writes:

> It is, therefore, not merely possible or probable, but indubitably certain, that space and time, as the necessary conditions of all inner and outer experience, are merely subjective conditions of all our intuition, and that in relation to these conditions all objects are therefore mere appearances, and not given to us as things in themselves which exist in this manner. For this reason also, while much can be said *a priori* as regards the form of appearances, nothing whatsoever can be asserted of the thing in itself, which may underlie these appearances.[89]

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[87] Pippin, R. 2007. McDowell's Germans: Response to 'On Pippin's postscript'. In *European Journal of Philosophy* 15 (3): 415.

[88] McDowell, J. 2009. The apperceptive I and the empirical self: Towards a heterodox reading of 'Lordship and Bondage' in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 150f. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[89] 'Es ist also ungezweifelt gewiß, und nicht bloß möglich, oder auch wahrscheinlich, daß Raum und Zeit, als die notwendigen Bedingungen aller (äußern und innern) Erfahrung, bloß subjektive Bedingungen aller unsrer Anschauung sind, im Verhältnis auf welche daher alle Gegenstände bloße Erscheinungen und nicht für sich in dieser Art gegebene Dinge sind, von denen sich auch um deswillen, was die Form derselben betrifft, vieles a priori sagen läßt, niemals aber das mindeste von dem Dinge an sich selbst, das diesen Erscheinungen zum Grunde liegen mag' (Kant, I. 1929. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 49/B 66. Translated by N.K. Smith. London: Macmillan. Kant, I. 1911. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. In Kant's gesammelte Schriften III. Berlin: Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften).

It should be noted that the view expressed in this passage is identified by Kant himself as his 'transcendental idealism'.[90] When McDowell recommends that we reject this part of his position, he is therefore suggesting that Kant's own philosophical framework is ultimately inadequate in order to articulate his genuine insights about perceptual experience. The motivation for McDowell's fundamental objection is that the force of Kant's rejection of categorial structure as a mere subjective requirement ultimately rests on unstable grounds precisely because Kant, in his transcendental idealism, embraces the idea that the forms of our sensibility are *themselves* subjective impositions. Spatial and temporal organisation is apparently in force only for us, and not something common to any discursive take on reality. Therefore '[t]he object of what Kant wants to see as our empirical knowledge is, in pervasive respects, a mere reflection of features of our subjectivity.'[91] Kant thus undermines his claim that transcendental idealism aims at protecting a common-sense empirical realism.[92] The claim that whatever objects may represent themselves to our senses must be given in intuitions with their categorial structure seems to identify 'objects themselves' with 'objects given to our senses'.[93] Given Kant's picture in the Aesthetic, however, where the forms of sensibility seem to look like 'a peculiarity of human cognitive equipment', we seem to be drawn into a much less attractive reading of the idea of 'objects themselves' – namely, things that, for all we know, may not be spatially or temporarily ordered.[94]

McDowell's interpretation of Kant's notion of the thing in-itself is thus complex. He acknowledges that Kant identifies 'things as objects of experience' with 'those same things as things in themselves'.[95] However, McDowell also points out how Kant claims that the spatial and temporal organisation of things as objects of our experience reflects a fact about us rather than characterising the things themselves: 'And he [Kant] himself stresses that his attempted vindication of the objective validity of the categories essentially turns on that feature of things as objects of experience.'[96]

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[90] Kant, I. 1929. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 490f. / B 518f. Translated by N.K. Smith. London: Macmillan. Kant, I. 1911. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. In Kant's gesammelte Schriften III. Berlin: Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

[91] McDowell, J. 2009. On Pippin's postscript. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 194. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[92] Ibid.

[93] McDowell, J. 2009. The apperceptive I and the empirical self: Towards a heterodox reading of 'Lordship and Bondage' in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 150. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[94] Ibid.: 151.

[95] Cf. Kant, I. 1929. *Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxvii. Translated by N.K. Smith. London: Macmillan. Kant, I. 1911. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. In Kant's gesammelte Schriften III. Berlin: Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

[96] McDowell, J. 2009. The apperceptive I and the empirical self: Towards a heterodox reading of 'Lordship and Bondage' in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 152 n. 11. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

The doctrine of the transcendental ideality of time and space therefore ultimately undermines Kant's attempt to show that our cognitions can seem to be directed at an objective world. Hence McDowell agrees with Hegel that the 'entire package' amounts to no more than a subjective idealism.[97]

6   The Hegelian Equipoise

McDowell's interpretation of Kant essentially makes three points. Firstly, that Kant does not conceive of intuitions as immediate cognitions, but as containing logical or conceptual content. Secondly, that Kant insists that our forms of sensibility do not provide us with sensory intake that is organised or unified in a way that can be isolated from the capacities of the understanding. And thirdly, that we need to reject Kant's doctrine concerning the transcendental ideality of space and time. In his approach to Hegel, McDowell basically attempts to show that Hegel follows Kant on the first and second point, but corrects him concerning the third point. To demonstrate the congeniality between the Kantian insistence on the logical structures of our intuitional content and the Hegelian agenda, McDowell emphasises a passage from Hegel's *Science of Logic*, in which Hegel claims that 'logic permeates every relationship of man to nature, his sensation, intuition, desire, need, instinct'.[98] In order to establish a direct connection to the Transcendental Deduction, McDowell points to the following passage from the same work: 'It is one of profoundest and truest insights to be found in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the *unity* which constitutes the nature of the *Notion* is recognized as the *original synthetic* unity of *apperception*, as the unity of the *I think*, or of self-consciousness.'[99]

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[97] McDowell, J. 2009. On Pippin's postscript. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 194. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[98] 'Stellt man aber die Natur überhaupt, als das Physikalische, dem Geistigen gegenüber, so müßte man sagen, daß das Logische vielmehr das Uebernatürliche ist, welches sich in alles Naturverhalten des Menschen, in sein Empfinden, Anschauen, Begehren, Bedürfniß, Trieb eindrängt und es dadurch überhaupt zu einem Menschlichen, wenn auch nur Formell, zu Vorstellungen und Zwecken, macht' (Hegel, G.W.F. 1999. *Hegel's Science of Logic*, 32. Translated by A.V. Miller. Amherst: Humanity Books. Hegel, G.W.F. 1999. *Wissenschaft der Logik I*, 10f. In *Hauptwerke in sechs Bänden* III. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag).

[99] 'Es gehört zu den tiefsten und richtigsten Einsichten, die sich in der *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* finden, daß die *Einheit*, die das *Wesen* des *Begriff*s ausmacht, als die *ursprünglich-synthetische* Einheit *der Apperception*, als Einheit des: *Ich denke*, oder des Selbstbewußtseyns erkannt wird' (Hegel, G.W.F. 1999. *Hegel's Science of Logic*, 584. Translated by A.V. Miller. Amherst: Humanity Books. Hegel, G.W.F. 1999. *Wissenschaft der Logik* II, 17f. In *Hauptwerke in sechs Bänden* IV. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag). McDowell points out his debt to Robert Pippin concerning the importance of this passage. Cf. Pippin, R. 1989. *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McDowell's interpretation of this passage can be reconstructed in the following way. In the first part of the B-edition of the Transcendental Deduction,[100] the unifying work of the understanding is qualified in terms of there being a self-conscious or apperceptive activity through the introduction of the concept of the original synthetic unity of apperception (*ürsprunglich-synthetischen Einheit der Apperzeption*). This notion expresses the idea that for the subject to be directed at an objective world, he must be able to ascribe experiences to himself – that is, he must be self-conscious. Intentionality and self-consciousness are interdependent.[101] Also, in this part of the Transcendental Deduction, Kant conceives of judging as bringing given cognitions to the objective unity of apperception (*gegebene Erkenntnisse zur Objektiven Einheit der Apperzeption zu bringen*).[102] Since the remark from 'The clue to the discovery of all pure concepts of the understanding' has identified the unity of judgements with the unity of intuitions, the ability of intuitions to manifest the rational constraint of the world can thus be rearticulated 'in terms of their possessing the kind of unity that results when, in judging, one brings cognitions to the unity of apperception'.[103] The synthetic unity of apperception is thus intrinsically connected to both the unity of judgements and the conceptual unity of intuitions. Therefore, when Hegel refers approvingly to the concept of the original synthetic unity of apperception, he is embracing the idea that the objective purport of intuitions is to be modelled on spontaneous apperceptive activity as it is paradigmatically expressed in judgements.

Now, concerning the second point in his interpretation of Kant, McDowell refers to *Faith and Knowledge*, one of Hegel's early works, in order to establish a continuity.[104] In this text, Hegel notes appreciatively that in Kant's Transcendental Deduction, space and time themselves are conceived as synthetic unities (*Synthetische Einheiten*) and spontaneity is recognised 'as the principle of the very sensibility that was previously characterised only as receptivity'.[105] Hegel goes on to say, therefore, that the Kantian forms of intuition (space and time) and forms of thought (the categories) 'cannot be kept apart at all as the particular, isolated faculties which they are usually represented as'.[106] In other words, Hegel

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[100] Cf. Kant, I. 1929. *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 129–142. Translated by N.K. Smith London: Macmillan. Kant, I. 1911. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. In Kant's gesammelte Schriften III. Berlin: Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

[101] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 99. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[102] Cf. Kant, I. 1929. *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 141. Translated by N.K. Smith. London: Macmillan. Kant, I. 1911. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. In Kant's gesammelte Schriften III. Berlin: Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

[103] McDowell, J. 2009. The apperceptive I and the empirical self: Towards a heterodox reading of 'Lordship and Bondage' in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 148. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[104] Ibid.: 149.

[105] '[...] als Prinzip der Sinnlichkeit begriffen wird, welche vorher nur als Rezeptivität charakterisiert worden war' (Hegel, G.W.F. 1977. *Faith and Knowledge*, 70. Translated by W. Cerf and H.S. Harris. Albany: The State University of New York Press. Hegel, G.W.F. 1970. *Glauben und Wissen*, 305. In *G.W.F Hegel: Werke in zwanzig Bänden* II. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag).

[106] '[...] gar nicht als besondere isolierte Vermögen auseinander liegen, wie man es sich gewöhnlich vorstellt' (ibid).

approves of precisely the tendency in the Transcendental Deduction that McDowell emphasises – namely, the attempt to avoid space and time organising our sensuous input independently of the understanding.

The third point of McDowell's interpretation is the critique of Kant's transcendental idealism – in other words, the fact that Kant leaves open the possibility that the world is not itself temporally and spatially ordered. According to McDowell, it is only with Hegel's idea of knowledge as the free self-development of the Notion or Concept (*der Begriff*) that we encounter a wholehearted attempt to include sensibility in the space of reasons. Two points are important here: firstly, the singular form 'Notion' or 'Concept' is to be taken seriously, as it refers to the specific Hegelian understanding of *conceptuality as such*.[107] Secondly, 'free' is to be understood as the constraint by conceptual norms – the freedom of the space of reasons. As we have seen, the problem with Kant is that he views the forms of our sensibility as independent facts about *our* cognition, whereas we should recognise them as 'a moment' within a Hegelian descendent of the operations of apperceptive spontaneity: the self-realisation of the Concept, say. The self-realisation of the Concept is the unfolding of thought – and as such, subjective. However, it is equally the self-revelation of reality – and as such, objective. In this conception, empirically accessible reality is not seen as even a partial reflection of self-standing features of subjectivity.[108]

This is what McDowell terms *the Hegelian 'equipoise' between the subjective and the objective*.[109] In comparison, the Kantian position is unbalanced. It leaves an unassimilated subjectivity, through its conception of our forms of sensibility, and a corresponding unassimilated objectivity, in the shape of the perhaps non-spatial and non-temporal thing *in-itself*. In short, Hegel radicalises Kant and brings everything within the reach of apperceptive spontaneity.

With the idea of sensibility as a moment within the free self-realisation of the Concept, one might suspect that McDowell has gone too far and undermined the very idea that he set out to vindicate, namely external constraint on our spontaneity. Here, it is important to remember that McDowell insists on construing the Hegelian idea of sensibility in close connection with the interpretation of the Deduction presented above: 'by Hegelian lights, Kant's Deduction would have worked if Kant had not attributed brute-fact externality to the spatial and temporal form of our sensibility'.[110] So rather than understanding the Hegelian elimination of externality as leading to a picture of objective reality as the unconstrained projection of our thought, we must conceive 'the independent layout of the world we experience as *the medium within which the freedom of apperceptive spontaneity is exercised*'.[111]

[107] McDowell, J. 2009. Hegel's idealism as radicalization of Kant. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 84. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[108] Ibid.

[109] McDowell, J. 2009. Hegel's idealism as radicalization of Kant. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 75. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[110] Ibid.: 85.

[111] Ibid.: 86; emphasis added.

The idea of objective reality as a *medium* of thought should be read as an expression of McDowell's empiricism. Hegel's talk of 'The Notion' is therefore radically *domesticated*; it does not allude to 'special non-empirical concepts'. In accordance with the interpretation of the B-Deduction, we should recognise the evolution of empirical knowledge to be the paradigmatic case of the self-realisation of the Notion. In empirical thinking, it is clear that conceptual thought is guided by experience. Therefore, given that this is the paradigm of the self-realisation of the Notion, we can avoid misunderstanding this formula in terms of complete unconstrained movements of thought.[112] McDowell even suggests a similar domestication of the Hegelian idea of the standpoint of Absolute Knowledge, by which we are given to understand that 'the pursuit of objectivity is the free unfolding of the Notion. It is not a standpoint at which we have somehow removed ourselves from the empirical world'.[113]

This Hegelian conception of sensibility should be read as a development of a Hegelian image that McDowell uses to characterise his position in *Mind and World*. The idea of 'the unboundedness of the conceptual' as it is presented here not only refers to the rejection of all appeals to immediacy to ground our intentional relation to the world. It also precisely implies the idea that we must conceive of our sensibility as within the space of reason, as a moment in the free self-realisation of the Concept. McDowell insists that this line of thought does not imply an undermining of the thought-independence of reality – rather, the world becomes a creature of our thought. In fact, it is only by acknowledging that the conceptual is unbounded that we allow our thought to engage with genuine objectivity that can constrain our thought rather than the pseudo-constraint provided by a non-conceptual given. As he remarks in his reading of Hegel, the point of expanding 'the scope of intellectual freedom is to achieve a genuine balance between subjective and objective, in which neither is prior to the other'.[114]

McDowell is aware that his Hegelian radicalisation of Kant does not leave anything Kantian 'in any but the thinnest sense'.[115] Not only is Kant's transcendental idealism, with its unhappy priority of the subjective, discarded if we accept the Hegelian account of sensibility.[116] With the proposed Hegelian correction of

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[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid.: 87.

[114] McDowell, J. 2009. The apperceptive I and the empirical self: Towards a heterodox reading of 'Lordship and Bondage' in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 152. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[115] McDowell, J. 2009. On Pippin's postscript. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 195. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[116] McDowell remarks that '[. . .] Kant's willingness to accept the Copernican image (B xvi–xviii) [. . .] certainly suggests a priority of subjective over objective' (McDowell, J. 2009. The apperceptive I and the empirical self: Towards a heterodox reading of 'Lordship and Bondage' in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 152 n. 13. Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

Kant, the very need for a Transcendental Deduction as such is undermined.[117] Conceiving the forms of our sensibility as a moment in the self-realisation of the Concept implies that the objective purport of the categories is always already dependent on the deliverances of receptivity, and these deliverances are, on the other hand, not conceivable without conceptual structuring. Kant thinks that the forms of thought, i.e. the categories, originate in the pure understanding, whereas objects are given to us only through the senses. Based on that premise, it is necessary to construe a Deduction to argue that the forms of thought are the forms of reality. If we follow the Hegelian impulse in the domesticated version propounded by McDowell, i.e. if we reconceive the way in which our sensibility is formed as a 'moment' in the self-realisation of the Concept, then we have articulated a picture of thought that is not confronted with the task to which Kant's Transcendental Deduction was conceived as an answer.[118]

The domestication of Hegel also determines how McDowell approaches *The phenomenology of spirit* and *The science of logic*. As to the latter, he claims that it is not to be regarded as a counterpart to the Transcendental Deduction. Hegel does not need a Deduction because he accepts Kant's idea that intuitions are unified by conceptual structures, while at the same time he also rejects the brute-fact externality that Kant attributes to the forms of sensibility.[119] Concerning *The phenomenology of spirit*, the identity-in-difference of thought and reality, which is the theme of this work, is not a thesis that Hegel seeks to prove – and eventually succeeds in defending at the end of the book. Rather, the identity-in-difference of thought and reality is a self-evident 'platitude' that Hegel defends against various forms of immediacy that would seem to threaten it. McDowell writes:

> It may seem absurd to suggest that the identity-in-difference of thought and reality is a platitude. But it takes work to enable it to present itself as the platitude it is, in the face of our propensity to mishandle immediacy. [...] What Hegel does [in *The phenomenology of spirit*] is [...] to show successive attempts at a picture of mindedness [...] – whose form anyway coincides with the form of reality – coming to grief because they include unmediated immediacy. At each stage until the last, the trouble is temporarily fixed by mediating the troublesome immediacy, reconceiving it as a "moment" in the self-realization of the Concept. But at the next stage an intelligible impulse to acknowledge an immediacy, a brute externality, arises in a new form, and we need more "experience" of the deleterious effects, and more mediation, until at the ideal endpoint the identity of thought with reality is no longer vulnerable to seeming problematic in that way.[120]

[117] McDowell, J. 2009. On Pippin's postscript. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 196. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[118] Ibid.: 195.

[119] McDowell, J. 2009. On Pippin's postscript. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 199. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. For a critique of McDowell's reading of Hegel on this point, cf. Rödl, S. 2008. Eliminating Externality. In *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus* 5, 175–188. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

[120] McDowell, J. 2009. On Pippin's postscript. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 198f. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

The issue concerning the objective purport of our conceptual thought, on which McDowell focuses, reflects one among many ways in which unmediated immediacy can make the relation between thought and reality seem problematic.

7   Limits of the Kantian and Hegelian Paradigm of Subjectivity

In *Normativity and Phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger*, Steven Crowell contrasts two traditions of transcendental philosophy:

> One attempts to preserve the role of subjectivity in transcendental philosophy by improving upon Kant's understanding of it, while the other rejects any such role. The first leads to phenomenology and to some naturalistic, cognitive-science readings of Kant, while the second leads from Hegel to neo-Kantianism and to an interest in transcendental arguments. The first takes its departure from the A-Edition version of Kant's Transcendental Deduction, with its account of how categories originate in a threefold synthesis (apprehension, reproduction, recognition). This may be called the "psychological" reading, since it attributes syntheses other than purely inferential or logical ones to the transcendental subject. The second – which may be called the "logical" reading – emphasizes the B-Edition's insistence on the autonomy of the understanding (i.e. the purely inferential, categorical character of the experiential synthesis) and the merely formal character of the unity of apperception.[121]

It is crucial to recognise that McDowell's *Destruktion* of Kant does not fit into the scheme drawn by Crowell. While McDowell's reading is certainly 'logical', it breaks with Kant by rejecting the 'merely formal character of the unity of apperception', as shall see in the following section. And even more fundamentally, when Crowell characterises the 'logical' reading as rejecting 'any role of subjectivity', this does not fit McDowell's 'logical' interpretation of Kant. In contrast to Neo-Kantians such as Herman Cohen and Neo-Neo-Kantians such as Brandom, McDowell aims to preserve a decisive role for experience and subjectivity in his interpretation of Kant.[122]

The main characteristic of McDowell's 'logical' reading is not that it plays down the role of subjectivity, but rather that it insists that the pivotal philosophical motivation behind Kant's transcendental project is to preserve and justify the notion of freedom. According to McDowell, the aim of Kant's transcendental project is to articulate the conditions for maintaining the vital intuition that our intentional life is embraced in all its aspects by the norm of responsible freedom. It is precisely this philosophical motivation that forces Kant to reject his early, A-version of the Transcendental Deduction, with its psychological picture of categorical synthesis, because it renders mysterious how our experience could make our thought

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[121] Crowell, S. 2013. *Normativity and Phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger*, 13f. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[122] This is the often-overlooked decisive difference between Brandom and McDowell. Cf. n. 15 in the Introduction, above.

answerable to the world and thereby preserve our responsible freedom. Interestingly, Crowell indirectly seems to acknowledge this framework for approaching Kant's transcendental project by emphasising that Kant saw it as the heart of philosophy to justify 'the idea of freedom'.[123]

McDowell thus interprets Kant and Hegel in order to provide a defence of the norm of freedom as embracing all aspects of our intentional life and claims that this can be achieved by establishing an equipoise between the subjective and the objective: the objective must be able to constrain our thought, which in relation to perceptual experience means that conceptual capacities must be actualised in our intuitions. Only then can perceptual experience present us with the kind of objectivity that can legitimately constrain our subjective thought and thereby preserve our responsible freedom.

In order to carry through this interpretation, McDowell employs Kant's concepts of intuitions and formal intuitions, as well as the Hegelian idea of sensibility as a moment in the free self-development of the Notion. At the same time, his interpretation rejects Kant's transcendental idealism, dissolves the philosophical motivation for the Transcendental Deduction and domesticates the Hegelian Notion so that it does not refer to special, non-empirical concepts. As this clearly demonstrates, the idea is not to reconstruct and defend Kant and Hegel in a historicist manner, but rather to show how certain key concepts, analyses and arguments from their texts can be developed so as to defend the crucial motivation of their philosophy: the intrinsic connection between our intentionality and the norm of responsible freedom.

In the process, this interpretation demolishes many, if not all, of the parts of Kant and Hegel's philosophy that they themselves took to be the most important – not only because they are obsolete, but because accepting them would in fact undermine the attempt to show the contemporary philosophical relevance and strength of their guiding intuition. This form of interpretation might seem very foreign to both historians of philosophy and to non-historical philosophy, but it should not be alien to readers of Gadamer's *Destruktion* of Platonism.[124] Heidegger, Gadamer and McDowell all abstain from both historical reconstructions and systematic philosophy with no historical dimension, because they take seriously the claim to truth of the historical. They attempt to read the texts and their arguments in light of the philosophical motivations that carry them, while at the same time testing these motivations by relating them critically to their own guiding questions in a contemporary context. In order to appreciate this attempt to philosophise by reactualising the history of philosophy, one should recognise that it is as much a critical as a constructive exercise.

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[123] Crowell, S. 2013. *Normativity and Phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger*, 10f. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Crowell refers approvingly to Dieter Henrich's work on this point (Henrich, D. 1994. Identity and objectivity: An enquiry into Kant's Transcendental Deduction. In *The Unity of Reason: Essays on Kant's Philosophy*, ed. R. Velkley, 127. Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

[124] Cf. Sect. 3 in Chap. 3 above.

This point is especially relevant in relation to Kant and Hegel's account of subjectivity, perhaps even to a greater extent than McDowell himself would like to admit. In relation to Kant, McDowell rejects the purely formal nature of the Kantian self – even if he embraces his idea of intrinsic interdependence between intentionality and self-consciousness. He writes:

> Now it would be satisfying if the self that is in question here were, in the end at least, the ordinary self. But it is hard to make that cohere with what Kant actually says. When he introduces the self-consciousness that he argues to be correlative with awareness of objective reality, he writes of the "I think" that must be able to "accompany all my representations". In the Paralogisms of Pure Reason, he claims that if we credit this "I" with a persisting referent, the relevant idea of identity through time is only formal. It has nothing to do with the substantial identity of a subject who persists as a real presence in the world she perceives. The subjective temporal continuity that is a counterpart to experience's bearing on objective reality shrinks to the continuity of a mere point of view, not, apparently, a substantial continuant.[125]

The problem with the idea of such a formal subjective unity is that it presupposes that the connection between mind and world, between the subjective and the objective, can be accounted for without the notion of subjectivity as a substantial, embodied presence in the world. Instead, the Kantian approach assumes that we can make sense of genuine notions of subjectivity and objectivity by operating with 'a free-standing notion of an experiential route through objective reality, a temporally extended point of view that might be bodiless'.[126] We should reject this misguided formalism and instead acknowledge that subjective continuity 'has more to it than consciousness itself contains'.[127] This is the idea of the subjective continuity as identical with the 'continuing life of a perceiving animal'.[128]

A further problem with the Kantian conception of the subject is that it does not acknowledge the passive nature of experience. As we have seen above, McDowell formulates the relation between the formal intuitions and the forms of our sensibility as an *explication* of an implicit unity. However, in the footnote describing the relation between the formal intuitions and the forms of intuitions, Kant speaks of a synthesis in which the understanding *determines* sensibility.[129] In Kant's formulation, there is an emphasis on the *activity* of the understanding in providing for the unity of the formal intuition, which is absent in McDowell's account. Similarly, in the second sentence of the passage from 'The clue', which is the guiding thread for McDowell's reading, Kant says that the unity of intuitions is a product of *actions* (*Handlungen*) of the understanding.[130] McDowell points out this 'activism' in

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[125] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 99f. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[126] Ibid.: 102.

[127] Ibid.: 101.

[128] Ibid.: 102.

[129] Cf. Kant, I. 1929. *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 160 n. Translated by N.K. Smith. London: Macmillan. Kant, I. 1911. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. In Kant's gesammelte Schriften III. Berlin: Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

[130] Ibid.: A 79/B 105.

Kant's account of the unity of intuitions, and rejects it because it harbours a disturbing tendency toward subjective idealism.

One particular problematic passage in this regard is found in the Transcendental Deduction, where Kant states that any combination of a manifold, any representation of something as a complex unity, 'be we conscious of it or not [. . .] is an act of the understanding'.[131] As McDowell comments, that passage suggests 'that the unity exemplified by an intuition is brought about by an exercise of freedom, though one we may not be conscious of'.[132] Perceptual experience would be a case of non-conscious spontaneous activity. Against this, McDowell urges that intuitions are *passive* and therefore involuntary operations of conceptual capacities. Kant *should* have claimed 'that in intuiting we are not actively judging or spontaneously at work. But capacities to whose character it is essential that we can use them in active judging, capacities that belong to our spontaneity, are actualized in intuitions'.[133] Thus, McDowell protests against Kant's tendency to understand the unity of intuitions as a result of intellectual activity. The note to B 160 is an example of Kant's problematic lack of acknowledgement of the passivity of experience. It speaks precisely of the possibility of space and time being given in intuitions as a *result* of a determination on the part of the understanding through a synthesis.

McDowell circumvents the 'activist' tendency in his interpretation of the note to B 160 by speaking of an explication of an implicit unity. When he quotes the passage from 'The clue', he often leaves out the second sentence that speaks of *actions* of the understanding. In this way, Kant's problematic tendency to conceive of intuitions as a result of spontaneous activity is corrected. Instead, the crucial distinction is between being passively saddled with intuitional yet conceptually unified content *and* spontaneous explication, through which we exploit the conceptual content of passively given intuitions in judgements. An experience is not the result of activity – it *happens*.[134] In other words, the object acts upon us in perceptual experience.[135]

In his remarks about Hegel, McDowell does not comment on the issue of passivity, but presupposes that Hegel corrects Kant's activist tendency. McDowell might have been led to this assumption by the strong emphasis on the passivity of experience in *The phenomenology of spirit* and on the passivity of thought in *The science of logic*. Stephen Houlgate argues, however, that Hegel *does not* share McDowell's insistence on passivity in perceptual experience. Summing up his

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[131] '[. . .] wir mögen uns ihrer bewußt werden oder nicht [. . .] eine Verstandeshandlung [ist]' (ibid.: B 130).

[132] McDowell, J. 2009. Self-Determining subjectivity and external constraint. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 96. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[133] McDowell, J. 2009. On Pippin's postscript. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 189f. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[134] McDowell, J. 2008. Responses. In *John McDowell: Experience, norm and nature*, ed. J. Lindgaard, 250. London: John Wiley.

[135] The expression 'acts upon' is taken from Barber, M.D. 2008. Holism and Horizon: Husserl and McDowell on non-conceptual content. In *Husserl Studies* 24: 79–97.

analysis of Hegel's account of the epistemology of perception in *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, Houlgate writes:

> [For Hegel] [w]e experience what we see as a world of objects only because we employ categories; [...] and we employ such categories [...] in acts of judgement. Judgement and understanding therefore make experience possible. Such judgement is, however, not always deliberate or self-conscious. Indeed it is more often habitual and automatic. In that sense, Hegel would agree with McDowell that our conceptual capacities are "passively drawn into operation". We do, indeed, find ourselves "passively saddled with conceptual contents": Hegel says of both consciousness and intuition that they *find* themselves confronted with a realm of things. We find ourselves so confronted, however only because of the (largely unnoticed) active operation of understanding and judgements *on* the sensations we receive.[136]

According to Houlgate's interpretation of Hegel, we do not receive or take in conceptual content in experience, only bare sensation. On such a reading, Hegel would – as in traditional empiricism – fall victim to the Myth of the Given. It is quite unclear how it would help to insist, as Houlgate does, that our active operations of understanding on bare sensations are unnoticed, habitual and automatic. This would mean that we still have bare sensations, even though we are not aware of them, which inevitably raises the question of how these sensations could rationally constrain our beliefs and judgements. How is it that judgements 'make sense of sensations', as Houlgate's Hegel asserts?[137]

In his answer, McDowell hints at this problem but also points out that Houlgate's Hegel is hard to distinguish from a subjective idealist. When factual and objective form is something we posit in automatic and habitual judgements, then the facts that we perceive to be the case 'are actually products of an intellectual construction on our part [...] How is that not a subjective idealism?'[138] According to Houlgate's reading, Hegel avoids subjective idealism because thought knows the inherent conceptual structure of the world *a priori* from within itself. Houlgate explains:

> This does not mean that I can deduce through pure thought that there is [a] tree or car in front of me. It means that thought knows through itself what the general *categorial* structure, ontological structure of being is. It knows that being comprises spatio-temporal things with properties, causal relations and quantitative determinations. Thought knows, therefore, that what there is before me is a realm of law-governed objects, even if I may be mistaken that this is a cat rather than a dog. Hegel thus shares the pre-Kantian, Spinozan conviction that thought can disclose and determine through itself the nature of the world *an sich*.[139]

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[136] Houlgate, S. 2008. Thought and experience in Hegel and McDowell. In *John McDowell: Experience, norm and nature*, ed. J. Lindgaard, 103. London: John Wiley.

[137] Ibid.: 103.

[138] McDowell, J. 2008. Responses. In *John McDowell: Experience, norm and nature*, ed. J. Lindgaard, 231. London: John Wiley.

[139] Houlgate, S. 2008. Thought and experience in Hegel and McDowell. In *John McDowell: Experience, norm and nature*, ed. J. Lindgaard, 99. London: John Wiley.

Houlgate therefore concludes that for Hegel rational constraint is not a matter of external restriction through the conceptual content of perception, but of internal restraint by the logical categories intrinsic to being. Unlike McDowell's conception, in which the world exercises (rational) authority over thought through the conceptual content of experience, Houlgate's Hegel claims that it is through thought that the world can be intelligibly conceived to exercise authority over perceptual experience. According to Houlgate, this is the principal difference between McDowell's non-traditional empiricism and Hegel's rationalism.[140]

In his response, McDowell responds on a systematic, rather than an exegetic level. He argues that the internal constraint by thought to which Houlgate appeals on Hegel's behalf does not suffice. According to Houlgate's Hegel, perceptual experience cannot enable us to know that we see, say, a cat on the mat. At best, we can only assure ourselves that what we actively posit in such an experience 'has the sort of structure that we know a priori that a fact must have'.[141] The reassurance of the objectivity of these sorts of general structures cannot compensate for the loss of immediate knowledge of the specific fact that we are able to obtain from perceptual experience if we accept McDowell's account. For Houlgate's Hegel, the facts to which perception allows us access are ultimately the result of our unnoticed 'positing'. Therefore, when he appeals to the a priori knowledge of the world, Houlgate's Hegel 'changes the subject' of the discussion rather than answers the charge of subjective idealism.[142]

It seems that McDowell is right on the systematic point: the idea of experience as the result of active positing or synthesis is untenable. Even if compensation is offered at a higher level, as per Houlgate's reading, this assurance cannot dispel the charge of subjective idealism. On an empiricist level however, Houlgate's Spinozist reading of Hegel questions McDowell's 'empiricist' interpretation of sensibility as a moment in the free development of the Notion. McDowell wants to hold on to

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[140] Ibid.: 104f.

[141] Ibid.: 231.

[142] According to McDowell, it is no help for Houlgate's Hegel to appeal to the *Logic*: 'Houlgate's Hegel appeals to the a priori knowable character of reality instead of directly responding to the accusation that his conception of sensory experience implies a subjective idealism about the phenomenal world. If we take Hegel's talk of "positing" literally, the accusation is no less pressing after Houlgate has brought in the *Logic*. For Houlgate's Hegel, the facts we thought we were taking in in perception are after all results of our "positing". A priori knowledge of the general character of reality [as it is developed in the *Logic*] serves as a sort of consolation for the loss of a conception according to which experience itself yields knowledge of how things are. My Hegel, in contrast, has a direct response to the charge of subjective idealism. If experience is informed by conceptual capacities, it can open us to the layout of phenomenal reality. What, as common sense has it, we take in in experience is not a result of constructive intellectual activity on our part [. . .] The *Logic* connects with this picture of experience in that it elaborates the idea of content that instantiates the forms of thought' (ibid.: 234). Unlike Houlgate's Hegel, McDowell does not presuppose that the *Logic* can substitute our common-sense picture, according to which we are passively constrained by the world through experience. The *Logic* instead gives determinacy to the invocation of forms of thought that, on McDowell's account, are passively actualised in experience by the attempt to establish, via a purely immanent argument, what these forms of thoughts are.

Hegel's rejection of Kant's transcendental idealism concerning time and space without comprehending Hegel's conception as a metaphysical position according to which rational constraint is supposed to be the immanent logical restriction of thought itself. He claims that the Hegelian idea of sensibility as a moment in the self-realisation of the Concept should allow experience to remain a place where reality can reveal itself to us and constrain our thought. Ideally, perceptual experience must still be able to give us a glimpse of reality and of how things are independently of what we think. However, this ambition is undermined if we allow the conceptual structure of perception to be the result of an unnoticed positing on our part, as in Houlgate's interpretation. In this case, the Hegelian position cannot amount to an Absolute Idealism – the equipoise between subjective and objective – but deteriorates into a merely subjective idealism. Houlgate agrees that Hegel incorporates sensory receptivity into reason, but only McDowell holds on to the idea that it is really the *receptivity* that is incorporated in this way, not the product of the unnoticed activity of our understanding.

In this way, the debate with Houlgate serves to clarify what McDowell means when he speaks of sensibility as a moment in the self-realisation of the Concept. This does not refer to a *substitution* of the transcendental role of sensibility by reason, such that the constraint exercised by sensibility is now only produced by the domain of thought. Rather, the transcendental role of sensibility is *preserved*, even though its conceptual nature is made apparent. The Hegelian formula therefore expresses the core idea of minimal empiricism as first developed in *Mind and World*: perceptual experience is the passive actualisation of conceptual capacities in sensory consciousness. Or, even more simply: *perceptual experience is the self-presentation of the object*.

On one level, the discussion of whether Hegel's account of perception could be incorporated into McDowell's framework boils down to the question of whether Hegel's philosophy is a Spinozist, pre-Kantian form of metaphysics that rejects the finite nature of our thought.

If we view Houlgate's interpretation of Hegel's conception of perceptual experience as systematically inadequate but exegetically correct, however, then this reveals a perhaps even more profound problem common to *both* Kant and Hegel's conceptions. In this case, it seems that both Kant and Hegel neglect the passive nature of experience – even if McDowell wants to keep Hegel's philosophy clear of this tendency. This fatal flaw is expressed in Kant's conception of the unity of intuitions as the *product* of actions of the understanding, and in Hegel's idea that we actively, although unconsciously, posit the conceptual structure of our experiences. This problem is present in both Kant's 'metaphysics of finitude' and in Hegel's (presumably) Spinozist position, which attempts to substitute the rational constraint of experience with an account of the categorial structure of the world from within thought itself.

I think this 'lack of passivity' in Kant and Hegel is an expression of the fact that they belong to the modern paradigm of subjectivity as Heidegger conceives it. What characterises this paradigm of subjectivity, according to Heidegger's critical diagnosis, is that it implicitly understands subjectivity in terms of an underlying foundation or basis for meaning. In this paradigm, subjectivity is conceived in terms of *sub-jectum* and ultimately *hypokeimenon*, as this problematic ontological

concept is originally articulated in Aristotle's philosophy. Both *hypokeimenon* and *sub-jectum* can be translated as 'underlying thing'. In the philosophy of the modern age (*Neuzeit*), beginning with Descartes, subjectivity – rather than the material substrate, as in Aristotle's philosophy – is conceived as this 'underlying thing' that grounds meaning. It is this ontological prejudice that is ultimately expressed in Kant and Hegel's idea that the objective unity of our experiences is the result of unnoticed 'actions of the understanding' or 'positing'.

McDowell's conception of experience does not share the ontological prejudice of the paradigm of subjectivity. In his framework, the conceptual content of experience, and hence the possibility of thought being directed at the world, is always already assumed as the self-evident perspective of our common sense. What philosophy must do is show what is implicit in this self-evident perspective when it is threatened by the idea of non-conceptual content, as propounded by an empiristic foundationalism, or when we attempt to ground meaning in the active performances of the subject. This approach is determined by Wittgenstein's guiding idea that philosophy is not legitimately committed to answering the question of how meaning is grounded.[143] McDowell wants to keep Hegel's philosophy free of the tendency to ground meaning in an 'underlying thing' and rather read him as conveying 'a clear-sighted awareness of groundlessness, bringing with it the understanding that *all* such attempts at grounding are misguided'.[144] Houlgate's reconstruction of Hegel's account of perceptual experience suggests that there are limits to such a Wittgensteinian reading, and thus indirectly indicates that Hegel's philosophy may, as Heidegger claimed, in some respects be tied to the paradigm of subjectivity, which conceives of the subject as an underlying thing that grounds meaning.

Our main concern here, however, is the value of McDowell's minimal empiricism in reconstructing the ontological dimension of hermeneutics. In this regard, it is decisive that the point that may separate McDowell from Hegel is the very same one that connects him with Gadamer's ontology of self-presentation. This hermeneutic ontology does not assume that subjectivity, or any other foundation, grounds meaning. This is the point of Gadamer's question: 'Does what has always supported us need to be grounded?'[145] Indeed, McDowell's programmatic statement as to how he seeks to reconstruct Hegel can be read as an echo of Gadamer's question: 'There is no ground, and it was wrong to suppose there was any need for one.'[146]

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[143] Cf. Sect. 9 in Chap. 5 below.

[144] McDowell, J. 2009. Towards a reading of Hegel on Action in the 'Reason' chapter of the *Phenomenology*. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 184. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[145] 'Bedarf es einer Begründung dessen, was uns immer schon trägt?' (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. Foreword to the second edition. In *Truth and Method*, xxxiii. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Vorwort zu 2. Auflage [1965]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 447. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[146] McDowell, J. 2009. Towards a reading of Hegel on Action in the 'Reason' chapter of the *Phenomenology*. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 184. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

8   Self-Presentation in the Account of Art and the Human Sciences

Our interest in McDowell's minimal empiricism was spurred by an attempt to explicate the world-involving or ontological dimension of language in philosophical hermeneutics. As we saw in the case of Davidson and Brandom, the idea of world-involvement can be construed in a way that does not involve a concept of perceptual experience. According to such an account, we cannot make sense of the world as some common and neutral content that lies beyond all conceptual schemes – rather, we must reject this dualism and acknowledge that the world can be the direct object of our beliefs without any interference by non-conceptual epistemic intermediaries. However, in the framework of Davidson and Brandom, the critique of appeals to bare immediacy leads to the demolition of the concept of experience altogether. Gadamer's own account does not supply us with an alternative notion of perceptual experience, and, as I have argued, his 'ontological turn' is therefore susceptible to the oscillation McDowell diagnoses between a coherentism that pictures our understanding as a 'frictionless spinning in a void' and the equally unsatisfying Myth of the Given. Hence I have turned to McDowell's Hegelian interpretation of the Kantian duality between receptivity and spontaneity, and sensibility and understanding, which rehabilitates the concept of experience while avoiding the Myth of the Given. One of the main strengths of presupposing a McDowellian concept of sensibility is that we can reject the idea that because language is an 'all-encompassing condition' of understanding in philosophical hermeneutics, our perception 'gets the worst of it'.[147] This attack draws its strength from the fact that Gadamer never seriously engages with the problem of perceptual experience. We therefore turn to McDowell, who develops an account of perception that purports to show why we are, along with Gadamer, in fact entitled to assume that man's relation to the world is absolutely and fundamentally verbal (*sprachlich*) in nature, in order to make sense of our being as creatures to which the world is disclosed at all.[148] It is now time to return to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and see how McDowell's account fits in more precisely.

The Greek verb *hermeneuein* has two basic meanings: interpretation and expression.[149] It refers both to the process of expression whereby the subject matter (*Sache*) is presented, and to the process of interpretation by which we seek to (re) apprehend the subject matter for our understanding. In fact, we might say that there are two models of understanding at stake here: one focusing on understanding as a

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[147] Løgstrup, K. E. 1978. *Skabelse og tilintetgørelse*, 112. *Metafysik IV*. Gyldendal: Copenhagen.

[148] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 417. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 479. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). McDowell explicitly endorses this passage (McDowell, J. 2002. Responses. In *Reading McDowell: on Mind and World*, ed. N. Smith, 297. London: Routledge).

[149] Cf. Grondin, J. 2001. *Einführung in die philosophische Hermeneutik*, 36f. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

subjective act of interpretation, another focusing on understanding as the expression of the subject matter. What is, I think, unique in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is that he connects the subjective aspect of understanding with the objective aspect – the subject matter coming to expression – and insists that they are intrinsically related. By contrast, contemporary (postmodern) hermeneutics isolates understanding as a subjective act of interpretation.

Gadamer's model of hermeneutics revolves around the notion of presentation (*Darstellung*) or self-presentation (*Selbstdarstellung*). His main ally is Hegel. According to Gadamer, it is Hegel who develops and transforms Spinoza's ontological concepts of *exprimere* and *expressio* into a philosophy of self-presentation.[150] For Gadamer, the core of Hegel's philosophy of self-presentation can be summed up in the idea of the 'doing of the subject matter itself' (*Tun der Sache selbst*).[151] Gadamer links this expression to Hegel's attempt to overcome the gap between subject and object inherent in the modern concept of method and objectivity. Philosophical hermeneutics can be viewed as an attempt to make this enigmatic claim relevant for our interpretation of human understanding in all its forms:

> We are simply following an internal necessity of the thing itself if we go beyond the idea of the object and the objectivity of understanding toward the idea that the subject and object belong together. Our critique of aesthetic and historical consciousness drove us to critique the concept of the objective, to detach ourselves from the Cartesian basis of modern science, and to revive ideas from Greek thought.[152]

When Gadamer speaks of the critique of aesthetic and historical consciousness, he refers to the argument developed in Part I and Part II of his book, respectively. For Gadamer, what is at stake in Hegel's thought is the idea that understanding cannot be adequately accounted for as a reflective subjective act. Rather, when we understand we are always already addressed by the subject matter in question, and in this sense understanding must be described as the self-presentation of the subject matter. On the side of the object, this means that objectivity is not a state wholly independent of subjectivity, but rather belongs to the movement of self-presentation. Thus, in the first part of his book, which deals with art, he reinterprets the notion of *objectivity*; in the second part, which deals with the human sciences,

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[150] Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Exkurs VI [1960]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 385. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[151] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 460. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 467f. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[152] 'Wir folgen lediglich einer Notwendigkeit der Sache, wenn wir den Begriff des Objekts und der Objektivität des Verstehens in der Richtung auf die Zusammengehörigkeit des Subjektiven und Objektiven hin überschreiten. Es war die Kritik des ästhetischen wie des historischen Bewusstseins, die uns zur Kritik am Begriff des Objektiven genötigt hatte und uns bestimmte, uns von der cartesianischen Grundlegung der modernen Wissenschaft zu lösen und Wahrheitsmomente des griechischen Denkens zu erneuern' (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 457. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 465. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

he rearticulates the notion of *understanding*. He does both within the framework of this conception of self-presentation. I shall outline this fundamental structure of *Truth and Method* and explain how it can be aligned with McDowell's minimal empiricism, as it has been described above.

In Part I of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer rejects the idea that the being of the work of art is a being in itself, which by means of an aesthetic differentiation (*ästhetische Unterscheidung*) can be separated from its reproduction or the contingency of its appearance. Against the notion of an aesthetic differentiation, Gadamer asserts that the mode of being of the artwork is presentation (*Darstellung*) – or more precisely, self-presentation (*Selbstdarstellung*). He contrasts this with the approach of the so-called *Erlebniskunst*, where the work of art becomes an empty mould filled subjectively with meaning in a variety of discontinuous 'experiences' (*Erlebnisse*).[153] The guiding concept in Gadamer's attempt to develop an alternative is the notion of play (*Spiel*). Gadamer's first main thesis is that, in the work of art, the play of presentation is potentially a representation for someone.

> All presentation is potentially a representation for someone. That this possibility is intended is the characteristic feature of art as play. The closed world of play lets down one of its walls, as it were. A religious rite and a play in a theatre obviously do not represent in the same sense as a child playing. Their being is not exhausted by the fact that they present themselves, for at the same time they point beyond themselves to the audience which participates by watching.[154]

Gadamer here asserts that the work of art as presentation addresses or speaks to its spectator. In fact, this address makes the audience the 'fourth open wall', which closes the work of art. In other words, the spectator must be considered part of the work of art.

However, the work of art's dependence on presentation does not entail dependence in the sense that the play acquires a definite meaning only through the particular persons representing it. Rather, in relation to them, the play retains relative autonomy. Therefore, understanding the work of art as a presentation that involves spectators does not destroy its unity, but suggests that this unity cannot be comprehended independently of its presentation. In relation to the different reproductions or presentations in which the work of art manifests its unity, Gadamer speaks of a total mediation (*totale Vermittlung*):

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[153] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 115. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 121. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[154] 'Alles Darstellen ist nun seiner Möglichkeit nach ein Darstellen für jemanden. Daß diese Möglichkeit als solche gemeint wird, macht das Eigentümliche im Spielcharakter der Kunst aus. Der geschlossene Raum der Spielwelt läßt hier gleichsam die eine Wand fallen. Das Kultspiel und das Schauspiel stellen offenkundig nicht in demselben Sinne dar, wie das spielende Kind darstellt. Sie gehen darin, daß sie darstellen, nicht auf, sondern weisen zugleich über sich hinaus auf diejenigen, die zuschauend daran teilhaben' (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 108. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 114. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

> Total mediation means that the medium as such is superseded (*aufhebt*). In other words, the performance (in the case of drama and music, but also in the recitation of epics and or lyrics) does not become, as such, thematic, but the work presents itself through it and in it. We will see that the same is true of the way buildings and statues present themselves to be approached and encountered. Here too, the approach as such is not thematic, but neither is it true that one would have to abstract from the work's relations to the life world in order to grasp the work itself. Rather, it exists within them.[155]

In the following chapters of the first part of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer develops an account of different forms of art and seeks to flesh out his general claim, namely that the artwork is not a being in itself, but rather that its presentation belongs to its being. The main claim is that the objectivity of the work of art is not conceived as a state of complete independence of subjectivity – rather, the subjectivity of the interpreter is to be conceived as 'belonging' to the self-presentation of the work of art itself. Interpretive and critical activity is fundamentally an act of response. Using the performing arts as his paradigm, Gadamer attempts in Part I to show that understanding an artwork is not an act performed upon a passive object, let alone a meaning-*bestowing* activity. Rather, such understanding attempts to articulate or enact a meaning that strives to be expressed. When, for example, a musician plays a piece of music, he answers to an address of the work itself: the demand to be played. In this sense, his interpretation is a reaction or a response to a meaningful address from the object. In our encounter with the work of art, it is always already presenting itself.

In Part II of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer extends the structure of self-presentation to cover the relation between interpreter and 'text' (in the broad sense), as found in the practice of the human sciences. Essentially, he claims that the process of interpretation must also be conceived within the framework of the self-presentation of the subject matter. This entails a criticism of the historicist assumption that the meaning of a text or historic event is a fixed entity in itself that can and must be reconstructed in our understanding. Against this methodological ideal based on a separation of subject and object, Gadamer emphasises the interpreter's *belongingness* (*Zugehörigkeit*) to tradition.[156] This fundamental belongingness expresses itself in the inevitable fore-structure of understanding (*Vorstruktur des Verstehens*). The object of interpretation speaks to our preconceived opinions (*Vorurteile*) that always already influence us. Thus,

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[155] 'Totale Vermittlung bedeutet, daß das Vermittlende als Vermittelndes sich selbst aufhebt. Das will sagen, daß die Reproduktion (im Falle von Schauspiel und Musik, aber auch beim epischen oder lyrischen Vortrag) als solche nicht thematisch wird, sondern daß sie durch sie hindurch und in ihr das Werk zur Darstellung bringt. Wir werden sehen, daß das gleiche von dem Zugangs- und Begegnungscharakter gilt, in dem Bauten und Bildwerke sich darstellen. Auch hier wird der Zugang als solcher nicht selbst thematisch, aber umgekehrt ist es auch nicht so, daß man von diesen zu abstrahieren hätte, um das Werk selbst zu erfassen. Vielmehr ist es in ihnen selbst da' (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 118f. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 125. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[156] Cf. Sect. 3 in Chap. 5 below for more on the relation between the phenomenon of belonging and the concept of tradition.

Gadamer depicts the understanding of texts and historic events as interplay between the movement of the tradition and the movement of the interpreter. He emphasises how the anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding of a text is not an act of subjectivity; rather it proceeds from the commonality that binds us to the tradition. However, this commonality is constantly being formed in our relation to tradition. Of course, methodological rigour is indispensable. We seek to articulate, test, revise and in some cases even reject our prejudices. But in doing so we are not increasingly approximating a being in itself that represents a completely detached state of objectivity. Rather, we enable 'the coming into play, the playing out, of the content of tradition in its constantly widening possibilities of significance and resonance, extended by the different people perceiving it'.[157]

Understanding in the human sciences is therefore not to be conceived as an act of subjectivity seeking to assert knowledge about an entity in itself, but rather as the participation in a process of transmission (*Einrücken in ein Überlieferungsgeschehen*) in which past and present are mediated in a fusion of horizons.[158] Gadamer thus decisively rejects a notion of understanding conceived solely as an act of subjectivity. Both before and beyond our reflective attempts to interpret the texts and objects of our cultural tradition, we are *connected with this tradition*.

9 Self-Presentation as a Transcendental and Ontological Concept

In Part III of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer explicates the transcendental and ontological dimension of his hermeneutical concept of self-presentation.

First, he sketches the transcendental presupposition that language is the medium in which the processes of mediation described in relation to Part I and II above are played out.[159] As we have seen, this view entails the idea that concepts do not explicate a non-conceptual given. This has important consequences in relation to works of art, texts and historical events: the concepts with which the subject matter is interpreted are not external instruments brought to bear on a given object – rather, through our use of them, we express the inner articulation of the subject matter itself.[160] The concepts belong to the object itself, in a manner analogous to the way

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[157] '[...] das Insspielkommen, das Sichausspielen des Überlieferungsgehaltes in seinen je neuen, durch den anderen Empfänger neu erweiterten Sinn- und Resonanzmöglichkeiten' (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 457f. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 466. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[158] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 291. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 295. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[159] Ibid.: 471/479.

[160] Ibid.: 477/469.

in which the spectators belong to the play that is performed. Since the object is not constituted independently of our conceptual capacities, it always already speaks to us in an address that manifests itself in our pre-understanding, which is always operative. Hence, in our interpretation, no measure or norm is available to us that is external and independent of this prior belongingness. On a transcendental level, our concepts explicate, revise and modulate an already existing belongingness between subject and object. This idea that our conceptual activity is a response to the inner articulation of the subject matter again rejects the idea of understanding as exclusively an activity of subjectivity. Instead, understanding or interpretation is reconceived as a moment in the self-presentation of the subject matter. Gadamer's point is most programmatically articulated in the following passage:

> That which can be understood is language. This means that it is of such a nature that of itself it offers itself to be understood. Here too is confirmed the speculative structure of language. To come into being does not mean that a second being is acquired. Rather, what something presents itself as belongs to its own being. Thus everything that is language has a speculative unity: it contains a distinction, that between its being and its presentations of itself, but this is a distinction that is really not a distinction at all.[161]

McDowell's interpretation of the Kantian duality between sensibility and understanding expresses the same insight, only more specifically in relation to perception. On this reading, the same logical structures give unity to both our intuitions and our judgements. This means that the logical or understandable form of our perceptual experience is not something that we impose on it, but rather its intrinsic structure: 'of itself it offers itself to be understood', as Gadamer puts it.

However, Gadamer also makes a second ontological point in Part III. At the beginning of the very last subchapter of his book, he speaks of language as 'a medium (*Mitte*) where I and world manifest their original belonging together', and claims that 'being that can be understood is language'.[162] In other words, he points to a universal, ontological dimension of hermeneutics. Since Gadamer never engages with the question of our most obvious openness to the world – our perceptual experience – this ultimate dimension of hermeneutics remains unconvincing. Therefore a radical 'nominalist' reading such as Rorty's, which dissolves being into language, becomes a tempting solution. This approach, however, would deny a proper role to receptivity and compromise the concept of experience. It would make Gadamer vulnerable to the oscillation that McDowell diagnoses between an assertion of unconstrained spontaneity, 'a frictionless spinning in a void', and a fruitless appeal to bare immediacy.

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[161] 'Was verstanden werden kann ist Sprache. Das will sagen: es ist so, daß es sich von sich aus dem Verstehen darstellt. Auch von dieser Seite bestätigt sich die Spekulative Struktur der Sprache. Zur-Sprache-Kommen heißt nicht, ein zweites Dasein bekommen. Als was sich etwas darstellt, gehört vielmehr zu seinem eigenen Sein. Es handelt sich also bei all solchem, das Sprache ist, um eine Spekulative Einheit, eine Unterscheidung in sich, zu sein und sich darzustellen, eine Unterscheidung, die doch gerade keine Unterscheidung sein soll' (ibid.: 479/470).

[162] Ibid.: 469/478.

It is in this light that McDowell's interpretation of the Kantian duality between receptivity and spontaneity, and sensibility and understanding, achieves its true relevance for philosophical hermeneutics. McDowell refuses to construe sensibility's contribution to experience as something that can be characterised independently of the way in which our understanding operates. This is the idea behind the Hegelian conception of sensibility as a 'moment' in a speculative unity of the free self-realisation of the Concept – at least in McDowell's use of Hegel's formula. Ultimately, the thought-independence of reality itself can only be upheld by allowing it to be included in the conceptual sphere, the space of reasons. Conceived in this way, we can see sensibility as a dimension in which the objects of the world *present themselves to us*.

From this perspective, Gadamer's attempt to rearticulate objectivity and method can be brought beyond the practice of understanding works of art and texts, and achieve a universal significance. We are now able to see why Gadamer can say that the basic ontological structure implicitly presupposed in our experience is that 'being is language – i.e. self-presentation' (*Sein ist Sprache, d. h. Sichdarstellen*).[163] The idea that being is self-presentation – the doing of the subject matter itself – and hence always already addresses us and involves our faculty for receptivity, is motivated by the idea that in order to see our intentional relation to the world as unproblematic, we must allow sensibility and ultimately reality itself to be embraced within the conceptual sphere, and thereby allow our perceptual experience and the layout of reality to be able to be articulated in language. In this way, Gadamer can therefore equate language and self-presentation. The idea that the world always already addresses and involves us *is* the idea that it can be articulated in words.

As we have seen, the core idea of McDowell's minimal empiricism is that conceptual capacities are passively actualised in sensory consciousness. According to this view, we can acknowledge that external constraint is exerted in intuitions (in the Kantian sense) by the '[. . .] object themselves, the subject matter of the conceptual representations involved in perception'.[164] McDowell expresses this idea of perceptual experience as the self-presentation of the object in the following metaphorical way:

> A seen object as it were invites one to take it to be as it visibly is. It speaks to one; if it speaks to one's understanding, that is just what its speaking to one comes to. "See me as I am," it (so to speak) says to one; "namely, as characterized by *these* properties" – and it displays them.[165]

McDowell emphasises that he is not holding the view – rightly criticised by Rorty – that the world speaks to us in its *own language*, as in a kind of transcendental

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[163] Ibid.: 481/490.

[164] McDowell, J. 2009. Sellars, Kant and intentionality. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 40. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[165] Ibid.

realism.[166] Objects can only speak to us because we have learned a human language. Thus, the quote's playful image of the object speaking to us in English merely illustrates the point that objects come into view for us only in actualisations of conceptual capacities that are intelligibly ours – and for them to be intelligibly ours, we must presuppose the acquisition of a natural language. Gadamer also employs the metaphor of a language of things (*Sprache der Dinge*) and makes an analogous point very clearly:

> The language that things have – whatever kind of things they may be – is not the *logos ousias*, and it is not fulfilled in the self-contemplation of an infinite intellect; it is the language that our finite, historical nature apprehends when we learn to speak.[167]

Thus, both McDowell and Gadamer reject the 'fantasy of conceptual capacities that belong to the world itself'.[168] Rather, they conceive of *language* as the medium through which our most primordial belongingness to world presents itself. In this way, McDowell's account of perception, in terms of a moment in the self-realisation of the Concept, emphasises the same two crucial features as Gadamer's notion of self-presentation – namely, on the one hand, the passivity of the event of understanding, and on the other hand the belongingness between us and the subject matter of understanding. According to Gadamer, the notion of self-presentation expresses the idea that understanding does not begin with us, with our procedures or methods: 'Understanding begins [. . .] when something addresses us. This is the first condition of hermeneutics.'[169] Gadamer's insistence on the address of the object as the origin of understanding makes the performing arts a paradigmatic model for the explication of his model, which corrects the idea of understanding as an act of subjectivity. Gadamer's idea obviously entails a strong emphasis on passivity and therefore the notion of experience also gains a paradigmatic importance for philosophical hermeneutics. The point McDowell makes concerning perceptual experience counts in general: experiences cannot be intelligibly conceived as the product of our activity. Rather, understanding has the structure of an event (*Verstehen ist ein Geschehen*), as Gadamer puts it.[170] But – and this is the second of the two crucial,

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[166] Ibid.: 43.

[167] 'Die Sprache, die die Dinge führen – welche Art Dinge es jeweils sein mögen –, ist nicht der *logos ousias* und vollendet sich nicht in der Selbstanschauung eines unendlichen Intellekts – sie ist die Sprache, die unser endlich-geschichtliches Wesen vernimmt, wenn wir sprechen lernen' (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 471. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 480. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). Cf. Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Die Natur der Sache und die Sprache der Dinge [1960]. In *Gesammelte Werke 2*, 66–76. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[168] McDowell, J. 2009. Sellars, Kant and intentionality. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 43. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[169] 'Das erste, womit das Verstehen beginnt [. . .] ist daß etwas uns anspricht. Das ist die oberste aller hermeneutischen Bedingungen' (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 298. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 304. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[170] Ibid.: 467/476.

common features of McDowell's and Gadamer's approaches – our understanding can only address us insofar as there is belongingness between us and the object. It could not present itself as an obstacle or challenge to our understanding if it were not, in some minimal way, connected to our preconceived opinions. Therefore the object of understanding always belongs within the potential horizon of our linguistic world-view. According to Gadamer, what defines hermeneutics is this interplay between, on the one hand, the belongingness to the object that allows for understanding and, on the other hand, the passive exposure to an externality that allows for real objectivity (*Sachlichkeit*). McDowell's contribution to the self-clarification of philosophical hermeneutics is to make apparent how this interplay can be claimed to be universal.

One might suggest that McDowell's contribution is an optional extra that philosophical hermeneutics may ignore while still propounding such an idea of objectivity and understanding as self-presentation in relation to experiences of artworks and texts. His interpretation of sensibility would then only be relevant for those who wish to defend a universalist form of hermeneutics, not for those wishing to stay within Gadamer's 'core' area of interest – the human sciences. However, this would be a misunderstanding. *As experience*, our encounters with a work of art involve a moment of sensory receptivity. And then the question arises: how are we to conceive of this moment? My claim is that only by presupposing McDowell's picture, in which conceptual capacities are drawn into operation in sensory receptivity, can the moment of sensory receptivity be construed in a way that acknowledges its proper role in hermeneutic experience. We are then able to acknowledge self-presentation as the defining structure of a hermeneutic concept of understanding and the act of interpretation as a moment within that structure.

In a response to Charles Taylor, who claims that McDowell does not draw the anti-foundationalist consequences of his position, and as such refrains from making 'a crucial continental move', McDowell writes that his master idea of an all-encompassing spontaneity can be equated with the notion of interpretation, as this notion is used in a continental context: 'Where [the] foundationalist says "It can't be interpretation all the way down," the proponent of the Given I discuss says "It can't be actualizations of capacities belonging to spontaneity all the way out." The imagery is different, but the thought is surely the same.'[171] It is crucial that McDowell's remark here is understood as an answer meant to deny Taylor's diagnosis and instead posit himself as an anti-foundationalist. As we have seen, McDowell emphatically rejects that it is 'interpretation all the way down', in the sense that he warns against conceiving our experience as an activity. Experience is not the result of unconscious interpretation, just as it is not the result of an unconscious judging. Instead, the same conceptual capacities[172] that are actively

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[171] McDowell, J. 2002. Responses. In *Reading McDowell: On Mind and World*, ed. N. Smith, 282. London: Routledge. Cf. Taylor, C. 2002. Foundationalism and the inner-outer distinction. In *Reading McDowell: On Mind and World*, ed. N. Smith, 106–119. London: Routledge.

[172] Or, the same *as-structure* we might say, to retain the analogy with the continental tradition (cf. Sect. 1 in Chap. 6 below)

applied in interpretation are already *passively* actualised in our experience. In this general sense, it is interpretation all the way down.[173]

To emphasise this crucial point, while McDowell claims that our sensory receptivity is within reach of spontaneity, he does not hold that we are subconsciously *active* when we enjoy perceptual experiences. Likewise, he does not say that spontaneity is active in our sensory receptivity, but only that receptivity is *within the reach* of spontaneity. He criticises Kant for not being entirely clear on this point, and rejects such a reading of Hegel because it would entail the facts we perceive to be the case being reduced to products of our intellectual construction. If we are to avoid such tendencies toward subjective idealism and uphold the equipoise between subjective and objective, then we must emphasise that experience is *passive*. Only in this way can we hold on to the idea that our sensibility constitutes genuine receptivity. Our perceptual experience, our sensibility, is receptivity in operation, and as such passive. In experience, the world 'impresses' itself on us, we are 'saddled with content' and our conceptual capacities are 'passively or involuntarily' drawn into play.[174] This insistence on passivity is crucial for McDowell's attempt to limit the *acts* of spontaneity by acknowledging a role for experience as foundation for knowledge, while at the same time escaping the framework of foundationalism by assuming a non-conceptual given. We should therefore highlight the distinction between being within the *scope* of spontaneity and being an *act* of spontaneity. In other words, without passivity there is no genuine constraint on our spontaneity – and since immediacy cannot ground our spontaneity, we have to maintain a sharp distinction between passivity and immediacy.

Finally, the critique of interpretation developed here must be distinguished from Vattimo's attempt to overcome the concept of interpretation as the foundation of hermeneutics. For Vattimo, the problem in conceiving hermeneutics as a philosophy of interpretation is ultimately that one overlooks or illegitimately plays down the problems of *reflexivity* inherent in this definition. He states that it is self-contradictory to claim that human existence is a self-interpretive form of existence 'all the way down' and then attempt to ground this hermeneutics of interpretation in an anthropological or transcendental theory. Regarding Nietzsche, Vattimo stresses

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[173] It should be noted that McDowell also rejects a concept of interpretation that understands interpretation as an application of schemata. This notion of interpretation belongs within the dualism of scheme and uninterpreted content, and as such it is rejected by McDowell as version of the Myth of the Given. Most explicitly, this is done in his work on Wittgenstein's notion of rule-following (collected in McDowell, J. 1998. *Mind, Value and Reality*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Cf. ibid.: 279ff.). Within the hermeneutical tradition, Wiesing also criticises such a notion of interpretation (cf. Wiesing, L. 2004. Zur Kritik am Interpretationismus oder Die Trennung von Wahrheit und Methode. In *Internationales Jahrbuch für Hermeneutik* 3, ed. G. Figal, 137–152. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[174] 'One's conceptual capacities have already been brought into play, in the content's being available to one, before one has any choice in the matter. The content is not something one has put together oneself, as when one decides what to say about something' (McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 10; cf. 12, 28. Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

the point that such a description is *itself* an interpretation, and hence cannot be awarded the status of a transcendental or anthropological theory.

Instead, according to Vattimo, hermeneutics ought to 'present itself as the most persuasive philosophical interpretation of a situation or "epoch", of the course of events of which it feels itself to be the outcome'. In other words, for Vattimo, the self-contradictory character of a hermeneutics of interpretation must be taken seriously and form the basis for developing a reflection on the historicity of hermeneutics. By introducing a Nietzschean philosophy of history, Vattimo seeks to describe the hermeneutics of interpretation as a distinctly modern form of thought. He admits that his position can be understood as a form of historicism, but sees this as preferable to the attempt to ground hermeneutics in a transcendental or anthropological theory of interpretation that neglects the problem of reflexivity. As such, when Vattimo speaks of overcoming or moving beyond interpretation, it is not the concept of interpretation as such to which he objects. He merely wants to insist that this notion belongs within the framework of a radical (Nietzschean) historicism, rather than ground it in a transcendental meta-theory.

However, in McDowell's and Gadamer's perspectives, the very idea that interpretation should be the basic concept in accounting for meaning is rejected. The alternative, which shapes Vattimo's thought between a transcendental grounding of interpretation and a Nietzschean historicist account of interpretation, is false. Vattimo rightly objects that the former option represents a foundationalist fantasy, but his own Nietzschean historicism is equally problematic: when inspected more closely, it is revealed as a disguised form of scepticism.[175]

Rather than relying solely on the notion of interpretation, we need the notion of self-presentation – which, unlike interpretation, is not confined to a view of meaning as a product of (subjective) activity, but stresses that interpretation is to be conceived as a response, because it belongs in relation to a meaningful world that always already addresses and constrains us.[176]

10   Retaining the Equipoise

There remains, however, an ambiguity in the account of objectivity and understanding in terms of self-presentation. This ambiguity stems from Gadamer's problematic idea of a *total mediation*. As we have seen, this means that in an experience of a work of art, the medium as such is superseded. According to Gadamer, when, for example, we hear a piece of music being performed, the performance or presentation as such does not become thematic but the work presents itself through it and in it. In *Gegenständlichkeit* (2006), Günter Figal criticises this view: 'That a presentation [*Darstellung*] does not become thematic, however,

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[175] Cf. Sect. 2, 3, 4, and 5 in Chap. 2 above.
[176] Cf. also Sects. 4 and 9 in Chap. 5 below.

does not mean that it would dissolve, as, for Gadamer, an actor "disappears" completely "in the recognition of what he presents". Even if one does not reflect on the presentation critically or affirmatively, it is there as such, and the work is only present for this reason.'[177]

In this sense, the presentation or the medium has its own irreducible function. We can appreciate Figal's point by staying with the example of a presentation given by an actor in a play or in a movie. When, for example, we enjoy the performance of Al Pacino as Shylock in M. Radford's screenplay version (2004) of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, it is not because Pacino completely evaporates as a 'medium' in favour of the character that he presents. Rather, when we are moved by the tragic logic of Shylock's thirst for 'justice', we also appreciate *Al Pacino* as a distinct performer of this role. It is precisely by reflecting upon Pacino's specific style compared with other actors who have performed the same part that we gain a deeper insight into the subject matter of the play. Figal sums up his point in the following way:

> Presentations are not simply subject to the power of a matter [*Sache*], which is pressing toward presence and is self-manifesting, but, rather, achieve their substantiveness through the intensification of their presentative character [*Darstellungscharakter*]. A presentation is all the more convincing, the more differentiated its own possibilities are. A presentation that is guided by a consciousness of its own possibilities does more justice to its matter than the one that recedes and wishes to be nothing other than the medium of its matter.[178]

We should thus speak of a *dialectic of intensification* between presentation and subject matter. This dialectic is especially significant in what might be termed *emphatic presentations*. In such emphatic presentations, what is generally the case becomes paradigmatically clear – namely, that the presentation does not completely dissolve in order to let the subject matter unveil itself.

Figal essentially holds that construing the process of understanding in terms of self-presentation necessitates a significant and problematic tendency to play down the role of the interpreting subjectivity. In Gadamer's account, therefore, there can be no space for the interpreting subjectivity to present the subject matter and thereby actively contribute to it becoming present. In dismissing the idea of self-presentation, Figal understands the Hegelian doctrine of the doing of the subject matter itself as a *substantialist* doctrine that reduces the interpreting subjectivity to a mere accidental figure.

It seems right that a proper account of the transcendental dimension of philosophical hermeneutics must emphasise the doing of the thing itself while explaining

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[177] Figal, G. 2010. *Objectivity: The hermeneutical and philosophy*, translated by T. George, 73. Albany (NY): SUNY Press; Figal, G. 2006. *Gegenständlichkeit. Das Hermeneutische und die Philosophie*, 88. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. Cf. Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 114. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 120. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[178] Figal, G. 2010. *Objectivity: The hermeneutical and philosophy*, translated by T. George, 76. Albany (NY): SUNY Press; Figal, G. 2006. *Gegenständlichkeit. Das Hermeneutische und die Philosophie*, 91.

how this does not play down the freedom of subjectivity. Even though our subjectivity is absorbed (*aufgeht*), it does not perish (*untergeht*) in the event of understanding.[179] Faced with the charge that Gadamer reduces the interpreting subjective figure to a mere accidental figure in relation to a matter that presents itself, it is relevant to make two points. First, we should remind ourselves why it makes sense to speak of the self-presentation of the subject matter in the first place. As McDowell's reconstruction of the Kant-Hegel relation makes clear, this discourse is introduced by the need to bring everything within the reach of spontaneity and free self-conscious interpretive thought in order to avoid any useless appeals to bare immediacy in our experience. The implications of this argument entail that even the intake in our perceptual experience is conceptually structured and hence available to spontaneity. Toward the end of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer returns to the description of the experience of art in terms of play. Here, he asserts that the subject matter of a work of art only is what it is due to the subjective presentation that allows it to be played out in constantly broadening possibilities of significance.[180] Of course, there are very significant differences between our 'everyday' perceptual experience, which is the paradigm case in McDowell's account, and the experience of artworks and classic texts, which are the main areas of interest for Gadamer. The relation between perceiving a state of affairs in the world, say, that spring has begun,[181] and judging that this state of affairs obtains, differs in many important ways from, say, the relation between the situation of an actor who is instructed how to play a part and the presentation of his understanding in the enactment of the role. However, these types of experience have a crucial and decisive feature in common. In both cases, everything experienced is within the sphere of responsible thinking. There are no elements at play that are beyond the reach of an interpretive subjectivity. Even if the judgement that 'spring has begun' or the actor's presentation of his understanding of the role allotted to him are not the result of intense reflection, this does not rule out the activation of conceptual capacities. What it means for something to 'present itself' or to 'address the recipient' is precisely that the relevant phenomenon remains within the reach of self-conscious, responsible thinking: in other words, it could be the subject of a reflective interpretation.

In short, it is precisely in order to preserve the possibility of what Figal terms 'a presentation that is guided by a consciousness of its own possibilities' that we *need* the concept of self-presentation. As we have seen, Figal's alternative – namely, to conceive hermeneutics as based on the subjective act of interpretation – cannot work. This model deteriorates into either a constructivism that undermines the normativity or a bindingness (*Verbindlichkeit*) that is characteristic of all experience,

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[179] Cf. Theunissen, M. 2001. Philosophische Hermeneutik als Phänomenologie der Traditionsaneignung. In *Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache. Hommage an Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 69. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

[180] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 457f. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 466. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[181] Cf. McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 27. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

including encounters with works of art.[182] Alternatively, this paradigm presupposes a form of 'objectivity' that, when inspected more closely, turns out to be Mythical because it could not constrain our thoughts, judgements and interpretations. By bringing in the critique of the Myth of the Given and McDowell's Hegelian interpretation of receptivity, I have thus articulated the philosophical context in which one can make sense of Gadamer's notion of self-presentation. In this light, Figal's suspicion that Gadamer's strategy is a substantialist doctrine that marginalises the role of subjectivity is misplaced. The emphasis on spontaneity allows us to speak of an *equipoise* between subjective and objective in perceptual experience, and correspondingly permits Gadamer to describe our experience of art and texts as *dialogical*. By stressing this balance in the idea of self-presentation, we are able to hold on to the notion of self-presentation and understand our interpretive acts within that framework. At the same time, we can acknowledge that the idea of a total mediation is problematic, precisely because it would entail a collapse of the equipoise, a breakdown of the dialogical relation.

Secondly, apart from this systematic answer to Figal's objection, there is also an exegetical aspect that ought to be emphasised. When we look more closely at Gadamer's text, it becomes clear that the conception of presentation as a mere medium that dissolves in favour of a total mediation is only *one tendency* in his account of hermeneutical experience. In the chapter from Part I in which he introduces the notion of total mediation, he also stresses the independency of the act of presentation by saying that it both leaves out (*weglassen*) and heightens (*hervorheben*) aspects of the subject matter presented.[183] Furthermore, in Part II of *Truth and Method*, when he describes the fore-structure of understanding, he repeatedly seeks to underline that this claim is not meant to undermine the point of a rigorous methodological process that tests and revises our fore-meanings (*Vormeinungen*) according to their origin (*Herkunft*) and validity.[184] In this context, Gadamer refers to Heidegger's development of the question of being (*Seinsfrage*) as a case of exemplary hermeneutical practice.[185] Heidegger critically tested his question of being against important turning points in the history of metaphysics, thereby following the maxim of any proper methodological understanding – namely, not merely to assert anticipatory ideas (*Antizipationen*) 'but to make them conscious, so as to check them and thus acquire right understanding from

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[182] In one of his investigations of aesthetics, Gadamer claims that artistic reproduction is free and binding (*verbindlich*) at the same time (Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Zur Fragwürdigkeit des ästhetischen Bewußtseins [1958]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 8, 15. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[183] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 114. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 120. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). Here, Gadamer speaks of imitation (*Nachahmung*) or *mimēsis*, but it is clear from the context that this is synonymous with presentation.

[184] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 269. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 272. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[185] Ibid.: 272/274.

the things themselves'.[186] By using Heidegger's critical testing of his question of being as an example of an interpretation that is firmly directed at the subject matter, Gadamer implicitly acknowledges that an interpretation is often more than a medium that must dissolve to bring forth the subject matter. Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle, for example, engages us by virtue of being an emphatic presentation that never allows us to forget that it mediates the subject matter, and thus reminds us that it is – to use Figal's phrase – 'conscious of its own possibilities'. Understanding is sensitive to the alterity (*Andersheit*) of the text, but this sensitivity does not presuppose the extinction of one's self (*Selbstauslöschung*), as seems to be implied by Figal's critical interpretation of the notion of self-presentation. Understanding includes the critical *activity* of revising and developing one's prejudices.[187]

In general, Gadamer's account of hermeneutic experience in Part II and III is therefore much more open to the dialectic of intensification between presentation and subject matter than his concept of total mediation suggests. This tendency is programmatically expressed in his concluding description of interpretation as a dialogue:

> Inasmuch as the tradition is newly expressed in language, something comes into being that had not existed before and that exists from now on. We can illustrate this with any historical example. Whether a given traditionary text is a poem or tells us of a great event, in each case what is transmitted re-emerges into existence just as it presents itself. There is no being-in-itself that is increasingly revealed when Homer's *Iliad* or Alexander's Indian Campaign speaks to us in the new appropriation of tradition; but, as in genuine dialogue, something emerges that is contained in neither of the partners by himself.[188]

It is thus in accordance with the *model of dialogue* or *equipoise* that the idea of self-presentation or the doing of the subject matter itself must be understood in order to preserve the equipoise between subject and object.

Even if Figal is right that the notion of total mediation is problematic, this far from undermines the concept of self-presentation. Interestingly, an analogous, albeit inverse point is relevant in relation to Gadamer's famous concept of the fusion of horizons. The danger here seems to be that when we conceive understanding as a fusion of horizons, the alterity of the object of interpretation is threatened. In relation to this concept, the balance of the hermeneutic conception of understanding seems in danger of tipping in favour of the *subjective side*, in which the moment of receptivity is played down. For example, when describing our attempt to understand the practices of a foreign culture as an attempt at a fusion of horizons, this could seem to hint at an

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[186] Ibid.

[187] Ibid.

[188] 'Indem die Überlieferung neu zur Sprache kommt, tritt etwas heraus und ist fortan, was vorher nicht war. Wir können uns das an jedem beliebigen geschichtlichen Beispiel illustrieren. Ob das Überlieferte selber ein dichterisches Kunstwerk ist oder etwa die Kunde von einem großen Geschehen vermittelt, in jedem Falle ist das, was sich da übermittelt, so wie es sich darstellt neu ins Dasein getreten. Kein Ansichsein wird nur zunehmend weiter enthült, wenn Homers Ilias oder Alexanders Indienzug in neuer Aneignung der Überlieferung zu uns sprechen, sondern es ist wie im echten Gespräch, wo auch etwas herauskommt, was keiner der Partner von sich aus umfaßt' (ibid.: 458/466).

appropriative strategy. In this case, it would be fair to say that hermeneutics is 'preoccupied with digestion'.[189] Gadamer is not blameless with regard to the misunderstanding that his position does not allow for irreducible otherness, and instead aims at the assimilation of the object of interpretation. But this is only if we read his notion of fusion of horizons as methodological, rather than conceiving it as a transcendental notion, as something that is at work *every time* we understand something that is initially alien to us. We would then refrain from understanding this concept as implying that, in understanding, the object is dissolved or absorbed in our interpretation, and instead focus on the simple fact that horizons can be different, but that they can also extend into one another because they are part of the same world.[190] If we follow this line of argument, we should stress passages like the following in Gadamer's account of understanding, where he describes the polarity (*Polarität*) between familiarity and strangeness in our relation to the texts of tradition:

> Hermeneutics must start from the position that a person seeking to understand something has a bond to the subject matter that comes into language through the traditionary text and has, or acquires, a connection with the tradition from which the text speaks. On the other hand, hermeneutical consciousness is aware that its bond to this subject matter does not consist in some self-evident, unquestioned unanimity, as is the case with the unbroken stream of tradition. [. . .] Here too there is a tension. It is in the play between the traditionary text's strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition. *The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between.*[191]

Gadamer is right to describe hermeneutics as placed between the poles of familiarity and strangeness. This emphasis on irreducible reciprocity avoids the pitfalls of both an appropriative subjectivity and an all-determining substance. According to Gadamer, it is a consequence of this intermediate position (*Zwischenstellung*) of hermeneutics that it should not attempt to develop a *procedure of understanding* – which might focus on, say, unity and appropriation – but instead attempt to clarify *the conditions and challenges that determine understanding as such.*[192] Only then are we able to refrain from a description that tips the balance in favour of either the subjective or the objective side.

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[189] Caputo, J. D. 1988. Beyond Aestheticism: Derrida's responsible anarchy. In *Research in Phenomenology* 18, 59–73.

[190] Taylor, C. 2002. Gadamer on the human sciences. In *The Cambridge companion to Gadamer*, ed. R. J. Dostal, 292. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[191] 'Die Hermeneutik muß davon ausgehen, das wer verstehen will, mit der Sache, die mit der Überlieferung zur Sprache kommt, verbunden ist und an die Tradition Anschluß hat oder Anschluß gewinnt, aus der die Überlieferung spricht. Auf der anderen Seite weiß das hermeneutische Bewußtsein, daß es mit dieser Sache nicht in der Weise einer fraglos selbstverständlichen Einigkeit verbunden sein kann, wie es für das ungebrochene Fortleben einer Tradition gilt. [. . .] [H]ier ist eine Spannung gegeben. Sie spielt zwischen Fremdheit und Vertrautheit, die die Überlieferung für uns hat, zwischen der historisch gemeinten, abständigen Gegenständlichkeit und der Zugehörigkeit zu einer Tradition. *In diesem Zwischen ist der wahre Ort der Hermeneutik*' (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 295. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 300. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[192] Ibid.

Chapter 5
Historical and Situated Objectivity: Tradition and *Phronēsis*

In Chaps. 3 and 4, we have seen how McDowell and the Sellarsian tradition can provide a framework for the rearticulation of philosophical hermeneutics. In the transcendental and ontological version propounded by McDowell, the Socratic paradigm of *logon didonai* allows us to hold on to the crucial link between understanding and objectivity and also formulate a notion of perceptual experience that respects this connection. In this way, Gadamer's own claims that language and understanding comprehend everything that can ever be an object, and that it is through language that our most primordial belongingness to the world presents itself, find renewed support. Furthermore, this interpretation of Gadamer emphasises the central status of the concept of self-presentation that distinguishes philosophical hermeneutics. This notion expresses a critique of the notions of judgement and interpretation, because they are not able to capture the aspect of passive receptivity that must be maintained in order to make sense of our understanding as constrained by its subject matter.

In this chapter, I will examine some of the fundamental objections to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in the light of the previous reconstruction. The first objection on which I will focus is connected to Gadamer's emphasis on the historically situated nature of our understanding. More specifically, I want to revisit Gadamer's concept of tradition, which enjoys a privileged role in philosophical hermeneutics. In fact, no other philosopher in the phenomenological movement has ascribed a more explicitly programmatic status to the concept of tradition, which plays an indispensable role in Gadamer's account of understanding (Sect. 1). A common criticism of his concept of tradition is that it leaves insufficient space for critical reflection. If this is true, then it seems to question the idea that our critical spontaneity of understanding is unbounded, which is the driving force in the previous attempt to make sense of the transcendental and ontological aspects of language. Tradition is perceived by the critics as an example of postulating a level in our experience that is, in the words of Robert Pippin, 'unavailable to reflective life'. As an alternative to this reading, I interpret Gadamer's concepts of tradition

and prejudice in the light of his explicit acknowledgement that every 'appeal to immediacy' (*Pochen auf der Unmittelbarkeit*) is futile (Sect. 2). Rather than an invocation of immediacy, Gadamer's idea is that tradition and prejudice positively contribute to every successful act of understanding in a way that outstrips our ability to bring to reflective transparency. Appreciating this point enables us to understand why Gadamer describes understanding as an activity that is constitutively not at our disposal (*unverfügbar*). As such, despite its ontological nature, tradition does not constitute an entity beyond the reach of critical reflection. This important point is also evident when we consider Gadamer's idea that our initiation into a linguistically articulated tradition is what constitutes us as intentional subjects capable of critical reflection (Sect. 4).

Gadamer's use of the notion of tradition in relation to the human sciences serves as a critique of the distorted view of understanding propounded by historicism. By discussing Brandom's appropriation of philosophical hermeneutics, it becomes clear that Gadamer's notion of tradition retains its critical potential beyond the particular target of historicism (Sect. 5). Even if Brandom gives up the mythical idea of objectivity presupposed by the historicists, his account retains the problematic methodologism intrinsic to this tradition, i.e. the idea that we can account for understanding solely on the basis of how the interpreting subject chooses to proceed. Such an approach overlooks that we are always already exploiting our connectedness to the object of interpretation, conceived as a shared subject matter within a world, in ways that we are not able to make completely transparent through methodological reflection. The problem with Brandom's appropriation thus serves to exemplify and validate the important difference between a merely methodological form of hermeneutics and one with a transcendental and ontological dimension. Furthermore, the analysis of Brandom's reading of Gadamer also serves to highlight an important difference between Brandom and McDowell, even though they are both representatives of the Sellarsian tradition.

It should also be acknowledged, however, that Gadamer's account of understanding in *Truth and Method* displays a problematic tendency that threatens his concept of tradition as I have attempted to reconstruct it (Sect. 6). This tendency is apparent in how Gadamer conceives the idea that the interpreter must achieve contemporaneity with the subject matter of interpretation. I will argue, however, that in his answers to his critics, Gadamer implicitly corrected himself and that we can reconstruct his concept of tradition without relying on this point. An important advantage of this reconstruction is that we allow philosophical hermeneutics to acknowledge the legitimacy of historical and critical-subversive types of interpretations. We thereby stay true to a guiding thought of this investigation, namely that philosophical hermeneutics is not so much concerned with the methodological question of how our understanding should proceed, but rather with the conditions that determine understanding as such. As we shall see, acknowledging this transcendental character of philosophical hermeneutics can also make a difference for our practice of interpretation, even though it does not prescribe a methodological ideal.

In light of the reconstruction in Chaps. 3 and 4, in this chapter I will also investigate the role played by the Aristotelian concept of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) in the hermeneutic conception of experience. As previously mentioned,

this concept serves as model for rationality in both McDowell and Gadamer's thinking (cf. Sect. 3 in Chap. 3 above). Focusing on an important aspect of practical wisdom will allow us to address a severe and seemingly well-motivated objection to philosophical hermeneutics, one that is directly connected to the concept of experience. Given Gadamer's language-oriented account of experience, the suspicion has been raised that this approach is bound to ignore or underestimate the specificity of our perception. In responding to this suspicion, it is of crucial importance that the model of practical wisdom offers a paradigm of rationality as situation-dependent. McDowell's account of so-called *demonstrative concepts,* which applies an Aristotelian conception of practical wisdom in relation to sense perception, is especially important in this respect (Sect. 7). Without invoking the idea of demonstrative concepts, we cannot accommodate the obvious fact that perceptual experience presents us with fine-grained aspects that outstrip our conceptual capacities – and therefore Gadamer and McDowell's position is undermined if we do not take this idea into consideration.[1] In order to emphasise the importance of this idea for philosophical hermeneutics, I go on to discuss Gadamer's approach to what has been termed the visual *logos*. I suggest that the idea of demonstrative concepts can provide a framework within which we can acknowledge the irreducible character of the visual *logos* and still maintain the guiding idea of hermeneutics – that language comprehends everything that can ever be an object (Sect. 8).

Finally, I want to describe how McDowell's account defends a situation-dependent form of reason, which entails that the content of a host of e.g. perceptual, aesthetical, ethical and political concepts cannot be explicated in abstraction from their actual application. He persuasively rejects the suspicion that such a form of understanding does not deserve the name 'reason' at all. According to this suspicion, the idea of rationality as situation-dependent, along the lines of Aristotle's notion of practical wisdom, seems to compromise the *consistency* that is a requirement in the very idea of rationality. According to this objection, the application of a concept cannot depend upon our appreciation of certain concrete features that cannot be specified in abstraction from the situation. It must be possible to articulate the rule that guides the application of a concept independently of the situation in which it is applied. At some points, Gadamer seems influenced by this dogmatic view of rationality and thus suggests that practical wisdom is not a form of rationality at all.[2] McDowell's diagnosis of the source of the problematic denunciation of practical wisdom can be helpful here. In his reading of Wittgenstein's reflections on rule-following, he shows that the source of the prejudice against practical wisdom is a misguided conception of the basis of our understanding (Sect. 9). Significantly, McDowell achieves the goal of

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[1] Discussions of McDowell's conceptualism that do not take his idea of demonstrative concepts into account are thus not very interesting.

[2] I think Gadamer is not alone in this wavering faith in a situation-dependent form of rationality. The acknowledgement that, in many areas of life, the norms cannot be formulated in situation-independent rules has led several 20th-century Continental philosophers (e.g. Lyotard, Arendt) to question the very idea that understanding in, say, the ethical, aesthetical and political sphere can be rational thinking directed at an objective reality. This makes McDowell's deconstruction of the misguided denunciation of practical wisdom interesting in a broader perspective.

justifying the rationality of practical wisdom by articulating the idea that all under-standing is embedded in and dependent upon tradition. In this way, his account affirms the intrinsic connection between tradition and practical wisdom that this chapter also seeks to articulate.

1   Gadamer's Concept of Tradition and Its Critics

Gadamer's notion of tradition is modelled on the practice of understanding in the human sciences. With this concept, he emphasises that all such understanding takes place within horizons of expectations and is therefore led by a pre-understanding or prejudice. The pre- or fore- structure (*Vorstruktur*) of our understanding is an effect of the customs and habits that facilitate our understanding. In relation to the interpretation of historical texts in the human sciences, Gadamer speaks of tradition in terms of a history of effect (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) that always already affects us when we attempt to understand.

The notion of *Wirkungsgeschichte* implies a correction of the model of interpre-tation offered by what Gadamer terms 'historicist consciousness'. Here, interpre-tation is conceived as the task of reconstructing the past within its own historical horizon, on its own terms, rather than in terms of our contemporary criteria and prejudices.[3] The ideal of historicist consciousness is a *historical objectivism* – a correct, adequate and true reconstruction of the meaning of the text as it was originally conceived. According to this view, interpretation is a matter of reconstructing the truth about the meaning of the text as closely as possible, while abstracting from the interpreter's conception of the subject matter.

However, according to Gadamer, when an interpreter attempts to clarify the author's commitments and views from the author's perspective, he is always already subject to certain prejudices that guide his understanding. One does not merely read the words on the page, because this reading is already guided by a certain preliminary understanding.[4]

We can and should, of course, reflect upon our dependency on tradition and the history of effect by tracing the historical development of the prejudices that lead us in our investigation. In a methodologically guided reflection on the history of the central concepts in the text we are attempting to understand, we can try to do away with arbitrary and misleading connotations that we might otherwise impose on these concepts. Yet, it is our understanding of the text as it gradually develops that we employ in order to discern the *productive pre-understanding* that allows the text to stand out in its distinctness from the prejudices that are a product of (centuries of) dogmatic misunderstanding. The crucial point, therefore, is that our attempts to rectify dogmatic or misleading prejudices that prevent us from letting the text speak

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[3] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 302. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 308. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[4] Ibid.: 268–273/270–276.

to us in its otherness are themselves preceded by an understanding of the text and the intention of its author. The critical examination of our prejudices is inseparably connected with our understanding of the text and cannot be strictly methodologically separated, as the historicist consciousness assumes. In other words, our prejudices guide us in ways we cannot make fully transparent. This acknowledgement of the finitude of our critical self-reflection makes a decisive difference. To some extent, we can know how tradition operates as a conditioning factor on our prejudices, but it outstrips our ability to identify and justify fully our dependence on it.[5] The historicist ideal that the meaning of the text should be reconstructed as it was originally conceived ignores or even represses this insight.

The idea of the tradition-dependence of our understanding is spelled out in more general terms as an insistence on the epistemological relevance of the concept of substance (*Substanz*). Gadamer is clear that this idea of a constitutive dependence on historical substance is to be understood as both a development and a correction of Hegel's philosophy of absolute reflection. It is from this perspective that he identifies the project of his philosophical hermeneutics: 'its task is to retrace the path of Hegel's phenomenology of mind until we discover in all that is subjective the substantiality that determines it'.[6] For Gadamer, the aim of (re)introducing the concept of substance is to highlight a dependency of understanding upon preconditions that cannot be made completely reflectively transparent.

However, it is precisely the concepts of tradition and prejudice, and the embrace of the notion of substance, that have led many of Gadamer's critics to suspect that his hermeneutics plays down the possibility of critical reflection to an intolerable degree. His position has been criticised as dogmatic because of its unacceptable appeals to levels of reality that are completely inaccessible to our reflective powers. Figal's interpretation is a recent example of such a critique. He highlights the following passage from *Truth and Method*:

> In fact history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitute the historical reality of his being.*[7]

According to Figal, this passage reveals a highly problematic tendency in Gadamer's hermeneutics – namely, the inability to account for the possibility of

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[5] Wachterhauser, B. 2002. Getting it Right: Relativism, realism and truth. In *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. R. J. Dostal, 57. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[6] '[. . .] sie habe den Weg der Hegelschen Phänomenologie des Geistes insoweit zurückgehen, als man in aller Subjektivität die sie Bestimmende Substanzialität aufweist' (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 301. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 307. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[7] 'In Wahrheit gehört die Geschichte nicht uns, sondern wir gehören ihr. Lange bevor wir uns in der Rückbesinnung selber verstehen, verstehen wir uns auf selbstverständliche Weise in Familie, Gesellschaft und Staat, in denen wir Leben. Der Fokus der Subjektivität ist ein Zerrspiegel. Die Selbstbesinnung des Individuums ist nur ein Flackern im geschlossenen Stromkreis des geschichtlichen Lebens. *Darum sind die Vorurteile des einzelnen weit mehr als seine Urteile die geschichtliche Wirklichkeit seines Seins*' (ibid.: 278/281).

critical reflection or critical distance in thinking.[8] He argues that such a line of thinking is expressed in its emphasis on tradition and in the fact that it threatens the freedom of understanding:

> Because tradition is like a closed electrical circuit for him, the *momentary caesura* only takes on the sense of allowing this closure to become explicit. Here there is no more than a flicker, a passing irritation, which can only serve to confirm the continuity of historical life, There is in no case the possibility to *maintain distance* from what has shaped and shapes one, and to give account of what happens to us.[9]

Robert Pippin, another critic of Gadamer's position, claims that the source of Gadamer's most profound divergence from Hegel lies in the latter's conviction that there is no 'level unavailable to reflective life':

> One cannot likewise just be "carrying on," at some level unavailable to reflective consciousness, the practices and rules of a community life. In Hegel's account, *there is no such level unavailable to reflective life or the activity could not count as an activity belonging to us*. Therein lies the deepest disagreement between Gadamer and Hegel.[10]

From this point of view, Gadamer's attempt to rehabilitate concepts such as prejudice and tradition appears as an appeal to levels that are beyond questioning and critique. Gadamer's concepts of tradition and prejudice seem to express a form of the Myth of the Given, because they ignore that attempts at justifications that take the form 'this is traditional' or 'this is the way we go on' cannot count as reasons.[11] Such foundationalism misconceives the nature of reason, insofar as it assumes entities that can count as reasons for a thinking subject, even if the subject could not freely acknowledge the authority of these entities.

In the reconstruction of the transcendental and ontological dimension of hermeneutics, I have followed the Sellarsian tradition in its rejection of any appeals to the mere Given. In order to avoid the Myth of the Given, McDowell conceives the content of perceptual experience as conceptual. In the face of Gadamer's critics, it could seem that we are presented with a choice: either we must question the attack

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[8] Blumenberg has formulated a similar critique of Gadamer. Blumenberg identifies philosophical hermeneutics with a problematic 'substantialist' position, because it allegedly conceives tradition as an entity that grants the possibility of mediation between past and present taking place behind the subject's back. This view of tradition as a history of effect that is '*mehr Sein als Bewußtsein*' entails that philosophical hermeneutics must approach its object (*das Gegebene*) as if it were dependent on the past (*das Vorgegebene*) in an all-too unequivocal manner (Blumenberg, H. 1983. *Säkularisierung und Selbstbehauptung*, 25. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag). According to Blumenberg, rather than the clear-cut relation of dependency entailed by the notion of history of effect, one should emphasise the configurations in which the object enters when it is received (*rezipiert*).

[9] Figal, G. 2010. *Objectivity: The hermeneutical and philosophy*, 15. Albany (NY): SUNY Press; Figal, G. 2006. *Gegenständlichkeit. Das Hermeneutische und die Philosophie*, 18f. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

[10] Pippin, R. 2002. Gadamer's Hegel. In *Gadamer's Century: Essays in honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. J. Malpas et al. 226. Cambridge: MIT Press.

[11] Ibid.: 234.

on the Myth of the Given and admit tradition as a layer of our intentional life that is beyond the reach of the spontaneity of the understanding; or we are forced to reject Gadamer's invocation of tradition because it expresses an unacceptable appeal to levels that are beyond questioning and because it plays down, to an intolerable degree, the possibility of critical distance. Alternatively, of course, it may be possible to question the underlying premise of this choice, and show that the notion of tradition does not limit the possibility for critical reflection. Rather, the aim is to clarify the structure of critical reflection, no matter how radical it may be.

2 The Epistemological Significance of Tradition

The section 'The limits of reflective philosophy', in the second part of *Truth and Method*, illustrates why it would be misplaced to understand Gadamer as limiting the possible scope of critical reflection.[12] After developing key notions such as 'prejudice', 'tradition' and 'history of effect', Gadamer reflects on how his account holds up against Hegel's Absolute Idealism. More precisely, he asks whether the 'immanent laws of reflection' – i.e. our reflective power to step back and critically assess anything that presents itself to us – do not destroy the idea of tradition affecting our understanding.[13] For a proper understanding of the role of reflection and critique in philosophical hermeneutics, it is essential to note that this question is not merely rhetorical. Gadamer does not intend to brush off this question by dogmatically asserting that tradition is a substance beyond the reach of reflection, which undermines or limits the possibility of critical reflection. Although it is clear from the context that in Gadamer's view there is something profoundly unattractive about the Hegelian project – he speaks of being confined (*gebannt*) and forced into it – he is, despite what his critics may think, aware of the compelling nature of Hegel's position:

> Polemics against an absolute thinker has itself no starting point. The Archimedean point from which Hegel's philosophy could be toppled can never be found through reflection. The formal superiority of reflective philosophy is precisely that every possible position is drawn into the reflective movement of consciousness coming to itself. The appeal to immediacy – whether of bodily nature, or of a "Thou" making claims on us, or the impenetrable factualness of historical accident, or the reality of the relations of production – has always been self-refuting, in that it is not itself an immediate attitude, but a reflective activity.[14]

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[12] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 336–341. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 346–352. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[13] Ibid.: 337/347.

[14] 'Die Polemik gegen den absoluten Denker ist selber ohne Position. Der archimedische Punkt, die Hegelsche Philosophie aus den Angeln zu heben, kann in der Reflexion nie gefunden werden. Das gerade macht die formale Qualität der Reflexionsphilosophie aus, daβ es keine Position geben kann, die nicht in die Reflexionsbewegung des zu sich selbst kommenden Bewußtseins einbezogen ist. Das Pochen auf der Unmittelbarkeit – sei es die der leiblichen Natur, sei es die des Ansprüche stellenden Du, sei es die der undurchdringlichen Tatsächlichkeit des geschichtlichen Zufalls oder die der Realität der Produktionsverhältnisse – hat sich immer schon selbst widerlegt, sofern es kein unmittelbares Verhalten, sondern ein reflektierendes Tun ist' (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 339. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 349. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

This passage is extremely important in order to understand Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, because here he not only acknowledges but emphasises that any 'appeal to immediacy' (*Pochen auf der Unmittelbarkeit*) is 'self-refuting'. From this perspective, we should be careful to interpret the notion of tradition as expressing an attempt to limit the reach of critical reflection. What Gadamer describes as the 'compelling power of absolute reflection' is the idea that reason enables a deliberating agent to step back from *anything* that pretends to be a candidate to ground the requirements of reason – including any content of tradition. However, if we accept that Gadamer is aware of this compelling power of reflection, we should not be tempted to interpret the key concepts of philosophical hermeneutics as 'appeals to immediacy'. Gadamer's attempt to correct Hegel is, in other words, more subtle than the invocation of levels unavailable to reflective life.

The section that attempts to rehabilitate the concepts of prejudice and tradition against Enlightenment thinking confirms the point expressed in the passages about Hegel.[15] It is true that the Enlightenment is criticised for subjecting all authority to reason, including that of prejudices and tradition.[16] Gadamer's aim, however, is not to undermine the authority of reason but to mediate the abstract contradiction *between* reason and authorities like prejudice and tradition. We must distinguish between appeals to tradition and prejudice, which *can* be dogmatic, and reason's reliance on tradition and prejudice, which is *always* present. A prejudice or a tradition may be conceived as an authority in the sense that we can *replace* our self-responsible use of reason by *appealing* to it. In this sense, an invocation of authority can be a case of dogmatism. Yet this does not preclude prejudices from being a legitimate authority, in the sense that when we attempt to understand, we depend on prejudices to guide our understanding towards the subject matter in ways that we are not able to make completely reflectively transparent. Later, we may reflect on our understanding again, and here, at least in the best cases, the previously non-evaluated aspects or implications of the guiding prejudice may be accepted as sound. Yet this situation will also include aspects or implications of the prejudices guiding our understanding that we are not able to bring to full transparency. It is this perpetual 'remainder' in our understanding that Gadamer seeks to address when he claims that all understanding is constitutively dependent on prejudice and tradition. The assumption behind his point is that our understanding can never be completely reflectively redeemed, and in this sense it is fundamentally finite. This assumption should be seen in light of the fact that *Truth and Method* to a significant degree reflects on the types of subject matter investigated by the human sciences, i.e. ethical, political or aesthetic concepts and phenomena. In relation to such subject matters, the prospect of securing full reflective transparency seems particularly unreal.

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[15] Ibid.: 278–286/281–290.
[16] Ibid. 279/283.

Regarding the criticism levelled against Gadamer's notion of tradition, it is important to note that none of his critics argue for the possibility that our understanding is able to achieve full transparency, complete certainty or presupposition-lessness (*Voraussetzungslosigkeit*). For example, in his criticism of Gadamer, Figal suggests that hermeneutic philosophy must insist on the possibility of cancelling out all presuppositions and retain a self-transparent distance from its object of investigation.[17] Philosophy can 'only be what it is in the presuppositionless clarity (*voraussetzungslose Klarheit*) of its activity'.[18] Contrary to Figal's claims, however, this emphasis on self-transparency does not undermine Gadamer's notion of tradition. His account does not reject the desirability or possibility of critical distance – as radical as it needs to be – towards particular prejudices or traditions, and in *this* sense Gadamer embraces the ideal of an understanding cleansed of presuppositions. However, he reminds us that our understanding – and, above all, our critical self-reflection – is shaped by prejudices and traditions that we cannot bring to complete reflective transparency. For all his insistence on the possibility and necessity of achieving presuppositionless clarity, Figal does not say anything to challenge this point.

If we admit to Gadamer's assumption, there is a risk that we fall victim to a form of scepticism in which we assume that the finitude of our understanding bars us from the possibility of getting it right in any specific case. The fact that we can never bring our guiding prejudices to full reflective transparency in a way that would provide us with absolute certainty could seem to undermine the very possibility that any specific act of understanding could get its subject matter right. It is exactly this misguided step that Gadamer seeks to avoid when he speaks of a *positive* epistemic contribution from prejudice and tradition. Our understanding is never able to achieve complete certainty concerning its guiding prejudices, but there is no necessary inference from this to the sceptical doubt that our understanding can never amount to objectivity, in the sense of getting its subject matter right. Gadamer specifically says that the acknowledgement of the authority of tradition is always intrinsically dependent on the condition that what is conveyed by this authority is precisely not irrational and arbitrary, but can, in principle, be discovered to be true.[19] According to this account, we can discover a prejudice to be true without being able to achieve full reflective certainty regarding its truth. In this sense, objective understanding is, according to Gadamer, not completely at our disposition.

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[17] Figal, G. 2010. *Objectivity: The hermeneutical and philosophy*, 14–24. Albany (NY): SUNY Press; Figal, G. 2006. *Gegenständlichkeit. Das Hermeneutische und die Philosophie*, 17–30. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

[18] Ibid.: 119/140.

[19] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 281. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 285. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

Contrary to the objections of his critics, the idea of the hermeneutic productivity of prejudice and tradition does therefore not imply reliance on something beyond that which we can critically examine. According to Gadamer, there are no layers beyond the reach of reflective life. But this does preclude him from insisting on the dependency of objective understanding or knowledge on conditions that the knower *in each instance* can never *fully* know.[20] This dependency of knowledge upon conditions that the knower in each instance of understanding cannot fully know is expressed in the idea that understanding is an event, not merely an act of subjectivity. More specifically, Gadamer claims that understanding must be conceived in terms of an event of tradition or process of transmission (*Überlieferungsgeschehen*).[21] Perhaps the concept of *Unverfügbarkeit* expresses the point even better: rather than referring to aspects that are unavailable to reflective life, the concepts of tradition and prejudice emphasise that the presuppositions that enable our claims and investigations to properly disclose a given subject matter are not fully at our disposition in each particular instance of understanding. In this way, the target of Gadamer's critique is not the ideal of the critical use of reason, rather the ideal of presuppositionlessness (*Voraussetzunglosigkeit*) or complete reflective certainty. This ideal is implicitly misguiding, and leads us to reject the idea of a positive epistemic contribution from tradition.

From this point of view, we should also understand the definition of tradition Gadamer offers: to be valid without justification.[22] On an initial reading, this definition seems to express the kind of dogmatic conception of tradition attributed to Gadamer by his critics. We should not, however, understand the definition 'to be valid without justification' as if the content of tradition is simply beyond the scope of our reflective powers. In accordance with his acknowledgement of the paradigmatic status of Hegel's attack on the idea of immediacy, Gadamer does not claim that understanding can appeal to tradition or prejudice as instances that can ground our interpretations. Rather, he points to a constitutive assistance from tradition and prejudice – i.e. an assistance that cannot be completely reflectively redeemed – in the process of critical understanding itself. It is a matter of a acknowledging that our self-determining reason always already operates within a whole that it is not fully at its disposition.[23] In this way, Gadamer claims to both develop and correct Hegel's

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[20] Wachterhauser, B. 2002. Getting it Right: Relativism, realism and truth. In *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. by R. J. Dostal, 56. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[21] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 291. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 295. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[22] 'Eben das ist vielmehr was wir Tradition nennen: ohne Begründung zu gelten' (ibid.: 282/285).

[23] I do therefore not agree with the interpretation of Gjesdal, who argues that philosophical hermeneutics is fundamentally flawed because Gadamer 'wants, in short, to transform the very notion of truth in understanding into a notion of authenticity' (Gjesdal, K. 2009. *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism,* 121. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). According to this reading, Gadamer neglects the fundamental critical dimension of validity and legitimacy in understanding in favour of 'deeper, more existential engagement' with the object of interpretation, in which the aim is 'a more authentic existence' (ibid.: 151). Gjesdal sees this tendency expressed

philosophy – rather than positing a layer of immediacy beyond the reach of reflection, he reminds us of the constitutive substantiality in the actualisation (*Vollzug*) of reflective understanding itself.

Gadamer's hermeneutic account of the role of tradition and prejudice does not, therefore, attempt to undermine the idea of objective understanding, but to show how we can avoid three problematic misconceptions. The first problematic approach to objectivity is a conception according to which our understanding could be objective simply by virtue of an appeal to prejudice or tradition. Gadamer's critics assume that his rehabilitation of tradition and prejudice expresses precisely such an appeal – but, as I have pointed out, Gadamer is not an advocate of immediacy. Rather, he allows for the possibility of radical critique of traditions and prejudices. The second problematic strategy on which Gadamer focuses is the idea of completely self-transparent understanding. He regards this idea as mythical, especially in light of the subject matters of the human sciences. Rejecting that understanding can be completely self-transparent could lead to a scepticism that denies that we can make sense of the very notion of objective understanding – this is the third problematic approach to objectivity that Gadamer seeks to dismantle. In order to avoid this pitfall, Gadamer reminds us of the idea of a positive epistemic

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in Gadamer's interpretation of the concept of 'the classical' (ibid: 151–153; cf. Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 286–91. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G.1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 290–295. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)). In response, Gadamer attempts to develop the idea that 'the classical is distinguished by the ability to erect a standard whose validity does not call for critical validation. Responding adequately to this standard, we simply "listen". The claim of the classical rests in its positing of a kind of authority which does have to prove itself to us *as* an authority' (Gjesdal, K. 2009. *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism,* 152. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). When relating to a classical text, we should not, according to Gjesdal's interpretation of Gadamer, evaluate it critically but attempt to allow it to question us in a profound existential manner (ibid.). Now, it is not obvious to me that Gjesdal can demonstrate that Gadamer wants to *replace* the authority of critical reflection with the dogmatic existential imperative incarnated in the work of the past. Rather, Gadamer simply seeks to show that it is essential for what is to be a classical work that its content cannot be rejected by our critical reflection and thus be exposed as merely a particular phenomenon of a past epoch. It belongs to the essence of the classical that it is able to survive such critical reflection and remain 'applicable' in the contemporary horizon in such a profound manner that it questions us at an existential level and thus remains a vehicle for making experiences. Therefore, when Gadamer emphasises that we do not achieve the meditation between the past and the contemporary horizon, but that this is achieved by the work itself, it is not an attempt to relieve us from the obligation of responsible and critical interpretation. The classical text will assert its authority *in* our critical and responsible interpretation if it is classical. Gjesdal's critique is connected to Gadamer's claim that, over and above the actions of the interpreter, it is the classical text itself that achieves a fusion between two horizons. What Gadamer means is that the interpreter is always already connected with the classical text through a history of effect, the effects of which he cannot make completely reflectively transparent. In this way, the process of coming to understand the meaning of a classical work is not only a result of our subjective reflection but also a product of productive prejudices – or as Gadamer puts it: a 'participation in an event of transmission between past and present', or a 'doing of the subject matter itself' (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 291; 460. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 295; 469. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

contribution from prejudices and traditions. Our understanding and interpretations can hit the mark even if we are not able to achieve reflective certainty concerning the prejudices that guide them. In other words, in order to hold on to the notion of objectivity, we should accept that the truth of our understanding is not completely at our disposal. The objectivity of our understanding is dependent upon the *positive* contribution of prejudices and traditions.

As mentioned, none of Gadamer's critics seriously defend the idea of a complete transparency of understanding. A number of them, however, find it necessary to retain this idea as a 'regulative ideal'. Drawing on Friedrich Schleiermacher, Manfred Frank, for example, suggests that hermeneutics should embrace the idea of an 'infinite approximation' to truth. The truth that we can infinitely approximate is here conceived as a state in which our understanding is completely self-transparent. Gadamer rejects this idea of truth as a regulative ideal. He finds it a hybristic expression of an unwarranted confidence in our powers of thought, one with potentially distorting effects – especially in relation to the way we conceive our understanding of subject matters of the human sciences. It could encourage a problematic conception of what 'progress' means in such practices, as if a specific, more or less dramatic improvement in our understanding of a phenomenon, represented a step towards the ideal of complete, self-transparent certainty. In this light, our conception of the historical development of our field of enquiry would fall victim to a distortive self-assurance that could prevent us from gaining insights that would require us to question our narrative of progress.

Gadamer's critics hold on to the idea of truth or valid understanding as a regulative ideal because they deem it necessary to do so in order to make sense of how we can come to understand not only differently, but better.[24] His hermeneutics allegedly makes the idea of '*progress in understanding* appear totally inconceivable', and we should therefore instead adopt the notion of a regulative ideal of understanding.[25] This criticism rests on the assumption that Gadamer reduces truth to 'the *facticity* of *meaning* as it becomes *manifest* to us in the particular historical situation'.[26] Gadamer is thus saddled with the idea that our understanding can be objective merely by virtue of being guided by the 'factical meaning' of our prejudices. However, as I have attempted to show, Gadamer does not appeal to prejudices or traditions as the basis for the truth of our interpretations. His point relates to such factors insofar as their authority is *legitimate* because they

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[24] Cf. Apel, K.O. 1997. Regulative Ideas or Truth-Happening? An attempt to answer the question of the conditions of possibility of valid understanding. Translated by Sommersmeier, R. In *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Hahn, L. E. 67–94. The library of living philosophers (Vol. XXIV). Chicago: Open Court.

[25] Ibid.: 67, 69.

[26] Ibid.: 68.

can, in principle, be discovered to be true.[27] According to Gadamer's conception, the experience of improving our understanding of, say, a text is therefore unproblematic. He does not deny that our initial understanding of a text in a given historical situation can be improved more or less dramatically when we critically examine our prejudices in relation to the text. But he adds that, in such cases, when our understanding improves we are not able to make the guiding prejudices completely reflectively transparent. In this sense, the truth of our understanding is dependent on the assistance of factors beyond our reflective grasp. Again, we should not interpret Gadamer's notions of prejudice and tradition as if their intention is to undermine the notion of truth or reduce it to 'factical meaning'. Rather, he attempts to change a specific illusionary conception of the basis of objective understanding by drawing the consequences of our inability to achieve complete reflective transparency. In other words, Gadamer is convinced that we can hold on to the notion of truth without providing a 'non-circular' account of the standards of true understanding, i.e. a description that is intelligible independently of our grasp of these standards, as it is expressed in our practice.

Gadamer's idea – that our understanding is dependent upon tradition in ways that go beyond what we can make completely reflectively transparent – is articulated in a way that should not arouse suspicion that it makes illegitimate appeals to immediacy and limits the scope of critical reflection. However, it is important to note here that Gadamer's notion of tradition is developed in relation to ethical, aesthetical, existential and political aspects of understanding. The practice of understanding in the human sciences functions as the paradigm for his philosophical hermeneutics. In this light, one may ask whether the notion of tradition is also relevant in relation to basic perceptual judgements. This is an important question given the account of perceptual experience articulated in the previous chapter. What is the relevance of Gadamer's concept of tradition for basic perceptual judgements about objects in the immediate vicinity of the subject? In order to answer this question, it is useful to distinguish between the attempt to make historical prejudices completely transparent and the attempt to achieve complete reflective certainty. Whereas historical prejudices may be irrelevant to basic perceptual judgements, these cases still have the same structure that Gadamer seeks to articulate with his notion of tradition. In both cases, the idea of complete reflective certainty is ruled out, while the idea that understanding can, in the best cases, 'get it right' is retained. And in both cases, objective understanding of reality is possible *because* it is dependent upon factors that are not completely at our disposal. Even

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[27] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 281. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 285. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). This passage also shows, *pace* Apel, that Gadamer does not presuppose a notion of truth as 'unconcealment' or 'happening' that is independent of the common sense idea of truth as identical with reality. Rather, it is this common sense idea of truth that he conceives *as* a happening, i.e. as a state that is not completely at the disposition of our reflective understanding. Apel's interpretation is inspired by Lafont, C. 1994. *Sprache und Welterschliessung. Zur linguistischen Wende der Hermeneutik Heideggers*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag.

the objectivity of basic perceptual judgements is, as McDowell metaphorically puts it, dependent upon 'favours from the world'. In order to understand the point of this metaphor, and how it aligns the conception of basic perceptual judgements with Gadamer's notion of tradition, we should focus on McDowell's response to the challenge of (a specific form of) scepticism.

At one point in *Mind and World*, McDowell discusses a potential sceptical objection to his idea that perceptual experience can, in the best cases, reveal glimpses of the world. He phrases the potential objection like this: 'how can one know that what one is enjoying at any time is a genuine glimpse of the world, rather than something that merely seems to be that?'[28] According to this line of objection, even if we focus on the most basic perceptions, where the subject is in a favourable position, we cannot make sense of the idea that this is a case of the subject 'letting the layout of the objective world reveal itself to her'.[29] The sceptical objection insists that a position in which we are led astray – a hallucination, say – can be subjectively indistinguishable from experiences that are veridical. In this way, the protest moves from the obvious fact that our perception is fallible, to what McDowell calls *the highest common factor conception*: '[...] the idea that even when things go well, cognitively speaking, our subjective position can only be something common between such cases and cases in which things do not go well'.[30] According to McDowell, the highest common factor conception expresses a tendency to interiorise our understanding, to withdraw it from the external world. This interiorisation happens when we suppose that we ought to be able to achieve objective understanding 'by our own unaided resources'.[31]

The consequence of the interiorising view of understanding is that it can only encompass how things appear to be – and not, even in the best cases, how things really are. There are different strategies for dealing with this predicament. One is simply scepticism. Since even the most favourable position in the space of reasons can, at most, guarantee appearances rather than knowledge, it could seem natural to draw the sceptical conclusion, and thus deny that we can achieve objective knowledge through perception. A second line of response assumes that there must be 'utterly risk-free' procedures for the basing of beliefs. McDowell ironically characterises this strategy as 'a rather touching *a priori* faith in the power of human reason' to come up with fully effective measures that can override the deceptive powers of appearance.[32] Such a response can be seen as an expression of a full-blown Cartesian insistence on certainty as the foundation of our beliefs about the world. The third strategy is a more moderate version of the Cartesian approach. This so-called composite or *hybrid model* accepts the interiorisation of

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[28] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 112. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.: 113.

[31] McDowell, J. 1998. Knowledge and the internal. In *Meaning, Knowledge and Reality*, 396. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[32] Ibid.: 399f.

our understanding, but adds an 'external element' in order to deal with the threatening scepticism. Again, the problem is that even the best imaginable understanding, in which one sees that things are thus and so, can seem to be undermined by the sceptical objection that, for all one knows, things could *merely appear* to be thus and so. In order to avoid scepticism, the hybrid conception conceives knowledge as a status 'one possesses by virtue of an appropriate standing in the space of reasons when – this is an extra condition, not ensured by one's standing in the space of reasons – the world does one the favour of being so arranged that what one takes to be so is so'.[33] The hybrid conception thus separates truth conceived as an external element from reliability in 'habits of belief-formation', which it conceives as an internal element.[34] Truth depends on the world doing us a favour, whereas our standing in the space of reasons is conceived as a zone in which no such favour is needed.

The problem is, however, that at this point sceptical doubt cannot be contained: how can we be certain that our standing in the space of reasons – now conceived as an internal element – is not 'indebted to the world for favours received'? In other words, how do we know that our paths and methods for arriving at beliefs are really reliable and do not merely appear to be so? Ultimately, this once again seems to depend on the kindness of the world. The idea of a 'safe' internal zone in which reason can, in principle at least, ascertain certainty through methodology is under pressure.[35] Moreover, the distinction upon which the hybrid model relies – between the space of reason and an additional element that is at the mercy of the world – seems to threaten our basic understanding of a state of knowledge as one that is not merely accidentally secured. According to the hybrid conception, whether one's belief or judgement is true is structurally independent of what can be scrutinised by reason. It is 'a mere accidental addition to possession of an internally constituted justification'.[36] What is *supposed* to be epistemologically significant about a knower is her status in the space of reason, but whether she *is* actually a knower is decided by whether a wholly unconnected fact obtains or not. It is not intelligible how these two elements can add up to a composite that deserves the title of knowledge.[37]

McDowell's attack on the hybrid conception of knowledge opens the way for his alternative. Whereas the hybrid conception retains reason in a sphere in which it is immune to luck or favours from the world, the alternative is *to conceive of reason itself as dependent on favours from the world*:

> The hybrid conception makes its concession to luck too late. The real trouble is with the thought it does not question, the thought that reason must be credited with a province within which it has absolute control over the acceptability of positions achievable by its exercise,

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[33] Ibid.: 400.

[34] Ibid.: 402.

[35] Ibid.: 403ff.

[36] Thornton, T. 2004. *John McDowell*, 192. Chesham: Acumen.

[37] Ibid.

without laying itself open to risk from an unkind world. That thought [. . .] has all the look of a philosopher's fantasy.[38]

If we look through and reject this fantasy, we can still allow the idea of objective understanding 'even though there is an irreducible element of luck, of kindness from the world' in whether it takes place.[39] When McDowell speaks of a constitutive element of luck or favour in reason, he is referring to 'factors that reason cannot control or completely control for'.[40]

Whereas the hybrid conception attempts to domesticate our dependence on this aspect by relegating it to an external condition, McDowell suggests embracing the view that *whenever* we see that things are thus and so, it involves 'a stroke of good fortune, kindness from the world'.[41] If we embrace this idea of an exteriorised reason that is constitutively beholden to the world, we acknowledge that our perceptual experience is fallible – even that it constitutively relies on favours from the world in order that things are actually as they appear to be. However, we avoid the assumption implied by the highest common factor conception, i.e. that we are confined to appearances. This conclusion is only mandatory if we conceive objective understanding as something to which a favourable world is completely external, as is the case in the hybrid conception. Instances of perception in which we enjoy genuine openness to the layout of reality depend upon favours from the world. It is this condition of experience that we must learn to live with, and thereby resist the temptation to retreat into a fantasy of a sphere in which we have total control.[42] The aim of McDowell's conception is not to provide an argument that rejects the sceptical line of questioning, but rather to question its underlying conception of objective understanding by offering an alternative picture according to which understanding is exteriorised and therefore constitutively beholden to the world.

At this point, the common, underlying structure in McDowell's and Gadamer's idea of objective understanding should be visible.[43] In hermeneutical terms, even

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[38] McDowell, J. 1998. Knowledge by hearsay. In *Meaning, Knowledge and Reality*, 442. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[39] Ibid.

[40] McDowell, J. 1998. Knowledge and the internal. In *Meaning, Knowledge and Reality*, 405. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[41] Ibid.: 406.

[42] McDowell, J. 1998. Knowledge and the internal. In *Meaning, Knowledge and Reality*, 408. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[43] The upshot of McDowell's approach to scepticism is the so-called 'disjunctive conception of experience'. Although he does use the term 'disjunctivism', McDowell develops this conception in a number of articles (McDowell, J. 1998. Singular thought and the extent of inner space; Criteria, defeasibility and knowledge; Knowledge and the internal. All in *Meaning, Knowledge and Reality*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press). Cf. also McDowell, J. 2009. Intentionality as a relation. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel and Sellars*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; McDowell, J. 2009. The disjunctive conception of experience as material for a transcendental argument. In *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical essays*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

the simplest veridical perceptual experience constitutes participation in an event of meaning that is not completely at one's disposal. McDowell's image of perception relying on a favour from the world is, in other words, a metaphorical characterisation of the *Unverfügbarkeit* of our understanding that is so central to philosophical hermeneutics. Both the knowledge we gain through basic perceptual experiences and our interpretation of aspects of reality relevant to the human sciences have the structure of an event.

This reading is confirmed by McDowell's remark about the real significance of philosophical scepticism. Scepticism about empirical knowledge is, at its deepest level, not to be viewed as expressing a paradox that we must overcome in order to ensure that our perceptual experience can be world-involving. Rather, scepticism is only significant when viewed as what McDowell calls an 'unhinged yet in its way appropriate' response to the perception that in empirical knowledge 'we are pervasively at the mercy of the world – a perception, say, of our finitude and dependence as empirical knowers'.[44]

3   Tradition and Change

Due to our inability to attain full reflexive transparency concerning the ways in which historical prejudices influence our grasp of texts or our understanding of significant moral, political, aesthetical or religious concepts, tradition is a fundamentally dynamic or productive entity. At one point, Gadamer illustrates this point by referring to moral concepts (*sittliche Begriffe*) such as the Aristotelian virtues of character. Due to our dependence on our specific ethical tradition, our ethical virtues or concepts do not correspond to a fixed standard that we could recognise in itself and apply deductively to relevant situations in our life. According to Gadamer, this is reflected in how Aristotle describes moral concepts:

> All these concepts are not just arbitrary ideals conditioned by convention, but despite all the variety of moral ideas in the most different times and peoples, in this sphere there is still something like the nature of the thing [*Sache*]. This is not to say that the nature of the thing – e.g. the ideal of bravery – is a fixed standard that we could recognize and apply to ourselves. Rather, Aristotle affirms as true of the teacher ethics precisely what is true, in his view, of all men: that he too is always already involved in a moral and political context and acquires his image of the thing from that standpoint. He does not himself regard the guiding principles that he describes as knowledge that can be taught. They are valid only as schemata. They are concretized only in the concrete situation of the person acting. Thus they are not norms to be found in the stars, nor do they have an unchanging place in a natural moral universe, so that all that would be necessary would be to perceive them. Nor are they mere conventions, but really do correspond to the nature of the thing – except that

[44] McDowell, J. 2007. Comment on Stanley Cavell's 'Companionable thinking'. In *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life: Essays in the honor of Cora Diamond*, ed. Crary, A. 304. Cambridge: MIT Press.

the latter is always itself determined in each case by the use the moral consciousness makes of them.[45]

This passage clearly suggests some form of ethical *realism*: ethical concepts can be said to be adequate responses to real states of affairs in the world. This is a way to do justice to our intuition that we can be right when we judge that a person, say, acts kindly. In such a case, the concept corresponds to the nature of the thing (*Sache*). What enables this position is that our ability to pass such correct judgements is conceived as constitutively dependent upon historical prejudices. As the quote exemplifies, it is Aristotle's formation in the Greek *polis* that allows his ethical outlook to be responsive to certain salient, ethical features of reality. For Gadamer, however, the historical prejudices that enable this interaction are not expressible as general rules that are deductively applied to particular cases – and in this sense, the rules that guide such interaction are not at the agent's disposal.[46]

This model of situation-specific understanding is employed in *Truth and Method* as a paradigm for understanding the interpretation of texts.[47] The interpreter who works with a text from the tradition seeks to apply this text. But the interpretation cannot be comprehended as the apprehension of a pre-given universal that can be understood *in-itself* and subsequently used for particular applications. Rather, the meaning of the text is not accessible in abstraction from the interpretative situation in which it is applied. The consequence of this is that the people receiving the content of the texts of our tradition are also continually expanding it, in constantly widening possibilities of meaning and resonance. In this sense, bringing the content of tradition into words in a new situation can also expand our understanding of new aspects of reality. Our essential dependency upon tradition induces a situation-specificity, and thereby a constant development of our patterns of concept-application in relation to the kind of concepts investigated by the human and social sciences. Regarding the concepts that are the subject matter of the human sciences, Gadamer conceives their *application*

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[45] 'Alle diese Begriffe sind nicht nur ein beliebiges konventionsbedingtes Ideal, sondern bei aller Varietät, die die sittlichen Begriffen in den verschiedensten Zeiten und Völkern zeigen, gibt es doch dort so etwas wie eine Natur der Sache. Das soll nicht heißen, daß diese Natur der Sache, z.B. das Ideal der Tapferkeit, ein fester Maßstab wäre, den man für sich erkennen und anwenden könne. Aristoteles erkennt vielmehr für den Lehrer der Ethik genau so an, was nach seiner Meinung für die Menschen überhaupt gilt, daß auch er immer schon in einer sittlich-politischen Bindung steht und von da aus sein Bild der Sache gewinnt. Aristoteles sieht selber in den Leitbildern, die er beschreibt, kein lehrbares Wissen. Sie haben nur den Geltungsanspruch von Schemata. Sie konkretisieren sich immer erst in der konkreten Situation des Handelnden. Sie sind also nicht Normen, die in den Sternen stehen oder in einer sittlichen Naturwelt ihren unveränderlichen Ort haben, so daß es sie nur zu gewahren gilt. Sie sind aber auf der anderen Seite keine bloßen Konventionen, sondern sie geben wirklich die Natur der Sache wieder, nur daß diese sich durch die Anwendung, die das sittliche Bewußtsein von ihnen macht, jeweils erst selber bestimmt' (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 317f. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 325f. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[46] Cf. Sects. 7, 8, and 9 below.

[47] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 310. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 317. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

as a process of continual concept *formation* (*Begriffsbildung*). Thus, when a person employs concepts with a general meaning, he is so directed toward the particularity of what he perceives that all of the concepts in play share in the particularity of the circumstances he is considering.[48] This situation-dependence implies a historicity to our concepts, since the concepts that our words express are enriched by a given perceptual understanding of the thing (*Sachanschauung*). This process results in a new, more specific word formation that does more justice to the particularity of that act of perception. Concepts are not static 'universals' that are applied in a situation by subsuming the particular instance under its universality – rather, the universality of the concept, its meaning, is only accessible in the continuously evolving process of concept-application. So even if speaking presupposes the use of pre-established words with general meanings, this use is at the same time a process of concept-formation by means of which the life of a language develops.[49] Living within a tradition is not a matter of being determined to repeat a specific pattern of understanding – rather, since tradition is a vehicle of meaning, it is by its very nature continuously developing and changing.

According to some of Gadamer's critiques, even such a notion of tradition underestimates the possibilities of radical change and innovation.[50] Although it is true that Gadamer does not emphasise the room for radical change, I think that his conception does not need to rule it out or downplay it. In this context, McDowell's interpretation of Gadamer's concept of tradition can be helpful. McDowell describes, in a very illuminating way, the room for radical critical innovation opened up by this concept of tradition:

> One kind of originality calls on those who understand it to alter their prior conception of the very topography of intelligibility. A remark with this kind of originality is not just a move hitherto unimagined but still within the possibilities as they were already comprehended, at least in general terms. (That is how it is with even the most radical innovation in chess.) Rather, the remark changes a hearer's conception of the structure that determines the possibilities for making sense. But even in this kind of case, it can only be a matter of warping a prior conception of the topography of intelligibility. An utterance could not make a place for itself in a comprehending mind from scratch, reshaping wholesale its audience's conception of the possibilities. Even a thought that transforms a tradition must be rooted in the tradition that it transforms. The speech that expresses it must be able to be intelligibly addressed to people squarely placed within the tradition as it stands.[51]

In order to clarify McDowell's point, it might help to invoke Gadamer's perhaps favourite example of a change 'in the very topography of intelligibility'. In the context of philosophical hermeneutics, it is natural to think of Socrates' flight to the *logoi* as it is described in Plato's *Phaedo,* i.e. as a paradigmatic instance of such a

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[48] Ibid.: 427/432.

[49] Ibid.: 428/433.

[50] E.g. Blumenberg, H. 1983. *Säkularisierung und Selbstbehauptung*, 25. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag.

[51] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 186f. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

radical innovation of thought.[52] Here, Socrates recounts his disappointment with explanations of natural philosophy that confuse causes and conditions. It is this rejection of the explanations of natural philosophy that leads Socrates to undertake 'a second sailing'. Rather than looking for immediate causes (i.e. conditions), we must search for causes as they are mediated in discourse. It is in discourse that we can paradigmatically understand causes as reasons, in the decisive sense that Socrates invokes. Only by examining causes as reasons in dialogue with ourselves or others can we live up to the Socratic demand of giving an account of our opinions and actions in light of what is best. In relation to the crucial dimension of justification and responsibility, the causes examined by the form of natural philosophy that Socrates rejects can only amount to 'exculpations'. At most, citing such causes can ensure that we cannot be blamed for what we think and do – it cannot justify our thoughts and actions.[53] By directing our attention to the irreducibility of explanations in terms of what may be better or worse, the Platonic Socrates changes the 'conception of the structure that determines the possibility for making sense' in the tradition of Western philosophy. He does this, however, not by beginning from scratch but by 'warping the prior conception of the very topography of intelligibility' as conceived by pre-Socratic natural philosophy. He reinterprets the notion of cause (*aitia*) in sense of 'reason'. Plato's dialogue thus exemplifies how the notion of tradition can allow for radical change.

4 The Ontological Aspect of Tradition

Gadamer's concept of tradition is intrinsically connected to the concept of belongingness (*Zugehörigkeit*). Acknowledging this connection enables us to recognise the ontological aspect of the notion of tradition in philosophical hermeneutics.

In the context of the human sciences, belonging is a condition of any comportment toward historical objects. Belongingness is more than a type of emotional dependence or a description of sympathy. Instead, it is conceived as a condition of possibility for historical interest, because belonging to traditions is, as we have seen, originally and essentially an aspect of our historical finitude.[54] Belonging to a tradition predetermines what seems to us as worthy of enquiry and what appears as a proper object of investigation. Gadamer explicitly identifies his notion of tradition with belongingness and emphasises the importance of this concept for hermeneutics. He goes on to say that belongingness is actualised in the commonality of the

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[52] Plato. *Phaedo*, 99e. In *Platonis Opera I*, ed. Burnet, J., 1901–07. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Cf. Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles [1978]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 7, 141. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). Cf. Sect. 3 in Chap. 3 above.

[53] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 8. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[54] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 252. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 266. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

fundamental, enabling prejudices that are more than cognitive 'units' or 'tokens', but that determine us in our very being.[55]

In the classical metaphysical tradition, belongingness refers to the transcendental relation between being and truth. Here, knowledge is conceived as an aspect (*moment*) of being itself, and not exclusively as an activity on the part of the subject. The incorporation of knowledge into being is the fundamental presupposition of all classical and medieval thought.[56] In this form of thought, the opposition between subject and object, as propounded in the Cartesian tradition, does not apply:

> Thus, here thought does not start from the concept of a subject that exists in its own right and makes everything else an object. On the contrary, Plato defines the being of the "soul" as participating in true being – i.e. as belonging to the same sphere of being as the idea – and Aristotle says that the soul is, in a certain sense, everything that exists. In this thinking there is no question of a self-conscious subject [*Geist*] without world which would have to find its way to worldly being; both belong originally to each other. The relationship is primary.[57]

It is evident that this classical way of conceiving the relation between mind and world is an inspiration for Gadamer's account of intentionality and understanding. At the same time, it is crucial for him that our belongingness to the world cannot be conceived as it is in classical philosophy, i.e. in terms of an unmediated, teleological connection between being and our thinking. It is not the point that the world comes, as it were, meaningfully articulated so as to be immediately accessible for our understanding.[58] Rather, such conceptual articulation of the world is only intelligible in the context of our acquisition of a natural language. As Gadamer programmatically states in the same context:

> We are thinking out the consequences of language as medium [*wir denken von der Mitte der Sprache aus*]. From this viewpoint the concept of belonging is no longer regarded as the teleological relation of the mind to the ontological structure of what exists, as this relation is conceived in metaphysics. Quite a different state of affairs follows from the fact that the hermeneutical experience is linguistic in nature [. . .].[59]

This central status of language is spelled out in the idea that our initiation into language constitutes our world-view and thereby establishes us as subjects of understanding and intentionality. Gadamer writes:

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[55] Ibid.: 295/300.

[56] Ibid.: 454/462.

[57] 'Hier wird also nicht vom Begriff eines Subjekts aus gedacht, das für sich wäre und alles andere zum Objekte macht. Im Gegenteil wird das Sein der "Seele" bei Plato dadurch bestimmt, daß es am wahren Sein teilhat, d. h. der gleichen Sphäre des Wesens angehört wie die Idee, und Aristoteles sagt von der Seele, sie sei in gewisser Weise alles Seiende. Es ist in diesem Denken keine Rede davon, daß ein weltloser Geist, der seiner selbst Gewiß ist, den Weg zum welthaften Sein zu suchen hätte, sondern beides gehört ursprünglich zueinander. Das Verhältnis ist das primäre' (ibid.: 455/462f.).

[58] Cf. Sect. 9 in Chap. 4 above.

[59] 'Wir denken von der Mitte der Sprache aus. Von ihr bestimmt sich der Begriff der Zugehörigkeit nicht mehr als die teleologische Bezogenheit des Geistes auf das Wesensgefüge des Seienden [. . .]' (ibid.: 465/457).

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.[60]

In order to experience the world in the manner characteristic of subjects of understanding, one must be able to relate to the world in a free and distanced way. This posture requires that one is able to reflect whether the content of one's experience is what it appears to be, and therefore is able to articulate and assess it critically. The ability to critically assess what we experience comes with our initiation into language. This initiation leads us into the world, in the sense that its manifold phenomena can now appear in their intelligibility or openness, i.e. as facts and subject matters that possess an independent being, which can be brought to the world in different ways that can challenge and commit us. Other animals are denied this open access to the world. They live their life in an environment (*Umwelt*), while we experience the world *as* a world. In this way, the belongingness between mind and world is mediated by language.

Due to this emphasis on language as the medium through which our most primordial belongingness to the world presents itself, the hermeneutic concept of tradition must be conceived as the critical successor to the metaphysical doctrine of belonging. This ontological conception equates our initiation into a linguistic (*sprachlich*) tradition with our acquisition of a world-view (*Weltansicht*). In order to accentuate the connection between world, tradition and language, Gadamer also describes our belonging to the world as a matter of always already being *addressed* by tradition.[61]

As McDowell has pointed out, this notion of tradition can make intelligible the way in which humans, who are born as mere animals, can develop and transform into 'thinkers and intentional agents in the course of coming to maturity':

Human beings mature into being at home in the space of reasons or, what comes to the same thing, living their lives in the world; we can make sense of that by noting that the language into which a human being is first initiated stands over against her as a prior embodiment of mindedness, of the possibility of an orientation to the world [. . .] The feature of language that really matters is [. . .] this: that a natural language, the sort of language into which human beings are first initiated, serves as a repository of tradition, a store of historically accumulated wisdom about what is a reason for what. The tradition is subject to reflective modification by each generation that inherits it. Indeed, a standing obligation to engage in critical reflection is itself part of the inheritance. [. . .] But if an individual human being is to realize her potential of taking her place in that succession, which is the same thing as acquiring a mind, the capacity to think and act intentionally, at all, the first thing that needs to happen is for her to be initiated into a tradition as it stands.[62]

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[60] 'Die Sprache ist nicht nur eine der Ausstattungen, die dem Menschen, der in der Welt ist, zukommt, sondern auf ihr beruht, und in ihr stellt sich dar, daß die Menschen überhaupt Welt haben. Für die Menschen ist die Welt als Welt da, wie sie für kein Lebendiges sonst Dasein hat, das auf der Welt ist. Dies Dasein der Welt ist sprachlich verfaßt' (ibid.: 440/446f.).

[61] Ibid.: 458/467.

[62] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 125f. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

This description emphasises that tradition constitutes the very horizon of our understanding. In this way, our linguistically articulated tradition is a power that stands over the subject as 'a prior embodiment of mindedness, of the possibility of an orientation to the world'. I think this gloss on our linguistic tradition captures the ontological intention of Gadamer's notion of tradition very well. Because McDowell, in his account of perceptual experience, has shown how the interconnected conceptual capacities that make up the layout of the tradition can be world-involving, the hermeneutic notion of tradition gains a renewed actuality. If the conceptual capacities to which we are introduced when we are initiated into a shared tradition of understanding also permeate our sensibility, it is easier to make sense of the idea that initiation into tradition equals initiation into a world-view.[63]

At some points, McDowell makes use of Gadamer's notion of tradition to criticise what he takes to be a certain *constructivist* tendency in some prominent conceptions of normativity. The main target for his criticism is Brandom, who claims that we should understand normativity as something instituted by our social-practical activities.[64] According to Brandom, it is not a self-standing subject, but rather communal activity that institutes the authoritativeness of conceptual norms.[65] McDowell grants that rational norms can be said to be self-legislated, in the sense that their authority depends on the possibility of free acknowledgement from the side of the subject:

> But that is consistent with – and indeed requires – that we not pretend to make sense of the idea of a legislative act that confers authority on the norms of reason. If the legislative act is not already subject to the norms of reason, how can it be anything but arbitrary? But nothing instituted by an act that is arbitrary could be intelligible as the authority of reason. If self-legislation of rational norms is not to be a random leap in the dark, it must be seen as an acknowledgement of an authority that the norms have anyway.[66]

One cannot avoid this problematic constructivism by appealing to the institution of normativity as a complex communal performance, as Brandom does. This merely replaces a dubious *subjectivism* with an equally dubious *intersubjectivism*. Inspired by hermeneutics, we must instead view the ability to recognise the norms of reason as something we owe to the supra-subjective powers (*übersubjektiven Mächte*) of

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[63] As a consequence of his hermeneutic notion of tradition, McDowell claims that language in the sense of tradition is more important than language as a 'tool for communication' or as 'an instrument of thought'. This is precisely because language in the sense of tradition is that which initially constitutes subjects of understanding and communication. McDowell criticises Davidson for '[…] focusing exclusively on what is required for communication and thereby ignoring the thought that tradition in the sense of shared languages […] might matter for the constitution of subjects of understanding' (McDowell, J. 2009. Gadamer and Davidson on Understanding and Relativism. In *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical essays*, 145. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Cf. McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 184ff. Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

[64] Brandom, R. 1994. *Making it Explicit*, xiii. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[65] McDowell, J. 2009. Self-determining subjectivity and external constraint. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel and Sellars*, 105. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[66] Ibid.

language and tradition.[67] McDowell would thus agree with Brandom that the world does not come with conceptual normativity in it.[68] Conceptual norms are only intelligible in the context of discursive practices, but this does not mean that we have to view them as instituted by these practices. The capacity to recognise the norms of reason is acquired by being initiated into suitable communal practices. Here, one gains the possibility of recognising and gradually revising and criticising the norms that do not owe their authoritativeness to their being recognised, but are nonetheless authoritative anyway.[69] In other words, we must distinguish between an authority that is sustained due to the *possibility* of being recognised and one that is conferred (instituted or bestowed) by the *act* of recognition.

As we have seen, McDowell warns against the desire to enquire as to the *source* of the normative authority of concepts.[70] In the light of this hankering, the concept of tradition would also become problematic. If tradition is thought to be the source of the normativity of reason, then it is understood as a super-individual that takes over the task of instituting normativity ascribed to subjects or intersubjective practices in the constructivist picture. However, we are not forced into this confused picture, in which personal performances are attributed to the supra-subjective power of tradition. Tradition and language as supra-subjective powers '[...] give a normative shape to our life-world, in a way that is not to be reduced to the activities of subjects, but saying that is not crediting personal performances to super-persons'.[71] When we are led into shared verbal practices that evolve historically, we become responsive to norms. But this does not mean that tradition institutes and guarantees normativity. Rather, we must view the assumption that it is necessary to investigate the very source of normativity as a 'baseless metaphysical scruple'.

We can recognise the same constructivist tendency that McDowell finds in Brandom in the assumptions that underpin Pippin's critique of Gadamer. Here, Pippin asserts that the norms to which our thinking is responsible cannot be regarded as something waiting to be found.[72] Rather, we have ourselves instituted, founded or 'posited' these norms. In this way, Pippin endorses (what he takes to be) Nietzsche's idea that '[...] we have *made* ourselves into creatures with the right to make promises (we are not "by nature" such creatures), and thus, by holding

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[67] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 456. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 464. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). Cf. McDowell, J. 2009. Gadamer and Davidson on Understanding and Relativism. In *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical essays*, 150. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[68] Brandom, R. 1994. *Making it Explicit*, xiv. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[69] McDowell, J. 2009. Self-determining subjectivity and external constraint. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel and Sellars*, 107. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[70] Cf. Sect. 7 in Chap. 4 above.

[71] Cf. McDowell, J. 2009. Gadamer and Davidson on Understanding and Relativism. In *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical essays*, 150f. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[72] Pippin, R. 2002. Gadamer's Hegel. In *Gadamer's Century: Essays in honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. J. Malpas et al. 227. Cambridge: MIT Press.

ourselves and each other to normative constraints, have made ourselves subjects and remain subjects only by finding ways to sustain such results'.[73] I think Pippin is right, in that this constructivist picture of meaning or intelligibility marks the deepest disagreement between the idealist and the Heidegger-influenced tradition.[74] In fact, highlighting the always already articulated character of our understanding – which the notion of tradition does – serves to question Pippin's constructivist position.[75]

Given that Pippin has acknowledged that the idea of being the *Urheber* of normativity is 'paradoxical', we must admit an 'element of receptivity' in the model of self-determination. He does not entertain the view that normativity is instituted 'out of whole cloth, out of the non-normative ooze, by an act of mere will, or intentionally or explicitly'.[76] However, this apparent concession is misleading, insofar as Pippin maintains a kind of *developmental constructivism*. He maintains that there is a price for rejecting rational constraint by non-conceptual content, namely:

> [that] it will be very hard to continue to maintain the common sense view that Greek slaves and modern data programmers must at some level have a common perceptual world in gazing out at the Aegean, "controlled by objects" seen in the same way. Living in a world everywhere animated by intentional natural forces, one "sees" their effects; socialized into a community of feudal order, there are visible inheritable properties in blood that entitle a family to rule over many generations; when there is a Great Chain of Being its orders of reality are directly manifest to all "with eyes to see"; when souls re-incarnate, the effects can be everywhere perceived; one "sees" the soul in bumps on the head and so on and so on.[77]

In one sense, it is obviously true that, regarding many crucial aspects of experience, a modern data programmer does not perceive the same way that a Greek slave does. In McDowell's and Gadamer's view, we cannot isolate a level of experience as a common layer that amounts to something Given. This approach acknowledges that people from different cultures really can *see* matters differently and that we cannot, a priori, from an external vantage point, determine which aspects of experience are unaffected by cultural, social and historical differences. Rather, we must engage in

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[73] Ibid.: 232. Cf. Nietzsche, F. 1999. S*ämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden* 5, 291. Bonn: de Gruyter. It is not obvious that *On the Genealogy of Morality*, to which Pippin refers, supports his claim. Nietzsche writes that *nature* took it upon itself to breed an animal that is entitled to make promises, not that we made ourselves that way. Thanks to S. Pethick for pointing this out to me.

[74] Pippin, R. 2002. Gadamer's Hegel. In *Gadamer's Century: Essays in honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Malpas, J. et al. 233. Cambridge: MIT Press.

[75] Cf. McDowell, J. 2002. Responses. In *Reading McDowell: On Mind and World*, ed. by N. H. Smith, 297. London: Routledge.

[76] Pippin, R. 2005. *The Persistence of Subjectivity*: *On the Kantian aftermath*, 219. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2007. McDowell's Germans: Response to 'On Pippin's postscript'. In *European Journal of Philosophy* 15, 3: 427f.

[77] Pippin, R. 2007. McDowell's Germans: Response to 'On Pippin's postscript'. In *European Journal of Philosophy* 15, 3: 425.

an interpretation of their world in order to understand how they perceive and how fundamentally their perception differs from ours.

But Pippin's claim is far stronger, since it concerns the very possibility that people with the different (pre-modern) world-views he sketches can be directed at the objective world at all. Pippin seems to think that if we are initiated into a tradition that is not shaped 'by mutuality of recognition among free, rational beings',[78] we have not been led into the space of reasons at all – and, therefore, our judgements cannot be rationally constrained by our perception. Such a view would, of course, question Gadamer and McDowell's idea that tradition constitutes us as subjects of understanding and communication. But Pippin's view also comes at a price: we, from our philosophical armchair, must conclude that people such as the Greek slave mentioned in the passage above are not justified in their perceptually based judgement that, say, a boat is coming or a storm is brewing, because they do not belong to a community shaped by mutuality of recognition among free, rational beings. McDowell and Gadamer, on the contrary, want to allow that such people are subjects of understanding, and claim that this ability was acquired when they were initiated into a linguistic tradition. In other words, they claim that all the differences that we are able to explicate belong within a framework in which we assume that the people that we investigate are subjects able to pass responsible judgements about the world that could be freely recognised in a practice of giving and asking for reasons – even though such a practice might only be present in their culture in a quite different, perhaps even rudimentary form. In this way, all of our enquiries into developments presuppose the ontological dimension of tradition: that initiation into tradition is what constitutes us as subjects of understanding.

5   A Hermeneutic Critique of Brandom's Methodologism

Gadamer's notion of tradition functions as a criticism of the ideal of historical objectivity as it is propounded in historicism. I think a discussion of Brandom's appropriation of philosophical hermeneutics can serve to demonstrate that Gadamer's critique of a purely methodological hermeneutics is relevant beyond the particular target of historical objectivism.[79]

Brandom reconstructs philosophical hermeneutics in terms of the distinction between *de re* and *de dicto* interpretation. He takes himself to agree with Gadamer that 'there is no such thing as the meaning of a text in isolation from its context – at least the context of its reading. A text can only be read from some point of view, in some context.'[80] When a text is given a *de dicto* interpretation, the context is

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[78] Ibid.

[79] Brandom, R. Hermeneutic Practice and Theories of Meaning. 2004. In *SATS – Nordic journal of philosophy* 5, 1: 5–26.

[80] Ibid.: 9.

supplied by the author's own commitments. In this way, this sort of interpretation tries to 'specify the contents of commitments in a way that would be recognized and acknowledged *as* specifications of those contents by the one whose commitments they are'.[81] Thus, the aim of this kind of interpretation is to be able to determine what the author *himself* would have said in response to various questions of clarification and extension.

In a *de re* interpretation of texts, the aim is not to specify what the author would have said in clarification or defence of important claims in the text, but rather to determine what *really* follows from these claims, what follows from them in truth. In this type of interpretation, one assesses the claims from the facts that determine what actually follows from what. As Brandom emphasises, the interpreter refers to the facts '*as she takes them to be*; that is the best any of us can do'.[82] So in this case, the context of interpretation is provided by the interpreter's commitments regarding how things actually are in relation to what the author is talking about. In this way, *de re* interpretations seek to establish 'what the author has *really* committed herself to, regardless of her opinion about the matter'.[83]

It is a consequence of Brandom's contextualism that he takes neither of the two kinds of interpretations to be intrinsically superior to the other. He thinks 'it is a mistake to think that one or the other of these types of content specification *gets things right* in a way the other doesn't. Both are wholly legitimate ways of specifying the contents of the very same conceptual commitments expressed by the words on the page.'[84]

As we have seen, Gadamer's model of understanding rejects the historicist ideal of a correct, adequate and true reconstruction of the meaning of the text as it was originally conceived. According to Brandom, *de dicto* interpretation attempts to determine what the author *himself* would have said in response to various questions of clarification and extension. Therefore one might initially wonder whether Brandom's notion of *de dicto* interpretation is a version of historicism? It seems that Brandom thinks that his idea of the *de dicto* reading can avoid Gadamer's critique of historicism because it does not pretend to provide a specification of the content that is any more *correct* than a *de re* reading. Because the *de dicto* type of interpretation is only *one* of many equally valid perspectives on the meaning of a text, a *de dicto* reading is not 'more correct, adequate or true than *de re* specifications'.[85] My view, however, is that Brandom's reconstruction of philosophical hermeneutics in terms of the distinction between *de re* and *de dicto* interpretation underestimates the force of Gadamer's critique of historicism. This critique is not merely directed at the illusion that one can objectively determine the meaning of the text independently of considering the contribution from the pre-understanding of

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[81] Ibid.: 15.

[82] Ibid.: 18.

[83] Ibid.: 19.

[84] Ibid.: 20.

[85] Ibid.

the interpreting subjectivity. *Instead, his concepts of tradition and prejudice are aimed at the deeper assumption that the understanding of texts begins with a reflective methodological choice by the interpreter – e.g. between a* de dicto *and a* de re *approach.* In other words, even if Brandom evades the objectivism that characterises historicism, the two approaches share a naïve methodologism.

In order to articulate this critique, we should focus on a priority of the *de re* type of interpretation that, in a specific sense, is established before and beyond the reflective choice of the subject. Gadamer's argument for such a priority of (what Brandom calls) *de re* interpretation is expressed in his idea of a fore-conception of completeness (*Vorgriff der Vollkommenheit*). The fore-conception of completeness must be viewed as a constantly operating expectation of meaning that proceeds from the truth of what is said or what is in the text, and therefore is always determined by the specific content that one attempts to understand. Using the example of an understanding of a letter, Gadamer writes:

> Just as the recipient of a letter understands the news that it contains and first sees things with the eyes of the person who wrote the letter – i.e., considers what he writes as true, and is not trying to understand the writer's peculiar opinions as such – so also do we understand traditionary texts on the basis of expectations of meaning drawn from our own prior relation to the subject matter.[86]

This passage does not invoke a methodological decision, but rather points out a *de re* aspect of our understanding that is *always already* active – 'the prior relation to the subject matter'. Gadamer does not describe our fore-conception of completeness as merely a matter of a psychological disposition to trust all texts to express the truth unless we are forced to admit the opposite. Rather, the idea is that it is impossible to understand any text at all if we do not presume that it is mostly expressing the truth. In any reading of any text, we implicitly comprehend a vast number of possible ambiguities from the standpoint of our own understanding of the subject matter. Only against the background of this massive ascription of truth is the text able to appear in its otherness and challenge our views and opinions.

As has been noted, Gadamer's idea of a fore-conception of completeness is akin to Davidson's notion of the 'principle of charity'.[87] Davidson emphasises how charity in understanding is not an option but a condition of possibility for

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[86] 'So wie der Empfänger eines Briefes die Nachrichten versteht, die er enthält, und zunächst die Dinge mit den Augen des Briefschreibers sieht, d. h. für wahr hält, was dieser schreibt – und nicht etwa die sonderbaren Meinungen des Briefschreibers als solche zu verstehen sucht –, so verstehen wir auch überlieferte Texte auf Grund von Sinnerwartungen, die aus unseren eigenen vorgängigen Sachverhältnis geschöpft sind' (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 294. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 299. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[87] Cf. Malpas, J. 2002. Gadamer, Davidson and the ground of understanding. In *Gadamer's Century: Essays in honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. J. Malpas et al. 195–216. Cambridge: MIT Press; Hoy, D. 1997. Post-Cartesian interpretation: Hans-Gadamer and Donald Davidson. In *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer: The library of living philosophers* vol. xxiv, ed. L.E. Hahn, 111–128. Chicago: Open Court.

understanding: 'Charity is forced on us, whether we like it or not, if we want to understand others, we must count them right in most matters.'[88]

The fore-conception of completeness is operative when we explicitly consider different possibilities of interpretation of an ambiguous passage or concept. Brandom points out that to interpret in a *de dicto* way, we must attempt to answer questions of clarification on behalf of the author. Gadamer would add that in order to do this, we must consider the implications of different possibilities of interpretation that we think the specific passage or concept allows for. As part of this process, our conception of what fits best with our view of the subject matter plays a natural part in our interpretation, if our aim is to understand the other. In this way, *de dicto* interpretation presupposes *de re* understanding.

Davidson stresses the charity of our interpretation in our everyday life, claiming that we employ 'off the cuff interpretation all the time, deciding in favour of reinterpretation of words' in order to maintain a reasonable and coherent understanding.[89] Of course, when it comes to interpretation of potential ambiguities in philosophical texts, matters are more complicated. Still, Gadamer's claim is that such elaborate interpretation is a natural extension of these everyday situations. In relation to the problem of text interpretation, he expresses this point in a straightforward way when he claims that understanding a text tends to capture (*einnehmen*) what the text says to the reader.[90]

In order to do justice to understanding as it is practised in the human sciences, Gadamer does not use the concept of agreement or consensus, but the idea of a developing a familiarity (*Einverständnis*) in our grasp of the subject matter. Understanding implies and presupposes such a familiarity. As such, in relation to texts dealing with complex political, literary, ethical or existential phenomena, he does not claim that agreement or consensus is somehow forced upon us. *Einverständnis* is not 'consensus' or 'agreement', as this term is misleadingly rendered in the English translation of Gadamer.[91] Rather, the point is that when we understand a text we are dependent upon a grasp of the subject matter in order to make sense of it at all. In our understanding of a text, this dependence upon a common horizon of familiarity functions as a way of relating the text to the whole complex of possible meaning in which we exercise our language. This dependence allows not only for subsequent *de dicto* interpretation, but also for radical disagreement and critique. What Gadamer insists on is merely that such critique presupposes that we have always already understood the object of critique as belonging to a shared world in manifold ways that are beyond our ability to fully articulate. In this sense, *de re* understanding is transcendentally prior. As Gadamer programmatically writes:

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[88] Davidson, D. 2001. On the very idea of a conceptual scheme. In *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 197. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

[89] Ibid.: 196.

[90] Gadamer, H-.G. 1999. Text und Interpretation [1983]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 351. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[91] E.g. Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 375 n. 40. London and New York: Continuum.

> To understand [*Verstehen*] primarily means: to understand and recognize oneself in the subject matter [*sich in der Sache verstehen*], and only secondarily: to understand and set the opinion of the other apart as a distinct opinion. The understanding of the subject matter [*Sachverständnis*] remains the primary of all hermeneutic conditions.[92]

The idea of our understanding as constitutively guided by prejudices directed at the subject matter questions Brandom's idea of the *de re* and the *de dicto* approach as two 'equiprimordial' forms of interpretation. Brandom's idea that any general privileging of one of these types of interpretation must be rooted in pragmatic considerations 'in the vulgar sense of purposes, interests and plans of the interpreter' appears in this light as a methodological abstraction.[93] It is not only the ideal that all legitimate understanding must and can be independent from any influence that cannot be made fully reflectively transparent that Gadamer shows to be mythical and unnecessary. The idea of constitutive (and ultimately, ontological) dependence upon historical tradition and prejudices also undermines Brandom's *dogmatic methodological pluralism*.[94] Instead, we should conceive the ability to understand a text as an expression of the opinion of the other as something that is only conceivable through the development of presupposed familiarity with the subject matter. Before we can give a *de dicto* account of the content of a text, we have already employed our grasp of the subject matter in manifold ways in order to understand the text at all.

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[92] 'Verstehen heißt primär: sich in der Sache verstehen, und erst sekundär: die Meinung des anderen als solche abheben und verstehen. Die erste aller hermeneutischen Bedingungen bleibt damit das Sachverständnis' (Gadamer, H-.G. 1999. Vom Zirkel des Verstehens [1959]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 62. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck); my translation).

[93] Brandom, R. 2004. Hermeneutic Practice and Theories of Meaning. In *SATS – Nordic journal of philosophy* 5, 1: 22.

[94] Brandom also operates with a third type of *de traditione* reading, but this type also remains within a purely methodological framework. On this view, *tradition* amounts to a particular kind of context: 'Here one supplements the words on the page by further claims made by others whom the interpreter, but not necessarily the authors involved, retrospectively sees as engaged in a common enterprise, as developing common thoughts or concepts' (Brandom, R. 2004. Hermeneutic Practice and Theories of Meaning. In *SATS – Nordic journal of philosophy* 5, 1: 22). Readings *de traditione* are a kind of mixture of the *de re* and *de dicto* approaches. On the one hand, contrary to a *de dicto* type of interpretation, the interpreter ascribes claims to the author that are 'not restricted to commitments the interpreter takes it would be acknowledged by the author of the text' (ibid.). This means that one could, for example, read Aristotle's practical philosophy, and in particular his concept of *phronēsis*, as belonging to the tradition of the flight to the *logoi* performed by Plato's Socrates and the Socratic question concerning the Good, even if this, in some respects, goes against Aristotle's explicit understanding of his own thinking. On the other hand, a *de traditione* interpretation does not necessarily *acknowledge* or *endorse* the central claims of the tradition that it reconstructs – i.e. one may refrain from considering the potential problems with the concept of *phronēsis* as one sees them while concentrating on recounting the trajectory from Plato's Socrates to Aristotle's practical philosophy. In this sense, a *de traditione* reading is not a *de re* interpretation either. As a methodological concept, *de traditione* seems useful; the crucial point, however, is that *tradition in Brandom's sense, in contrast to Gadamer, remains a purely methodological concept – it describes a reflective choice made by the interpreter.*

Gadamer's notions of tradition and prejudice do not express an attempt to appeal to a (mythical) entity that lies beyond the reach of our reflective scrutiny, which can serve to justify our judgements and interpretations. Rather, these concepts are attempts to dislodge us from a methodologism that creates a distorted picture of the nature of understanding and interpretation. One (historicist) variant of this methodologism claims that we must conceive interpretation as a matter of reconstructing the meaning of the text at least as closely as possible while abstracting as much as possible from the interpreter's conception of the subject matter. The ideal of historicism is an understanding of the text that is completely uncontaminated by the interpreter's pre-understanding of the subject matter. Another variant of methodologism is Brandom's picture, which suggests that understanding begins with the choice between different equiprimordial modes of interpretation – paradigmatically, *de re* and *de dicto* interpretation. Both Brandom and the historicists make the mistake of conceiving understanding as if it were an object that we have at (or can bring to) our disposal. Gadamer reminds us that we are fundamentally exposed when we understand, because we are guided by tradition and prejudice in ways we cannot bring to reflective transparency. Furthermore, he points out that this unreflective guidance is, at the most primordial level, a precondition for understanding anything at all. Gadamer's point thus entails that we employ our understanding of the subject matter in order to understand what the text means, in ways that we will never be completely able to identify or abstract from – and therefore it is misguided to think that *de dicto* and *de re* interpretation are equiprimordial approaches that we can choose between.

6   Responsibility and Hermeneutic Vigilance

As we have seen, tradition is a dynamic entity and the concept in itself allows for radical innovations and critique.[95] A tradition is subject to reflective modification by each generation that inherits it, and even entails an obligation to critically interpret its content.

The notion of tradition in philosophical hermeneutics is modelled on the conception developed in Aristotle's ethical thinking, in which the concept of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) plays a central role. The preconditions for becoming a virtuous man – a person with practical wisdom – are, according to Aristotle, established through the inculcation of respectable norms and conventions, and thereby the formation of virtuous habits in a good upbringing. But these habitually or traditionally established norms do not constitute virtue as such, because they do not in themselves guide the virtuous individual in the particular situation of action. 'Practical wisdom' is an articulation of the insight that, in order to act responsibly, the acting person must attempt to let good reasons be the causes of their actions, and

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[95] Cf. Sect. 3.

therefore they are implicitly obligated to give an account of these actions when one is demanded. This means that, in the situation of acting, one cannot appeal to the authority of traditions or the opinions of others. For the virtuous individual, what one says or what tradition prescribes cannot count as a reason for a particular course of action. Rather, they are thrown back upon their own critical use of reason and personal responsibility (*Selbstverantwortung*).[96] In the end, inheritance of a tradition requires that I, as an agent, am responsible for my understanding and application of the norms that have been handed down to me by tradition.

McDowell captures this point in the following passage:

> Of course being initiated into a tradition cannot by itself ensure that what someone takes to be reasons really are the reasons they seem to be. Someone may think or act in the light of something that is not really a reason for thinking or acting as she does, because her grasp of what is a reason for what is defective. It may be that the presence of a supposed reason in the conception of reasons she has had handed down to her, or the rational weight it is taken to have in that conception, reflects a mere prejudice that informs the thinking of her community. Suppose, for instance, that someone's conforming her thought or action to a putative reason reflects her believing that race or gender settles a person's proper station in life. In that case what ultimately explains her thought or action is not the force of a reason that she recognizes as such. What we have here is only the illusion of an instance of that. The explanatory weight falls through the supposed reason to whatever explains her taking it to be a reason.[97]

Tradition includes 'the responsibility to reflect for oneself about the credentials of putative reasons for thought or action, in full awareness that one cannot rely uncritically on any supposed wisdom that one has merely inherited. If one takes things on trust from others, one is oneself responsible for doing so.'[98] McDowell describes this responsibility as burdensome, and suggests that some of the 'unsatisfactory tendencies' in philosophy – he cites, among others, relativism and the Myth of the Given[99] – can be understood as attempts to evade it.

As we have seen, the epistemological point of the notion of tradition is that, even in the best cases, understanding is positively dependent upon prejudices that the interpreter cannot make completely reflectively transparent. Therefore, in light of this reconstruction of Gadamer's concept of tradition, we can speak not only of a burdensome responsibility, but of a constitutive tension in the very phenomenon of understanding. On the one hand, the interpreter has a standing obligation to critically reflect upon the contents of tradition, and when he trusts others by exploiting their wisdom, as he can and should, he cannot take this lightly because he is himself responsible for taking things on trust from others. On the other hand, he is forced to trust tradition. In fact, he always already has done so, beyond that for which he can critically account – in other words, it is by virtue of this trust, which he

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[96] Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles [1978]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 7, 221. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). Cf. Sect. 3 in Chap. 3 above.

[97] McDowell, J. 2010. Autonomy and its burdens. *Harvard Review of Philosophy*, Vol. XVII: 12.

[98] Ibid.: 13.

[99] Ibid.: 13ff.

cannot completely reflectively redeem, that he is able to understand at all. This tension is not a paradox, because it does not undermine our endeavour to understand. Rather, it emphasises the fragile and unsecured nature of these attempts.

In *Truth and Method,* Gadamer takes the emphasis on responsibility so far as to require that the aim of our understanding of the historical texts, artworks and concepts of tradition must be to be able to 'stand behind them', i.e. interpret them such that they can be applied in our contemporary context in a way that makes their meaning valid for us now. Using a notion from Kierkegaard, Gadamer demands that, in human science, the interpreter must achieve contemporaneity (*samtidighed*) with the object of interpretation.[100] Of course, this approach acknowledges that if we fail to transpose ourselves (*sich versetzen*) in the historical horizon of the text, then we will fail to understand its meaning. Yet Gadamer maintains that the nature of understanding is distorted if the task of understanding is reduced to placing ourselves in the other's situation.[101] According to these passages, achieving a fusion of horizons or application of the text consists in understanding how the text can be true.

It seems to me that here Gadamer goes too far in emphasising our obligation to develop a responsible relation to tradition when he claims that interpretation, as it is practised in the human sciences, must attempt to become contemporaneous with the objects of interpretation, mediating them with our contemporary horizon in such a way that we can understand them to be true. This ideal may be relevant in some cases of interpretation, but it is questionable whether it can be generalised.[102] The problem may be partly caused by Gadamer's analogy between interpersonal relationships and the relation between the interpreter and the subject matter, which is misleading in a crucial respect.[103] In the case of interpersonal relationships, it is an indication that something inauthentic is at play when a partner in dialogue refrains completely from engaging with the claim to truth in our utterances. Here, there is tendency towards a problematic objectification that becomes manifest if our partner in dialogue explicates our point of view in terms of the (psychological, sociological, historical) forces that might have caused us to inhabit this point of view.[104] In such

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[100] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method,* 124f. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 131f. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). Cf. Kierkegaard, S. 1985. *Philosophical Fragments*, transl. by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong, 55–71. Princeton (New Jersey): Princeton University Press.

[101] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 302f. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 308. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[102] De Mul, J. 2004. *The Tragedy of Finitude: Dilthey's hermeneutics of life*, transl. by Burret, T. 335. New Haven: Yale University Press.

[103] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 352–355. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 364–68. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[104] It may be a part of many genuine dialogues to diagnose and thereby explain certain assumptions or beliefs in order to gain reflective distance from them. Gadamer's point, however, is that if diagnosis and explanation in abstraction from validity becomes the implicit or explicit *telos* of the dialogue, then it has developed into a technical form of communication – such as, for example, some forms of therapeutic therapy.

a situation, we are rightly offended because our claim to understanding has been reduced to a matter of causal influence. However, when meaning is objectified in a text or a work of art, the approach that focuses on the possible truth or validity of the subject matter does not seem to enjoy the same priority. When interpreting a text, we are not in the situation of action where we need to be able to account for our understanding in terms of how the meaning of text, as it is brought out in our reading, prescribes or justifies a particular course of action. On the contrary, we are exempt from the immediate pressure of the situation of action – we are in a contemplative mode of understanding.[105] Here, we are set free to objectify the text in a historical, even critical-subversive form of interpretation. Similarly, when we interpret a work of art, we attempt to understand an object, and therefore we are not under the same obligation to approach its meaning as we are when entering a dialogue with a person. This does not mean that the attempt to become contemporaneous with the object of interpretation is necessarily misguided – only that in the human sciences, contrary to what Gadamer claims, it is reduced to one mode of understanding among many.[106]

It is interesting to note that Gadamer, following the publication of *Truth and Method,* answered certain critics by stressing that the notions of 'application' and 'fusion of horizons' in understanding are *not* to be conceived in the normative sense of a Kierkegaardian demand to become contemporaneous with the subject matter.[107] He now emphasises that these notions should only be understood to refer to the directedness toward and familiarity with a common subject matter that all understanding presupposes and develops.[108] I think Gadamer was right in making this (implicit) self-correction. In fact, the Kierkegaardian concept of contemporaneity that Gadamer entertains in some passages of *Truth and Method* would

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[105] I think Figal is right that Gadamer tends to neglect the possibility of a contemplative hermeneutics that is not modelled on the situation of action. Figal explores hermeneutics as a contemplative approach, and explicitly distances his conception from Gadamer's prioritisation of the practical perspective. Cf. Figal, G. 2010. *Objectivity: The hermeneutical and philosophy*, translated by George, T. 14–17. Albany (NY): SUNY Press; Figal, G. 2006. *Gegenständlichkeit. Das Hermeneutische und die Philosophie*, 17–21. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

[106] There are alternatives other than a strict historical interpretation that seeks to reconstruct the meaning of the text from the perspective of the author. The text may also be read in the manner of the so-called hermeneutics of suspicion. In *Freud and Philosophy,* Ricoeur famously introduces the idea that interpretation is not only 'the willingness to listen' in order to secure 'a restoration of a meaning addressed to me in the manner of a message, a proclamation, a kerygma'. It is equally 'the willingness to suspect', 'a tactic of suspicion, a battle against masks' (Ricoeur, P. 1970. *Freud and Philosophy: An essay on interpretation*, translated by Savage, D. 26–29. New Haven: Yale University Press). Besides Marx, Nietzsche and Freud figure as the paradigmatic exponents of such a hermeneutics of suspicion. Gadamer comments upon Ricoeur's diagnosis in Gadamer, H.-G. 1984. The hermeneutics of suspicion. In *Hermeneutics: Questions and prospects*, ed. Shapiro, G. et al. 54–65. Amhearst: University of Massachusetts Press.

[107] Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Replik zu Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik [1971]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 261. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[108] Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Hermeneutik und Historismus [1965]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 395. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

potentially set dogmatic boundaries for us. With his answer to his critics, Gadamer makes clear that philosophical hermeneutics can insist on the irreducible positive contribution from prejudices in interpretation, while also acknowledging that historical reconstructions and critically subversive forms of interpretation are not inferior to readings that attempt to show why a text is true. Only in some instances will we be able to translate the meaning of the text in such a way as to show how its meaning can be valid for us now. Gadamer implicitly acknowledges this in the response to his critics, and thus refrains from making it a condition of possibility for 'the fusion of horizons' or the 'application' of a text that we are able to achieve such an integration of the text.

The correction of Gadamer's idea of achieving contemporaneity with the object of interpretation can still acknowledge that the relation between the text of the past and our contemporary concerns is always an implicit dimension of understanding. Because we always already share a relation to a shared subject matter with the text, our horizon always fuses to some extent with that of the text when we come to understand it. As Gadamer conceives it, this is a matter of coming to understand the implicit question to which the text is an answer. When we express our understanding in an interpretation, this shows how we understand the subject matter or the question motivating the text, and thus articulates the relation between the text and our contemporary horizon. This intrinsic involvement with the meaning of the text is also present in historical reconstructions or a critical-subversive interpretation, and not only in a reading in which we explicitly attempt to show how an ancient text's conception of the subject matter is still true. As the concepts of tradition and prejudice remind us, this involvement with the subject matter of the text always goes beyond what we are able to reflectively articulate.

Gadamer suggests that we acknowledge this structure of understanding, rather than convince ourselves we can avoid it by clinging to some sort of methodological ideal. What is at stake here is the development of what Gadamer calls *hermeneutic vigilance* (*Wachheit*).[109] This signifies the ability to intensify the fusion between our contemporary horizon and the horizon of the text, and thereby increase the likelihood of our encounter with the text becoming an experience in the emphatic sense of the term, i.e. something that can change our preconceptions about the subject matter and ourselves.[110]

On the one hand, we should therefore follow Gadamer's implicit self-correction and avoid the idea that full contemporaneity with the subject matter is a condition of possibility for achieving a fusion of horizons. An interpretation in which we attempt to articulate how a historical text can be true is only one among many legitimate hermeneutic approaches. On the other hand, we can maintain the value of hermeneutic vigilance, no matter what form of interpretation we practise. It makes a

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[109] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method,* 306. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 312. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). The English version is misleading insofar as the translation of this passage ignores the term *Wachheit*.

[110] Ibid.: 348ff./359ff.

difference whether we are aware that we are always already involved with the meaning of the text as a shared subject matter, and that our interpretation of its meaning is affected by prejudices that we cannot make completely transparent. This hermeneutic vigilance enables a more adequate relation to the object of interpretation than is possible in a purely methodological form of hermeneutics, e.g. in historicism or in Brandom's pragmatism.

7   Practical Wisdom and Perceptual Experience

How can the language- and concept-oriented approach characteristic of philosophical hermeneutics accommodate the fine-grained nature of our perceptual experience? In order to address this question, it is necessary to return to Gadamer and McDowell's interpretation of the Aristotelian concept of practical wisdom.[111] One reason for the importance of this notion is precisely that it provides a paradigm for conceiving reason as situation-dependent, which allows philosophical hermeneutics to pay heed to the fine-grained nature of perceptual experience.[112]

Consider the following passage from book VI of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*:

> And it is clear Prudence [*phronēsis*] is not the same as Scientific Knowledge [*epistēmē*]: for as has been said, it apprehends ultimate particular things, since the thing to be done is an ultimate particular thing. [...] Prudence deals with the ultimate particular thing, which cannot be apprehended by Scientific Knowledge but only by perception: not the perception of the special senses, but the sort of intuition [*nous*] whereby we perceive that the ultimate figure in mathematics is a triangle; for there, too, there will be a stop.[113]

A crucial aspect of practical wisdom, Gadamer argues, is that it 'includes perfect application' and is therefore employed in the 'immediacy of the given situation'.[114] We should therefore reject an abstract 'rule-case' picture of practical wisdom such that its content could be specified in universal terms, independently of the concrete situation in which the *phronimos*[115] is called on to act.

Sensitivity to the particular situation is an indispensable part of moral knowledge. In the best cases, we are able to see a situation in the light of what is to be done and thus act immediately on this situation-specific understanding. Here, 'one rather

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[111] Cf. Sect. 3 in Chap. 3 above.

[112] I am thus interested in the systematic value of Aristotle's conception of *phronēsis* for my reconstruction of philosophical hermeneutics. For a more comparative approach, cf. Rese, F. 2007. Phronesis als Modell der Hermeneutik. Die hermeneutische Aktualität des Aristoteles. In *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Wahrheit und Methode*, ed. G. Figal, 127–150. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.

[113] Aristotle. *Ethica Nicomachea*, ed. L. Bywater, 1962, VI 8, 1142a, 24–31. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[114] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 319. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 327. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[115] The *phronimos* is the person who has *phronēsis*.

than another of the potentially practically relevant features of the situation' rightly identifies the *phronimos* as the significant aspect of a situation.[116] Since the rejection of the abstract rule-case picture of practical wisdom entails that one cannot order the salient features of a situation according to general principles, we should instead admit that there is an element of 'perception' in the adequate response to the situation. In the analysis of rectangular figures in mathematics, we come to recognise that the triangle is the simplest two-dimensional plane figure that allows for no further subdivision. Analogously, we encounter practical situations where 'there will be a stop' and discursive justifications run out. Ultimately, in giving an account of one's judgement in such a case, one can only appeal to the other's 'perception' of the case discussed by saying, for example, 'Can't you see it?' or 'You simply aren't seeing it.' [117]

A main point in this interpretation of Aristotle is that aspects of a situation can be given to the subject via experience in a meaningful way without her possessing in advance the words or descriptive phrases to cover these aspects. McDowell exploits this point in relation to perceptual experience in general with his crucial idea of demonstrative concepts. The background to this idea is the basic phenomenological finding that perceptual experiences seem to be so detailed that they cannot be captured by the concepts at the subject's disposal. In other words, there is a *fineness of grain* to our perception that concepts are unable to accommodate. Our repertoire of colour concepts, for example, seems coarser in grain than our ability to discriminate shades, and therefore unable to capture the fine detail of colour experience. Words like 'red', 'green' or 'burnt sienna' '[. . .] express concepts of bands on the spectrum whereas [. . .] colour experience can present properties that correspond to something more like lines on the spectrum, with no discernible width'.[118]

In response to this line of argument, McDowell insists that we should not equate the sphere of the conceptual with universal concepts that are fully explicable by means of words or descriptive phrases. He therefore rejects an essential connection between a person's grasp of concepts and his or her command of a descriptive vocabulary that fully encodes these concepts. For a person to possess a colour concept, he need not be able to describe what this shade of colour looks like in terms other than: '*coloured thus*'. As McDowell stresses, insofar as we possess the concept of a shade, we are able to *acquire* the concept of a shade of colour:

> Why not say [. . .] that one is equipped to embrace shades of colour within one's conceptual thinking with the very same determinateness with which they are presented in one's visual experience, so that one's concepts can capture colours no less sharply than one's experience presents them? In the throes of an experience of the kind that putatively transcends one's conceptual powers – an experience that *ex hypothesi* affords a suitable sample – one can give linguistic expression to a concept that is exactly as fine-grained as the experience, by

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[116] McDowell, J. 1998. Virtue and reason. In *Mind, Value and Reality*, 62. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[117] It should be emphasised that the perception of relevant features of a situation may require deliberative effort. The right way to handle a situation will not always be apparent on an unreflective inspection of it.

[118] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 56. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

uttering a phrase like "that shade", in which the demonstrative exploits the presence of the sample.[119]

For such a demonstrative to be a concept, i.e. something that figures in expressions of thought, their application cannot be restricted to a single occasion of utterance.[120] Rather, the subject's command of the demonstrative is decided by whether or not he has *recognitional capacity* regarding samples of the colour shade. It is thus the capacity for memory that determines whether a demonstrative concept is possessed.[121] The life span of a recognitional capacity can, of course, be longer or shorter, and the ability to retain it can be cultivated, in a manner analogous to the ability of a wine connoisseur to remember and recognise specific flavours.[122] What is decisive, however, is not the exact span of time but the principle that a demonstrative concept is not restricted to a single actualisation.[123]

By invoking the idea of demonstrative reference, McDowell emphasises that, even if our stock of concepts at any given time is not sufficient to keep up with the discriminations of perceptual experience, we have the ability to 'carve out' a conceptually unified aspect of the experience by determining it with, say, the following linguistic expression: 'having that shade of colour'.[124] Of course, we do not and cannot carve out *all* the conceptual aspects of a single experience by forming matching discursive capacities, but this does not imply that we must posit non-conceptual content.[125]

The use of demonstrative concepts is a situation-dependent form of rationality simply because there is no way to identify the conceptual capacity 'in abstraction from the activating experience itself'. The idea of demonstrative concepts is therefore crucial, because it allows us to accommodate the fine-grained perceptual detail that shapes the course of perceptual life.

As his debate with Hubert Dreyfus shows, McDowell also employs the same model in relation to the domain of action. Throughout his work, Dreyfus emphasises that the significant 'joints' of the skill domain mastered by an expert craftsman do not all have names. He writes:

> In complex domains, one does not have the words for the subtle actions one performs and the subtle significations one articulates in performing them. A surgeon does not have words

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[119] Ibid.: 56f.

[120] As McDowell remarks, this would be like '[...] Wittgenstein's case of the person who says "I know how tall I am", putting his hand on top of his head to prove it. The putative thought – "I am *this* tall", "It looks to me as if something is of *that* shade" – is being construed so as to lack the distance from what would determine it to be true that would be necessary for it to be recognizable as a thought at all' (ibid.: 57).

[121] Ibid.: 172.

[122] Ibid.: 57 n. 14.

[123] Cf. McDowell, J. 2009. Sellars, Kant and intentionality. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 33, n. 18. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[124] McDowell, J. 2009. Avoiding the Myth of the Given. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 263. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[125] Ibid.: 265.

for all the way he cuts, or a chess player for all the patterns he can tell apart and the types of moves he makes in response.[126]

The skill of a *technitēs,* an expert craftsman, allegedly shows that meaning is too fine-grained for concepts to be able to capture.[127] Dreyfus' insight can be accommodated by appealing to the situation-specific conception of rationality expressed in the Aristotelian concept of practical wisdom[128] – and specifically by invoking the idea of demonstrative concepts.[129] Even if a surgeon does not have words for all of the cuts they make, these ways of cutting are aspects of an experience that is conceptually unified. Indeed, this is why the relevant aspects are available and can be explicated by way of demonstrative reference. In other words, what Aristotle calls *technē*, the knowledge of a (expert) craftsman, is essentially a situation-specific form of rationality, and can therefore be viewed as encompassed by the model of practical wisdom.

We can accept this generalisation of the model of *phronēsis* without denying Gadamer's important distinction between *phronēsis* and *technē*. At one point in his account, Gadamer claims that the *phronēsis* can be distinguished from *technē* because moral knowledge is not possessed and then only subsequently applied to the particular situation. He writes:

> The image that a man has of what he ought to be – i.e., his ideas of right and wrong, of decency, courage, dignity, loyalty and so forth (all concepts that have their equivalents in Aristotle's catalogue of virtues) – are certainly in some sense images that he uses to guide his conduct. But there is still a basic difference between this and the guiding image the craftsman uses: the plan of the object he is going to make. What is right, for example, cannot be fully determined independently of the situation that requires a right action from me, whereas the *eidos* of what a craftsman wants to make is fully determined by the use for which it is intended.[130]

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[126] Dreyfus, H.L. 1991. *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Sein und Zeit, Division I*, 215. Cambridge: MIT Press.

[127] Cf. Dreyfus, H.L. 2005. Overcoming the Myth of the Mental. In *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, Vol. 79, 2: 55f.

[128] Cf. McDowell, J. 2009. What Myth? In *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical essays*, 309ff. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[129] Dreyfus construes McDowell's understanding of concept application as 'detached rule-following', which he contrasts with 'situation-specific' intelligibility (Dreyfus, H.L. 2005. Overcoming the Myth of the Mental. In *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, Vol. 79, 2: 52). But it is exactly this dichotomy McDowell challenges: 'Dreyfus pictures rationality as detached from particular situations – as able to relate to particular situations only by subsuming them under content determinately expressible in abstraction from any situation [. . .] But I think we should reject the picture of rationality as situation-independent' (McDowell, J. 2009. What Myth? In *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical essays*, 309. Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

[130] 'Das Bild, das der Mensch von dem hat, was er sein soll, also etwa seine Begriffe von Recht und Unrecht, von Anstand, von Mut, von Würde, von Solidarität usw. [. . .] sind zwar in gewissem Sinne Leitbilder, auf die er hinblickt. Aber es ist doch ein grundsätzlicher Unterschied von dem Leitbilds erkennbar, das etwa der Plan eines herzustelllenden Gegenstandes für den Handwerker darstellt. Was recht ist z.B., ist unabhängig von der Situation, die das Rechte von mir verlangt, nicht voll bestimmbar, während sehr wohl das "Eidos" dessen, was ein Handwerker herstellen will, voll bestimmt ist, und zwar durch den Gebrauch, für den es bestimmt ist' (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 315. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 323. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

I think we can acknowledge this point without coming into conflict with the idea that expert craftsmanship – a form of *technē* – is situation-dependent. Gadamer's idea is that the craftsman constructing a chair is guided in his application of the *eidos* in a more determinate way than the *phronimos* 'applying' a moral concept in a situation-specific way, because the former is guided by the intended use of the object he constructs. He warns us to respect this important difference in order to not consider ethics as a form of *technē*, i.e. he wants to say that we do not have at our disposal a conception of what constitutes living a good life, in the same way as a craftsman has a conception of what, say, a chair is when he wants to build a chair. We can accept this point while still insisting that the craftsman –especially the expert craftsman – depends in various crucial ways on situation-specific knowledge that cannot be formulated in universal rules, in abstraction from the activating experience.

8   The Visual *Logos*

Given Gadamer's reluctance to engage with the problem of perceptual experience, it is perhaps unsurprising that we do not find any reflection on a form of conceptual thinking bound to demonstrative reference. By exploiting McDowell's idea of demonstrative concepts, we can distinguish more explicitly between different levels of our conceptual – and hence potentially verbal – engagement with the world than Gadamer is able to. The value of this for philosophical hermeneutics can be appreciated by considering Gadamer's approach to visual art.

In the third part of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer attacks the false romanticism of immediacy (*Romantisierung der Unmittelbarkeit*), which rejects the possibility of a verbal interpretation of a work of art.[131] According to Gadamer, there is no principal difference between the situation of an artist who interprets a play or piece of music by performing it and a scholar who produces an interpretation of it. Even if the artist regards it as inartistic to justify his interpretation in words, a verbal interpretation can always be given.[132] What specifically interests us here is a concession Gadamer makes a few pages later, when he writes that the verbal interpretation in fact only achieves an approximate correctness (*Richtigkeit*) and thus falls short of the rounded concreteness (*runden Konkretion*) of an artistic reproduction.[133]

Now, it is unclear whether Gadamer means to suggest that the inadequacy of a verbal interpretation could, in principle at least, be remedied by still more verbal interpretation. In relation to a work of art, this would appear quite problematic.

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[131] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 400ff. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 403ff. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[132] Ibid.: 400/403.

[133] Ibid.: 402/405.

Anyone who has experienced a work of visual or plastic art knows that no amount of verbal interpretation can do justice to the many specific details of a reproduction that contribute to giving it 'rounded concreteness'. This is not because we should instead imagine an infinitely long list of propositions that could express all aspects of the work – rather, it is due to a more radical inadequacy of our words to express the meaning of the work. We should therefore not content ourselves with an appeal to the infinite nature of interpretation or dialogue concerning this point. This would only confirm the suspicions of critics who perceive the privileging of language in philosophical hermeneutics to have distorting effects on our conception of experience.

In this context, Gottfried Boehm's *Wie Bilder Sinn erzeugen* [*How images generate meaning*] is quite relevant.[134] Working within the hermeneutic tradition, Boehm examines the *logos of the visual* in the broadest sense: not only in visual art, but also sculpture, architecture and pictures and images in general. The issue at hand is meaning, insofar as it is shown (*gezeigt*) and not spoken.[135] Boehm assures us that he is not appealing to romantic immediacy but rather advocating a careful interpretation that takes the irreducibility of the image seriously and thus insists on the difference between 'saying' (*Sagen*) and 'showing' (*Zeigen*). The interpretation of images must attempt to look beyond the 'covering over' (*Überformung*) effected by our linguistic schemata, conceptual demands and textually based prejudices, in order to uncover (*freilegen*) the 'deictic potential of the image'.[136]

The target of Boehm's critique is the idea that the image (*Bild*) is a transformation of something that could be said. This is the conception of the image as a substitute for a linguistic piece of meaning.[137] According to Boehm, this prejudice expresses a fixation on language that literally overlooks the possibilities and irreducible independence of the visual. Boehm programmatically claims that the brightness (*Helligkeit*) of reason reaches further than the word, and that the visual logos is *sui generis*, unencompassed by predication, discourse and language.[138]

In one essay, Boehm takes his point of departure in Paul Valéry's *Eupalinos ou l'Architecte* (1924), which recounts a dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus in Hades. Valéry depicts how Socrates used to take a profound interest in art but, when he was 18, he decided instead to pursue the philosophical life. Key to the young Socrates' decision was an experience he had one day while walking on the beach, when he found an indefinable object (*un objet ambigu*). Boehm recounts the scene in following way:

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[134] Boehm, G. 2008. *Wie Bilder Sinn erzeugen. Die Macht des Zeigens.* Berlin: Berlin University Press. As Boehm points out, one should keep in mind that the German *Bild* can refer to both images of consciousness and physical pictures (ibid.: 11).

[135] Ibid.: 10.

[136] Ibid.: 15.

[137] Ibid.: 42.

[138] Ibid.: 15, 19, 53.

[The indefinable object] was embedded in the spectacle of nature: white, the size of a fist [*faustgross*], hard, delicate, polished and light. But what was it? Socrates, while examining the object from all angles, made it an object of his probing [*nachfassenden*] questioning. Where does it come from? What is it made of? Who has made it? And to what purpose? None of these questions can be answered, the object remains in a definitive sense undefinable. The essential logic [*Wesenslogik*] of such an object is interpreted by Socrates as the expression of an extreme lack, and finally he throws it back into the ocean. [...] Within the Socratic-Platonic world this object was an outrage *par excellence*, an absurdity [*Un-ding*]. Only when the young Socrates disposed of it once and for all as it were, when it sunk into the ocean, did he regain his foothold. He went "inland" [*landeinwärts*], as Valéry beautifully puts it, avoiding the open and ambivalent intermediate zone at the margin of the elements – he became a philosopher.[139]

In Valéry's critical portrait, Socratic and Platonic philosophy views everything that cannot be given an unambiguous definition as inaccessible to philosophical questioning. Valéry's *objet ambigu* provides ample food for thought while at the same time eluding every attempt to be captured in unambiguous assertions. Boehm, however, does *not* draw the conclusion that the story points to the sheer impossibility of linguistically and conceptually interpreting the visual work of art. What is at stake is rather another kind of questioning, another kind of knowledge.[140]

I think we can accommodate this emphasis on the independent status of visual *logos* following the model of demonstrative concepts. Such a conceptual capacity can only be identified and understood with reference to the specific situation in which it is formed or applied. The idea of demonstrative concepts is an attempt to undercut the false prejudice that 'linguistic articulation would require words to do all the work of expression by themselves, without help from the lived-in situations

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[139] 'Es war eingebettet in das Schauspiel der Natur: weiss, faustgross, hart, zart, poliert und leicht. Aber was ist es? Sokrates, das Ding von allen Seiten musternd, macht es zum Gegenstand seines nachfassenden Fragens. Wo kommt es her? Woraus ist es geformt? Wer hat es gemacht? Zu wessen Nutzen? Keine dieser Fragen findet eine Antwort, es bleibt in einem endgültigen Sinne undefinierbar. Seine Wesenslogik deutet er als einen äussersten Mangel, und schliesslich wirft er es zurück ins Meer [...] Innerhalb der sokratisch-platonischen Welt war dieses Ding der Skandal schlechthin, das Un-ding. Erst als es der junge Sokrates gleichsam aus der Welt geschafft hatte, indem er ins Meer versenkte, gewann er Boden unter den füssen zurück. Er ging "landeinwärts", wie Valéry so schön sagt, mied die offene und ambivalente Zwischenzone am Rand der Elemente, er wurde Philosoph' (ibid.: 214f.; my translation). Cf. Valéry, P. 1924. *Eupalinos ou l'architecte*, 159ff. Paris: Librairie Gallimard.

[140] (Ibid.: 217.) In an application of Valéry's idea of the work of art as an *objet ambigu,* Boehm points to Constantin Brancusi's marble sculpture *Le Commencement du Monde* from 1924, to make the nature of interpretation of ambiguous works of visual art more clear. As Boehm remarks, this work seems as if created to exemplify Valéry's idea. In his treatment of this example, Boehm is interested in a *specific* ambiguity of the work of art; it is not a matter of complete arbitrariness, which would only dialectically mirror the insistence on a complete ineffability of the work. In some places, Valéry himself seems to come close to such a position, e.g. when he says 'mes vers ont le sens qu'on leur prête' – a statement that Gadamer rejects as an unacceptable hermeneutic nihilism (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 82. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 100. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)). A more promising alternative is to allow that even an *objet ambigu* exercises rational constraint on our interpretation, albeit in a much more complex way than trivial objects of visual experience.

in which we speak'.[141] In the case of visual experience, the conceptual capacity is intrinsically bound to a specific visual shaping of our sensory consciousness. In this way, the idea of demonstrative concepts acknowledges the independence of the visual. The visual is not conceived as ineffable, beyond the reach of language – rather, the visual aspect is understood as a constitutive part of the conceptual capacities that explicate it. Of course, Boehm's concern is not primarily with basic perceptual experiences of coloured cubes and the like, but with complex experiences in the field of visual and plastic arts; it is the independence of the visual as it is encountered here that he attempts to defend. Still, this project can be described as an effort to allow the visual character of a work of art to be a constitutive part of the interpretation that seeks to comprehend it. Boehm distinguishes an appropriation from a more genuine approach to the visual by means of a distinction between a view of meaning as *mirrored* or *grounded* in the image (*Bild*). In such a perspective, even an infinite dialogue would only treat the work of art as a mirror of meaning, a substitute for what could also be said rather than acknowledging that its meaning is grounded in the work itself and therefore only accessible in our encounter with it.

Even if Gadamer sometimes disregards this point and pretends that (an infinite) amount of words could substitute the meaning of the work of art, he also sometimes clearly acknowledges Boehm's point. A good example of this is when he credits Heidegger with the insight that the work of art contains a truth that only presents itself in the encounter with the work itself.[142] He follows Heidegger in thinking about the essence (*Wesen*) of the work temporally. *Wesen* must be understood as a verb (*Zeitwort*), i.e. as pointing to a concrete temporal presence of meaning, rather than to a meaning that could be expressed and understood independently of our encounter with the work itself. As Gadamer points out: 'on the side of the spectator or the recipient the "essence" corresponds to the activity of dwelling [*Verweilen*] at the work of art'.[143] According to this view, the linguistic interpretation of the work of art can never be more than a deictic gesture to the meaning of the work itself. *It is*

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[141] McDowell, J. 2006. Response to Stella Gonzalez Arnal. In *Teorema* XXV, 1: 135.

[142] Gadamer speaks of the work of art, '[…] das seine Wahrheit so in sich birgt, daß dieselbe auf keine andere Weise offenbar ist als im Werk' (Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Die Sprache der Metaphysik [1968]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 3, 233. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)). Günter Figal has developed this idea systematically in his aesthetics, albeit in a way that breaks with the central status of language in philosophical hermeneutics (Figal, G. 2010. *Erscheinungsdinge. Ästhetik als Phänomenologie*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck). Cf. Thaning, M.S. 2011. Rezeption in der Philosophischen Hermeneutik. In *Heideggers 'Ursprung des Kunstwerkes'. Ein kooperativer Kommentar,* ed. T. Keiling and D. Espinet, 266–283. Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann; Thaning, M.S. 2012. Günter Figal: Erscheinungsdinge. In *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 137, 12: 1386–1390.

[143] '[…] dem "Wesen" entspricht hier seitens des Betrachters oder Aufnehmenden das *Verweilen beim Werk*' (Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Die Sprache der Metaphysik [1968]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 3, 233. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck); my translation).

not that the visual work of art contains something ineffable, rather it is that the words the interpreter uses must be viewed as constitutively determined by the visual presence of the work itself. These words and concepts therefore cannot be made intelligible independently of this irreducible presence without reducing it to a substitute for meaning.

I have used Boehm's approach to visual arts as an example in order to suggest that conceptuality and language can allow room to insist on the sensibility that is essential to every work of art. At one point, Boehm claims that Gadamer's concept of linguisticality should be interpreted so as to encompass meaning as it is encountered in the visual and plastic arts.[144] This is a valuable emphasis on the plurality of phenomena that hermeneutics is determined to make sense of. And yet the reason that Gadamer propounds a *hermeneutic* philosophy is that he conceives language as the centre (*Mitte*) of our understanding of all manifestations of meaning. The motivation for this privileging of language is that the very idea of a manifestation of meaning implies normative constraint. Such normativity is only intelligible if our linguistic interpretation can encompass the relevant type of *logos* while at the same time acknowledge its irreducible specificity.

There is therefore a crucial sense in which all other types of *logos* that we might discuss are derivations of the *logos* of language. In order to respect the intrinsic link between meaning and normative constraint, McDowell insists that when we form a demonstrative capacity in response to a specific colour shade, this activity falls within the conceptual sphere. What I want to suggest is that we should transpose this notion of concepts to the interpretation of the visual arts if we want to comprehend our relation to these arts as one of understanding, and that we can indeed do so without losing sight of the irreducible specificity of visual works of art.

9   The Misguided Denunciation of Practical Wisdom

The generalisation of the paradigm of practical wisdom described above does not deny the difference between situation-dependent knowledge and deductive rationality. Mathematical knowledge, for example, can obviously be formulated in universal rules. Nonetheless, an important aim for McDowell is to reject a certain misconception of the ground for the distinction between pure deductive rationality as it is found in mathematics and other forms of rationality. The target of his critique is a certain problematic prejudice that the deductive paradigm of rationality tends to create, and which can seem to undermine our right to assume that the situation-dependent form of rationality is really an exercise of reason at all. In

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[144] Boehm, G. 2008. *Wie Bilder Sinn erzeugen. Die Macht des Zeigens*, 244. Berlin: Berlin University Press.

relation to ethics, this prejudice is expressed in the idea that there must be '[…] a set of rules of conduct, presumably in some such form as this: "In such-and-such conditions, one should do such-and-such."'[145] It is this approach to ethics as a system of moral rules of conduct (*System moralischer Verhaltensregeln*) that both McDowell and Gadamer reject in their interpretation of the Aristotelian model of practical wisdom.[146]

From the point of view of a certain fixation on the deductive paradigm of rationality, the notion of practical wisdom seems to betray the *consistency* that is a requirement in the very idea of rationality.[147] According to this objection, we cannot hold on to the concept of objectivity if we allow a situation-dependent notion of rationality. In other words, practical wisdom cannot avoid making mistakes in its attempts to get things right. To retreat to such a position would compromise the very idea that exercises of practical wisdom are normatively constrained, and thus make unintelligible how it is a form of knowledge at all. Thus the paradigm of *epistēme*, deductive rationality, should not be allowed to undermine the view that practical wisdom is a special kind of knowledge aimed at objectivity, in the minimal sense of 'getting it right'.[148] However, since Gadamer fails to show *why* the deductive paradigm of rationality does not threaten the mode of rationality modelled on *phronēsis,* his position is unstable on this important point.

This is where McDowell's reflections on the tendency to misconceive the paradigm of deductive rationality become relevant. He attacks the problem head-on by using Wittgenstein's reflections on rule-following in *Philosophical Investigations* to reveal that the denunciation of practical wisdom in the name of an insistence on consistency expresses a deeply rooted, problematic prejudice about rationality. Following Wittgenstein, McDowell uses the example of extending a series of numbers. This is a clear case of deductive rationality, in which a rule *can* be formulated and successively applied. McDowell describes the problematic prejudice concerning this example in the following way:

> We tend to picture understanding the instruction "Add 2" – command of the rule for extending the series 2, 4, 6, 8, … – as a psychological mechanism that, aside from lapses of attention and so forth, churns out the appropriate behaviour with the sort of reliability that a physical mechanism, say a piece of clockwork, might have. If someone is extending

[145] McDowell, J. 1998. Some issues in Aristotle's moral psychology. In *Mind, Value and Reality*, 27. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[146] Gadamer, H-.G. 1999. Praktisches Wissen [1930]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 5, 247. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)

[147] McDowell, J. 1998. Virtue and reason. In *Mind, Value and Reality*, 58. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[148] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 319. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 328. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

the series correctly, and one takes his behaviour to be in compliance with the understood instruction, then, according to this picture, one has postulated such a psychological mechanism, underlying his behaviour, by an inference analogous to what whereby one might hypothesize a physical structure underlying the observable motions of some inanimate object.[149]

The problem with this picture of understanding as a psychological mechanism is that it misconstrues the *ground* of the pictured state of understanding. Even if the person asked to perform the application of the rule points to his previous practice of application as evidence of his understanding, he can only make manifest a finite fragment of the path that the rule dictates, not the infinite range of behaviour that the rule prescribes. Illustrating this, Wittgenstein dramatises a future exercise of the rule in which the application diverges from what we could call correct: after extending the series of numbers to 1,000, the person continues: 1,004, 1,008…[150] If we could not convince the person continuing in this way that he was making a mistake, 'that would show that the behaviour hitherto was not guided by the psychological confirmation that we were picturing as guiding it. *The pictured state, then, always transcends the grounds on which it is allegedly postulated.*'[151] Even in the case of universal rules, what constitutes our understanding transcends what we can make manifest. Our extrapolation from the aspects of our practice of rule-following that we can make manifest to our future exercises postulates *a mediating state* that supposedly automatically secures further application, as if some psychological mechanism was activated. Yet when we attempt to identify this state, it eludes us.

Corresponding to the idea of understanding as a psychological mechanism that mechanically grinds out appropriate behaviour is the conception of rules as *rails* or *tracks* that are objectively there to be followed, in the sense that they could be characterised independently of any reference to the pre-understanding of the participants in our practices.[152] Picking up on Wittgenstein's imagery, McDowell describes understanding in this view as the feat of 'having one's mental wheels engaged with an independently traceable rail'.[153] The underlying assumption behind this idea of rules as independently placed tracks is that of an imagined possibility of a *sideways-on contemplation* of the relation between our 'arithmetical

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[149] McDowell, J. 1998. Virtue and reason. In *Mind, Value and Reality*, 58. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[150] Cf. Wittgenstein, L. 1984. *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, §185. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag. As McDowell points out the question does not only concern the constitution of another person's understanding of a rule: '(Imagine that the person who goes on with 1004, 1008, . . . had said, in advance, "I know in my own case that my behaviour will not come adrift")' (McDowell, J. 1998. Virtue and reason. In *Mind, Value and Reality*, 59. Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

[151] McDowell, J. 1998. Virtue and reason. In *Mind, Value and Reality*, 59. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; emphasis added.

[152] McDowell, J. 1998. Non-cognitivism and rule-following. In *Mind, Value and Reality*, 207. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[153] Ibid.: 204.

thought and language and the reality it characterizes'. From this supposed sideways-on perspective, it would be apparent 'that a given move is a correct move at a given point in the practice: that, say, 1002 really does come after 1000 in the series determined by the instruction "Add 2"'.[154] A central motivation for the idea of a sideways-on perspective is our comprehensible rejection of the reduction of mathematical objectivity to a matter of contingency. We want to be able to insist that what it is for the square of 13 to be 169 cannot be reduced to a story about how human beings can be trained to find such calculations compelling. '[I]t is because the square of 13 really *is* 169 that we can be brought to find the calculations compelling'.[155] According to McDowell, this insistence is not in itself a problem. Rather, the problem arises when we are tempted to think that such a remark must necessarily be grounded in a sideways-on perspective beyond our mathematical practices, from where we could, at least in principle, externally validate the independence of mathematical truth.

If we can see through the illusion of such a metaphysical notion of objectivity, understood as a state completely independent of subjectivity, we can still retain the unpretentious notion of objectivity simply conceived as 'getting things right'. In other words, McDowell emphasises that Wittgenstein's point is not sceptical. He does not attempt to induce a sense of constant anxiety that cases of the 1,000, 1,004... type are realised. Our confidence that this will not happen is legitimate; it is a certain metaphysical conception of the *ground* of our confidence that McDowell seeks to question. But what, then, grounds McDowell's minimal notion of objectivity and our confidence that our understanding of basic rules or concepts will not go astray if we cannot make it fully manifest? McDowell prefers to answer with a passage from Stanley Cavell's *Must We Mean What We Say?*:

> We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing insures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books or rules), just as nothing insures that we will make, and understand, the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humour and of significance and of fulfilment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation – all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls "forms of life". Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this. It is a vision that is as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying.[156]

What Cavell, following Wittgenstein, calls 'forms of life' is obviously analogous to what McDowell in *Mind and World*, following Gadamer, terms *tradition*.[157] As we

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[154] Ibid.: 208.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Cavell, S. 1969. The availability of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. In *Must We Mean What We Say? A book of essays*, 52. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Cf. McDowell, J. 1998. Virtue and reason. In *Mind, Value and Reality*, 60. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[157] Wittgenstein also uses the notion of custom (*Gepflogenheit*), e.g. Wittgenstein, L. 1984. *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, §198. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag.

have seen, we should not understand the concept of tradition as part of an attempt to ground meaning. Likewise, forms of life are only accessible from an internal vantage point, and therefore cannot be reconstructed so as to explain the origin or genesis of meaning. The invocation of custom in relation to forms of life is not to be understood as the beginning of a project that seeks to reconstruct how meaning comes to be possible via a social construction. Nor does the idea of a constitutive dependency of meaning on forms of life open the way for a reductionist enterprise that would simply attempt to conceive of it in meaning-free, causal terms. In such an account, the meaning of a concept or a rule could be simply reduced to a causal description of how a string of events ended up producing the behaviour that we, strictly speaking, mistakenly view as the expression of an understanding of meaning. According to this reductionist view of forms of life, we would be mistaken in taking a given behaviour to be *meaningful*.

In order to avoid such a picture, we should rather say that meaning is an intrinsic part of our forms of life. In other words, according to McDowell, Wittgenstein not only warns against a *full-blown Platonism,* which pictures our understanding of a rule as mediated by a psychological mechanism that follows independently traceable, laid-out rails. He also rejects a reductionist or social-constructivist account that simply undermines the phenomenon of meaning itself. He thereby makes room for a moderate form of Platonism, which insists that meaning is not 'constituted in splendid isolation from anything merely human. The demands of reason are essentially such that a human upbringing can open a human being's eyes to them.'[158] This does not entail that we reduce meaning to a human *construction*: the meaning of the rule or the concept is there anyway, 'whether or not one's eyes are opened to it'.[159] In this way, we can come to accept that a state of understanding is dependent upon forms of life. If we hold on to this thought, then it is perfectly reasonable to be confident that a case of the 1,000, 1,004… type is not a real possibility that we could encounter. In short, we must acknowledge that it is due to our involvement in shared forms of life that we can understand the special, compelling force that conceptual norms possess.

As we have seen, McDowell and Gadamer both stress that the situation-specificity of practical wisdom entails that it includes a perceptual capacity that helps to determine which features of a specific situation are of relevance to a given concern. From the perspective of a fixation on the deductive paradigm, this inclusion of perception is problematic insofar as it creates a troubling dilemma. *Either* further reflections upon a case would allow reconciliation with the deductive paradigm, i.e. it would be possible to formulate a rule specifying the conditions under which a concept is correctly applied and thus dispel the essential situation-dependence. *Or,* if this possibility is not available, then the notion of a genuine case

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[158] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 92. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
[159] Ibid.: 91.

of correctly applying the concept must simply be illusory. McDowell seeks to undermine this dilemma by using Wittgenstein's reflections on rule-following to reveal that it is based on an illusion: 'The illusion is the misconception of the deductive paradigm: the idea that deductive explicability characterizes an exercise of reason in which it is, as it were, automatically compelling, without dependence on our partially shared "whirl of organism".'[160] In the case of practical wisdom, the dependence on forms of life (the whirl of organism) is, of course, more obvious. In difficult cases, where we appeal to an appreciation from the other – 'Can't you see it?' – dependency is brought completely out in the open. But if we recognise the dependence on forms of life, even in cases that belong to the deductive paradigm, then we can refrain from denying this when we need to openly appeal to appreciation. In other words, it can be an exercise of rationality that is normatively constrained by reality.

This conception does not downplay attempts to convince others in situations where the deductive paradigm finds no application and there is no articulable rule governing the case. We may give a skilfully presented characterisation or offer general considerations concerning the use of the relevant concept. Even if none of this adds up to a deductive proof, it still counts as reasoning. The role of this type of situation-dependent persuasion is what Gadamer speaks of when he connects *rhetoric* to practical wisdom.[161] Gadamer seeks to defend a notion of rhetoric that cannot be reduced to an instrument for manipulation. On this view, an instrumental notion of rhetoric that merely seeks to persuade the other in order to further a specific end is a derivate of a more primordial conception of rhetoric. In such rhetoric, we attempt to convince the other of something that we think is true but that we cannot deductively prove. Gadamer contrasts this idea of rhetoric with mathematical rationality, where we can give regular proofs.

Similarly, McDowell does not attempt to undermine the analogous distinction between practical wisdom and mathematic rationality (*episteme*); he only points out that the dependency of our attempts at persuasion in cases of practical wisdom is also present in deductive rationality – where we do not rely on persuasion, but on proofs. The rule-following considerations, as McDowell reads them, are not aimed at questioning the rigour of deductive rationality as it is expressed paradigmatically in mathematics, but only target a problematic tendency to misconceive the ground of this rigour. They seek to protect us from falsely eliminating the idea of objectivity within the area of practical wisdom due to being spooked by an illusionary picture of how meaning and understanding are grounded, even in the practice of strictly deductive rationality.

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[160] McDowell, J. 1998. Virtue and reason. In *Mind, Value and Reality*, 63. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[161] Cf. Sect. 3 in Chap. 3 above.

Chapter 6
Hermeneutic Meaning and Apophantic Alienation

The purpose of this chapter is to articulate a hermeneutic notion of meaning that corresponds to the conception of experience and understanding that I have described so far. A central motivation for explicating the world-involving dimension of language through McDowell's reading of Kant and Hegel is that he does not propound an *apophantic* or propositional account of perception. Such an account would be irreconcilable with philosophical hermeneutics, because Gadamer, following Heidegger, views the idea that meaning can be objectified in propositions as a symptom of metaphysical prejudice. Recently, McDowell has explicitly modified his position on this point – he now recommends viewing the content of perception as *conceptual*, but specifically denies that it is *propositional*. In this way, he claims to avoid the Myth of the Given without committing himself to a picture in which our perception is parcelled out, so to speak, in propositional structures. This chapter therefore aims to reconstruct Gadamer's hermeneutic account of meaning in order to show how it aligns with McDowell's revised position.

I begin in Sect. 1 by eliciting the two main aspects of Gadamer's interpretation of Augustine's notion of the inner word. The first stresses the idea of linguisticality, namely that even the inexpressible features of our experience belong to a horizon of meaning constituted by language. The second aspect concerns the finite character of every linguistic act. The Christian notion of incarnation allows Gadamer to insist on an inseparable link between these two aspects in a hermeneutic conception of meaning. Our thinking is always already verbal, but no verbal act is able to fully express its subject matter (*Sache*). In the following sections, I try to explicate this theological model phenomenologically by discussing the phenomenon of assertion as it is conceived in Heidegger and Gadamer's thinking. The inclusion of Heidegger's approach to assertion allows for a more developed understanding of a hermeneutic conception of meaning. Heidegger's analysis of assertion shows that our presentation of meaning always contains an implicit dimension that must be recognised in order not to fall victim to what I term an apophantic alienation (Sects. 2, 3). Against this background, Gadamer's reflections on assertion gain a

profound importance. He shows that the objectification of meaning expressed in the forms of apophantic alienation analysed by Heidegger is not inevitable. Gadamer makes clear that we can accept the idea that all meaning can be presented in assertion without fundamentally distorting effects *if* we emphasise that the assertion does not contain its meaning within itself as an object (Sect. 4). This account embeds the meaning of assertions in practical and discursive horizons, and thereby stresses that we can only understand the universal character of linguistic reason by acknowledging that the content of reason is not an entity whose content – if only in principle – can be explicated. Rather, reason is a virtuality or an infinite horizon that points beyond every linguistic act, but which is nonetheless in play as an implicit whole when we understand a specific assertion. In the last section (Sect. 5), I discuss McDowell's revised position in relation to Gadamer's hermeneutic conception of meaning.

1 The Inner Word and the Model of Incarnation[1]

Gadamer's notion of meaning should be approached by focusing on his idea of a universal dimension of hermeneutics, as developed in his interpretation of Augustine's discussion of the incarnation of God in Christ.[2] Here, the theological problem at stake is the unity of the *verbum dei*, i.e. the unity of God the Father and God the Son. If the incarnation of God in Christ is to retain its role as the word of redemption attributed to it by Christian faith, then this unity between God and Christ is crucial. To attain the conceptual means to elucidate this enigmatic unity, Augustine focuses on the analogy between human cognition, the so-called inner word (*verbum intellectus*), and the divine word.[3] In this, he is guided by the prologue of the Gospel of John, in which the mystery of incarnation is precisely described in terms of the word.

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[1] My reading of this notion builds upon the interpretation presented in Grondin, J. 2000. *Einführung zu Gadamer*, 214ff. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck); Grondin, J. 2001. *Einführung in die philosophische Hermeneutik*, 9ff. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

[2] Cf. Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 418–426. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 422–432. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). Grondin reports that, in a conversation, Gadamer pointed to Augustine's notion of the inner word as the most adequate expression of hermeneutics' claim of universality (cf. Grondin, J. 2001. *Einführung in die philosophische Hermeneutik*, 9. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft). Gadamer confirms the importance of his interpretation of Augustine in Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Europa und die Oikoumene [1993]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 10, 271f. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[3] When Gadamer speaks of 'a word' (*Wort*), he is not referring to the entities that make up our sentences. A word is a linguistic act, like when we ask somebody to 'put in a word' for us. Cf. Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Von der Wahrheit des Wortes [1971]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 8, 37. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

> Exegesis interprets the speaking of the word to be as miraculous as the incarnation of God. In both cases, the act of becoming is not the kind of becoming in which something turns into something else. Neither does it consist in separating one thing from the other (*kat' apokopēn*), nor in lessening the inner word by its emergence into exteriority, nor in becoming something different, so that the inner word is used up.[4]

The consubstantiality (*Wesensgleichheit*) between God and Christ, and between God the Father and his Word, is essential for Christian faith and theology. This relation is radically different from the concept of embodiment (*Einkörperung*) that figures in Platonic or Pythagorean philosophy, or even in Ancient Greek religion as such. This difference pertains to the notion of God:

> Even the appearance of the divine in human form, which makes Greek religion so human, has nothing to do with incarnation. God does not become man [in Platonic and Pythagorean philosophy], but rather shows himself to men in human form while wholly retaining his superhuman divinity.[5]

Similarly, in this form of thought, the notion of soul is assumed to be fundamentally different from the body. It retains its own separate nature throughout all of its embodiments, and its ultimate separation from the body is regarded as a restoration of its true being. These assumptions change with the Christian idea of incarnation, which Gadamer seeks to exploit in order to conceive the relation between thinking and language in a proper manner. The equivalent to a Platonic notion of God or soul, conceived as fundamentally different from the body, is a Platonic notion of language as *signs*. According to the conception criticised by Gadamer, signs are pure instruments that express thoughts that have, as it were, a life of their own, independent of language. This problematic idea is described in the following way:

> This is to say that thought is so independent of the being of words – which thought takes as mere signs through which what is referred to, the idea, the thing, is brought into view – that the word is reduced to a wholly secondary relation to the thing (*Sache*). It is a mere instrument of communication, the bringing forth (*ekpherein*) and uttering (*logos prophorikos*) of what is meant in the medium of the voice.[6]

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[4] 'Die Exegese interpretiert das Lautwerden des Wortes ebenso als Wunder wie das Fleischwerden Gottes. Das Werden, um das es sich in Beidem handelt, ist kein Werden, in dem aus etwas etwas anderes wird. Weder handelt es sich um eine Abscheidung des einen vom anderen (kat' apokopēn), noch um eine Minderung des inneren Wortes durch sein Hervorgehen in die Äußerlichkeit, noch überhaupt um ein Anderswerden, so daß das innere Wort verbraucht würde' (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 419. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 424. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[5] 'Auch die Erscheinung des Göttlichen in menschlicher Gestalt, die die griechische Religion so menschlich macht, hat nichts mit Inkarnation zu tun. Gott wird da nicht Mensch, sondern zeigt sich den Menschen in menschlicher Gestalt, indem er zugleich seine übermenschliche Gestalt ganz und gar behält' (ibid.: 418/422).

[6] 'Es soll damit gesagt sein: das Denken enthebt sich so sehr des Eigenseins der Wörter, nimmt sie als bloße Zeichen, durch die das Bezeichnete, der Gedanke, die Sache in den Blick gerückt wird, daß das Wort in ein völlig sekundäres Verhältnis zur Sache gerät. Es ist bloßes Werkzeug der Mitteilung, als das Heraustragen (ekpherein) und Vortragen (logos prophorikos) des Gemeinten im Medium der Stimme' (ibid.: 414/418).

In an interpretation of *Kratylos*, Gadamer attributes this conception to Plato and terms it the beginning of a dominant Western tradition of the forgetting of language (*Sprachvergessenheit*).[7] It is this tradition that Gadamer criticises when he claims that there is an intrinsic link between understanding and verbal articulation.[8] In this way, his reading of Plato is ambiguous. On the one hand, he uses the Socratic paradigm of giving and offering an account in order to question the prevalent picture of Plato as a dualistic and metaphysical philosopher.[9] On the other hand, he sees in *Kratylos* a residual element of such a dogmatic dualism, which threatens the intrinsic link between understanding and verbal expression. According to Gadamer, the point of this dialogue is that the verbal expression (*das Wort*) is reduced to a 'sign' that represents a delimited and previously comprehended meaning. This line of thought forms the foundation of the dominant conception of language in the Western tradition, and Gadamer traces it up to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment traditions. Plato's *Sprachvergessenheit* is thus inherited in the ideal of a language that is able to represent the totality of the knowable 'by a system of artificial, unambiguously defined symbols'.[10] Gadamer mentions G.W. Leibniz's conception of a universal language of signs (*characteristic universalis*) as a significant expression of the Platonic ideal of language. Philosophical hermeneutics not only denies that such an ideal could be realised – indeed, Gadamer implies that Leibniz would accept this objection. Rather, Gadamer suggests that the very ideal itself expresses a misguided view of the relation between understanding and language. According to this line of objection, thought does not begin in a space devoid of verbal articulation, before 'subsequently becoming an object of reflection by being named, by being subsumed under the universality of the word'.[11]

By interpreting the incarnation of Christ in a way that emphasises his consubstantiality with God, Christian theology opens up a different way of thinking about the relation between thought and language. Seen from such a perspective, it must not only be stressed that the word becomes flesh and thus emerges into

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[7] Many commentators have disputed Gadamer's reading (e.g. Grondin, J. 2000. *Einführung zu Gadamer*, 207ff. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck); Figal, G. 2002. The Doing of the Thing Itself: Gadamer's Hermeneutic Ontology of Language. In *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. by R.J. Dostal, 117f. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Di Cesare, D. 2000. Zwischen Onoma und Logos, Platon, Gadamer und die dialektische Bewegung der Sprache. In *Hermeneutische Wege. Hans-Georg Gadamer zum Hundertsten*, ed. by G. Figal et al., 112. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck); Barbaric, D. 2002. Spiel der Sprache. Zu Platons Dialog Kratylos. In *Internationales Jahrbuch für Hermeneutik* 1, ed. by G. Figal, 50f. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)). It is beyond the scope of this investigation to assess Gadamer's reading. The following account does not depend on whether or not Gadamer is right concerning *Kratylos*, but only on the intelligibility of Gadamer's idea of *Sprachvergessenheit* as a systematic notion.

[8] Cf. Chap. 3.

[9] Cf. Sect. 3 in Chap. 3.

[10] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 414. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 418. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[11] Ibid.: 417/421.

external being; it is equally important to point out, against the tradition of *Sprachvergessenheit*, 'that that which emerges and externalizes itself in utterance is always already a word'.[12] *The inner word – the process of cognition – must be characterised in terms of* '*verbum*', *not only in terms of* '*logos*'. Therefore, a reflection on the relation between language and thought inspired by the Christian idea of incarnation holds that *the word is not formed only after the act of knowledge, but rather belongs to the act itself.* Words are not introduced in thought via a reflective act in which we apply them to our thoughts. In such a picture, we would be interpreters of our own mind. Language would be reduced to an instrument for making sense of thoughts that are already in place independently. According to Gadamer, however, this picture is wrong:

> A person who thinks something – i.e., says it to himself – means by it the thing that he thinks. His mind is not directed back towards his own thinking when he forms the word. The word is, of course, the product of the work of his mind. It forms the word in itself by thinking the thought through. But unlike other products it remains entirely within the mental sphere. This gives the impression that what is involved is a relationship to itself and that speaking to oneself is a reflexive act [...] In fact there is no reflection when the word is formed, for the word is not expressing the mind but the thing intended.[13]

We cannot make sense of a space of thinking that is devoid of words. In order to express the intimate belongingness of word and subject matter, Gadamer makes use of an analogy, saying that in this respect the word resembles light. Just as light makes colours visible, so does the word express the nature of the thing (*Sache*) – it does not seek to be anything in itself. Its being consists in its revealing (*Offenbarmachen*). The same is the case in the Augustinian notion of incarnation:

> Here too the important thing is not the earthly appearance of the Redeemer as such, but rather his complete divinity, his consubstantiality with God. To grasp the independent personal existence of Christ within this sameness of being is the task of theology. Here a human analogue – the mental word, the *verbum intellectus* – is helpful. This is more than a mere metaphor, for the human relationship between thought and speech corresponds [...] to the divine relationship of the Trinity. *The inner mental word is just as consubstantial with thought as is God the Son with God the Father.*[14]

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[12] Ibid.: 419/424.

[13] 'Wer etwas denkt, d.h, sich sagt, meint damit das, was er denkt, die Sache. Er ist also [nicht] auf sein eigenes Denken zurückgerichtet, wenn er das Wort bildet. Das Wort ist wohl der Produkt der Arbeit seines Geistes. Er bildet es in sich fort, sofern er den Gedanken aus und zu Ende denkt. Im Unterschied zu sonstigen Produkten verbleibt es aber ganz im Geistigen. So entsteht der Anschein, als handelte es sich um ein Verhalten zu sich selbst und als wäre das Sich-Sagen eine Reflexion [...] In Wahrheit ist bei der Bildung des Wortes keine Reflexion tätig. Denn das Wort drückt gar nicht den Geist, sondern die gemeinte Sache aus' (ibid.: 425/430; the word 'nicht' is conjectured).

[14] 'Auch hier kommt es nicht auf die irdische Erscheinung des Erlösers als solche an, sondern vielmehr auf seine vollständige Göttlichkeit, seine Wesensgleichheit mit Gott. In dieser Wesensgleichheit dennoch die selbstständige personale Existenz zu denken, ist die theologische Aufgabe. Hierzu wird das menschliche Verhältnis aufgeboten, das am Wort des Geistes, dem verbum intellectus, sichtbar wird. Es handelt sich um mehr als ein bloßes Bild, denn das menschliche Verhältnis von Denken und Sprechen entspricht [...] dem göttlichen Verhältnis der Trinität. *Das innere Wort des Geistes ist mit dem Denken genauso wesensgleich, wie Gottessohn mit Gottvater*' (ibid.: 420/425; emphasis added).

It is not because we always already *interpret* our own thinking in linguistic terms that we cannot make sense of a space of thinking devoid of words. Rather, our explicit assertions *express* an intrinsic structure in our thought, so that in this sense we may say that our thinking 'strives' to be explicitly linguistically expressed. When we think, we seek and find the right word – and in this way, the thing comes into language.

This intrinsic link between thought and language motivates Gadamer's rejection of the so-called 'false romanticism of immediacy' (*falsche Romantisierung der Unmittelbarkeit*).[15] Gadamer links the discussion of this romanticism to the common experience of being unable to express what we feel or think – for example, when we are confronted with a work of art, when we have undergone excessive trauma or when we have other groundbreaking experiences. However, the concern that Gadamer discusses relates to all forms of experience that would fit into a phenomenology of the inadequacy of linguistic expression. The question is how we are to interpret such experiences. When we are faced with an overwhelming presence (*überwältigender Präsenz*), the task of putting what is experienced into words can often seem hopeless. We are therefore tempted to say that our possibilities of understanding are far more individual than our powers of expression. The latter are regulated – often even manipulated – due to the socially motivated tendency toward uniformity with which language forces understanding into particular schematic forms. In such an interpretation of the phenomenology of linguistic inadequacy, language constitutes a sort of confinement of schematisations and predictions (*Vorgreiflichkeiten*) from which our desire for understanding seeks to free us. The base assumption is of a certain critical superiority of understanding over language.

If Gadamer's thesis concerning the linguisticality of understanding is not to picture language as a prison that confines us within uniform schematisations, then we must, as we have so far in this investigation, see language as the language of reason (*Sprache der Vernunft*) itself.[16] This will allow us to focus on language as a medium of the process of understanding, rather than a positive, given entity determined by conventions of opinion. Faced with the fact that words often fail to express an experience, we must still insist that this experience remains within the space of possible understanding and articulation. And should we finally come to understand something that was initially completely alien to us, we will have stretched and perhaps even broken the conventions of opinion, which Gadamer also calls the spell of the verbal (*Bann des Sprachlichen*). However, this critical movement does not take us outside the reach of verbal conventions themselves. The hermeneutical experience is the corrective (*Korrektiv*) by means of which our

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[15] The expression 'romanticism of immediacy' is used specifically about the aesthetics of genius (*Genieästhetik*), but I think this is only one form of the romanticism that Gadamer seeks to reject (ibid.: 401/404).

[16] Ibid.: 402/405.

reasoning breaks the spell of the verbal, but it is itself constituted by language.[17] In other words, when words fail us, it is still a mode of linguisticality (*Sprachlichkeit*). This experience signals a break with the spell of the verbal and thus presents the possibility of understanding anew – in other words, rather than an end point, it marks the beginning of a new search.[18]

Whereas the incarnation of the divine word fully expresses God's essence, there is a fundamental asymmetry in the human word. The human word is essentially incomplete (*wesensmäßig unvollkommen*). It is not able to fully manifest the subject matter, and hence we must make use of a plurality of words. This deficiency is not due to our words being an imperfect representation of that at which our mind is directed. This would open up a Platonic space for pre-linguistic thought, which is precisely the idea that the model of incarnation sets out to avoid. Instead, the word is the perfect mirror of our thoughts, and the lack of the human word is a mark of our finitude: 'Rather, the imperfection of the human mind consists in it never being completely present to itself but in being dispersed into thinking this or that.'[19] The word of human thought is directed at the subject matter, but it can never fully express it. Therefore, in our attempts to fully express the inner word, our thinking continually moves on to new conceptions. It cannot be one word; it must be many. There is thus a positive side to this incapacity for completeness: it reveals the infinity of our mind, which again and again surpasses itself because it does not know what it knows.

In his discussion of the inner word, Gadamer introduces the concept of finitude in a somewhat problematic manner, which he explicates through the contrast between divine and human word. Gadamer points out that whereas the incarnation of the divine word fully expresses God's essence, there is a fundamental asymmetry in the human word. The human word is essentially incomplete and is therefore unable to fully express the subject matter. Hence it is dependent on a plurality of words, so even if the word of human thought is directed at the subject matter, it can never fully express it. Our thinking therefore continually moves on to new conceptions in our attempt to fully express the inner word.

What is essentially at stake here is whether or not the finitude of human thought can only be understood when it is contrasted with the idea of an infinite mind. In

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[17] Ibid.: 403/406. Some forms of verbal interpretation, however, are constitutively tied to perceptual experience. Cf. Sect. 8 in Chap. 5 above.

[18] 'Indessen, wenn es einem die Sprache verschlägt, so heißt das, daß man so viel sagen möchte, daß man nicht weiß, wo beginnen. Das Versagen der Sprache bezeugt ihr Vermögen, für *alles* Ausdruck zu suchen – und so ist es ja selbst geradezu eine Redensart, daß es einem die Sprache verschlägt – und eine solche, mit der man seine Rede nicht beendet, sondern beginnt' (Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Sprache und Verstehen [1970]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 185. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[19] 'Vielmehr ist es die Unvollkommenheit des Menschlichen Geistes, daß er nie die vollständige Selbstgegenwart besitzt, sondern ins Meinen von Diesem oder Jenem zerstreut ist' (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 424. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 429. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

particular, the question is whether we can make sense of the idea that a linguistic act can never fully express its subject matter without presupposing an idea of a divine mind being able to bring the subject matter to its full expression. We should avoid this contrast between the human and the divine in order to make sense of the essential finitude of the human condition, because it will force us to conceive of human understanding as essentially expressing a lack.[20] In this case, the modal category of actuality would gain priority. If we make sense of the finitude of human understanding as privative, we explicitly or implicitly assume an ideal of pure actuality (*actus purus*) in which the subject matter is fully present for an infinite mind. The tendency to conceive human understanding in this privative way is clearly expressed in the following passage:

> Whereas God completely expresses his nature and substance in the Word in pure immediacy, every thought that we think (and therefore every word in which the thought expresses itself) is a mere accident of the mind [*Akzidens des Geistes*]. The word of human thought is directed toward the thing, but it cannot contain it as a whole within itself.[21]

More generally, it is clear that Gadamer wishes to avoid such a picture of the finitude of human understanding as privative, as an incomplete mode of being that could in principle be overcome. In one programmatic passage, he denies the very idea of an infinite mind for which the subject appears in the light of eternity.[22] We cannot make sense of an (ideal) understanding in which the subject matter is present in pure actuality. In the light of this, it seems that the problematic picture of the finitude of human understanding as a derivate is an effect of the particular theological model that Gadamer uses in the chapter on the inner word to explicate his understanding of the relation between thought and language. On closer inspection, we can see that Gadamer is aware of this potential problem. Toward the end of the chapter, he points to another tendency that is found in modern Protestant theology, and which would be more congenial to a hermeneutic understanding of finitude. In such theological reflections, it is emphasised that even in the word of God there is an essential multiplicity or finitude:

> It is true that the divine Word is one unique word that came into the world in the form of the Redeemer; but insofar as it remains an event [. . .] there is an essential connection between the unity of the divine Word and its appearance in the church. The proclamation of salvation, the content of the Christian gospel, is itself an event that takes place in sacrament and preaching, and yet it expresses only what took place in Christ's redemptive act. Hence

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[20] Grondin seems willing to embrace this consequence (cf. Grondin, J. 2000. *Einführung zu Gadamer*, 214. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[21] 'Während Gott im Wort seine Natur und Substanz in reiner Aktualität volkommen ausspricht, ist jeder, Gedanke, den wir denken, und damit auch jedes Wort, in dem dieses Denken sich vollendet, ein bloßes Akzidens des Geistes. Das Wort des Menschlichen Denkens zielt zwar auf die Sache, aber sie kann sie nicht als ein Ganzes in sich enthalten' (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 424. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 429. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[22] Ibid.: 468/476.

it is one word that is proclaimed ever anew in preaching. Its character as gospel [*Botschaft*], then, already points to the multiplicity of its proclamation.[23]

If even the divine word is inconceivable without multiplicity or finitude, then it is not, as Gadamer seems to assume at certain points, due to a lack in human nature that this element is introduced in thought. Rather, the finitude of our understanding is a 'positive' determination of human being or marks the distinction (*Auszeichnung*) of man.[24] We can emphasise this if we follow the line of thought expressed in the quoted passage above and thus point to an aspect of 'finitude' in the divine word. Our expression of a subject matter in thought or discourse always points to a multiplicity of meaningful aspects that is not immediately present in the specific expression itself.

2   The Apophantic Alienation of Meaning

Gadamer himself emphasised the importance of this aspect of Augustine's doctrine of the inner word by claiming that it is in fact an expression of hermeneutics' claim to universality. He even defines hermeneutics according the principle that we are never quite able to say what we intend.[25] Language is never fully able to express all that there is to be said about a subject, and this constitutes an important counter-weight to Gadamer's claim that language forestalls (*überholt*) any objection (*Einrede*) against its jurisdiction.[26] Gadamer's emphasis on the inner word does not call into question the universal nature of linguisticality as a medium of understanding. On the contrary, the aim is to emphasise both the intrinsic link between

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[23] 'Das göttliche Wort ist zwar wirklich nur ein einziges Wort, das in der Gestalt des Erlösers in die Welt gekommen ist, aber sofern es doch Geschehen bleibt [. . .] so besteht damit eine wesenhafte Beziehung zwischen der Einheit des göttlichen Wortes und seiner Erscheinung in der Kirche. Die Verkündigung des Heils, der Inhalt der christlichen Botschaft, ist selbst ein eigenes Geschehen in Sakrament und Predigt und bringt doch nur das zur Aussage, was in der Erlösungstat Christi geschehen ist. Insofern ist es ein einziges Wort, von dem doch immer wieder in der Predigt gekündet wird. Offenbar liegt in seinem Charakter als Botschaft bereits der Verweis auf die Vielfalt seiner Verkündigung' (ibid.: 426/431).

[24] Like Heidegger, Gadamer seeks to conceive the finitude of man not as a lack, but as a distinction. Cf. Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Existentialismus und Existenzphilosophie [1981]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 3, 183. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[25] 'Oberster Grundsatz der philosophischen Hermeneutik ist, wie ich sie mir denke (und deshalb ist sie eine hermeneutische Philosophie), daß wir nie das ganz sagen können, was wir sagen möchten' (Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Europa und die Oikoumene [1993]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 10, 274. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)). In the same text, he 'applauds' Grondin's interpretation of *Wahrheit und Methode*, which stresses the paradigmatic importance of the chapter on the inner word (ibid.: 271f; cf. Grondin, J. 2000. *Einführung zu Gadamer*, 205. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[26] Gadamer, H-.G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 402. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 405. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck); cf. Grondin, J. 2000. *Einführung zu Gadamer*, 216. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

thinking and language *and* the inability of every specific linguistic act to fully express its subject matter. The two aspects are intrinsically linked in the reflections on the inner word in Trinitarian theology.[27]

However, if we are to grasp the hermeneutic concept of meaning, then the interpretation of the inner word can only serve as guiding principle in our investigation. I believe it is telling that Gadamer admits that it seems as if we explain the unintelligible with the unintelligible when we use the relation between God and Christ to shed light on the relation between language and thought.[28] We therefore need a more *phenomenological* model than that of Augustinian theology to express the intrinsic connection between the universality of the medium of linguisticality and the finite character of every particular linguistic act.

The following sections develop the idea behind the notion of the inner word by focusing on Heidegger and Gadamer's interpretation of the phenomenon of assertion (*Aussage*), which enables the notion of the inner word to be expressed within a non-metaphysical, phenomenological framework. At the same time, developing the hermeneutic conception of meaning through a discussion of the status of the assertion within Heidegger and Gadamer's thinking allows for better understanding of the significance of McDowell's recent non-propositionalist picture of perceptual experience.

Let me begin by presenting Heidegger's view of assertion in *Being and Time*. In chapter five, the assertion is discussed in relation to Heidegger's account of understanding (*Verstehen*), in which it is named as one of the equiprimordial, existential ways of disclosing *Dasein*.[29] More specifically, Heidegger treats the phenomenon of assertion in relation to his investigation into the structure of something-as-something (*Etwas-als-Etwas*), which he claims is a constitutive structure of our understanding. In order to grasp Heidegger's interpretation of assertion, we must therefore grasp the fundamental nature of the *as-structure*. In relation to perception, he writes:

> In dealing with what is environmentally ready-to-hand by interpreting it circumspectively, we "see" it *as* a table, a door, a carriage or a bridge; but what we have thus interpreted [*Ausgelegte*] need not necessarily be also taken apart [*auseinander zu legen*] by making an

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[27] Grondin, J. 2000. *Einführung zu Gadamer*, 215. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[28] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 420. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 425. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). Even though Grondin uses the notion of the inner word as a guideline for his interpretation of philosophical hermeneutics, he admits that it seems 'old fashioned' and 'metaphysical' to speak of an inner word behind language (Grondin, J. 2001. *Einführung in die philosophische Hermeneutik*, 10. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft). Barbaric also speaks of Gadamer's reading of Augustine as clumsy (*schwerfällig*) or cumbersome (Barbaric, D. 2007. Die Grenze zum Unsagbaren. Sprache als Horizont einer hermeneutischen Ontologie. In *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Wahrheit und Methode*, ed. G. Figal, 216. Berlin: Akademie Verlag).

[29] Heidegger, M. 1997. *Being and Time*, translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson 171f. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers; Heidegger, M. 1993. *Sein und Zeit*, 133. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.

assertion which definitively characterizes it. Any mere pre-predicative seeing of the ready-to-hand is, in itself, something which already understands and interprets.[30]

In this passage, Heidegger wants to emphasise that seeing (and more generally, perception as such) has the structure of something-as-something, which we also find in judgements and assertions.

> In such an assertion, the "as" does not turn up for the first time; it just gets expressed for the first time, and this is possible only in that it lies before us as something expressible. The fact that when we look at something, the explicitness of assertion can be absent, does not justify our denying that there is any Articulative interpretation in such mere seeing, and hence that there is any as-structure in it.[31]

According to Heidegger, we grasp something-as-something even in perceptual experience. He describes the structure of such experience as the interplay between understanding (*Verstehen*) and interpretation (*Auslegung*). In his analysis of our practical comportment, Heidegger describes understanding as the inexplicit grasp of the significant aspects of a situation, structured in an internally coherent and purposeful whole. He emphasises that understanding, as it expresses itself in our practical comportment, is a knowing-how rather than an intellectual, detached form of reflection. Interpretation is introduced as the development of understanding, and can be conceived as the articulated focus on certain salient significances that are relevant for a practical purpose. For example, the understanding of a tennis player is expressed in the different aspects of her practice of playing tennis – how she serves, approaches the net and plays drop shots – but also in how she reacts to the decisions of the umpire or to the behaviour of her opponent. All of these different aspects of her understanding are more or less articulated interpretively, so as to accommodate relevant and particular significances. For instance, when preparing to serve, the player might grasp (and in this way, articulate) one tennis ball as being harder than another and thus better suited to a serve. It is appropriate to describe the relation between understanding and interpretation as 'interplay', because it is a reciprocal and dynamic relation. The overall understanding of a situation or a practice not only necessitates some level of articulation, but the specific articulation also in turn develops the overall understanding.

Since understanding and interpretation are not related to two different forms of intelligibility, but express the dynamic of one single structure, Heidegger can claim that with interpretation, 'the understanding appropriates understandingly that which is understood by it. In interpretation, understanding does not become something

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[30] 'Der umsichtig-auslegende Umgang mit dem umweltlich Zuhandenen, der dieses *als* Tisch, Tür, Wagen, Brücke ‚sieht', braucht das umsichtig Ausgelegte nicht notwendig in einer bestimmenden *Aussage* auseinander zu legen. Alles vorprädikative schlichte sehen des Zuhandenen ist an ihm selbst schon verstehend-auslegend' (ibid.: 189/149).

[31] 'In dieser [Aussage] taucht das "Als" nicht zuerst auf, sondern wird nur erst ausgesprochen, was allein so möglich ist, daß es als Aussprechbares vorliegt. Daß im schlichten Hinsehen die Ausdrücklichkeit eines Aussagens fehlen kann, berechtigt nicht dazu, diesem schlichten Sehen jede artikulierende Auslegung, mithin die Als-Struktur abzusprechen' (ibid.: 190/149).

different. It becomes itself.'[32] This intrinsic connection between understanding and interpretation thus emphasises that the structure of something-as-something belongs to understanding and *not* only to interpretation.[33] In fact, Heidegger specifically says: 'If the "as" is ontically unexpressed, this must not seduce us into overlooking it as a constitutive state for understanding, existential and a priori.'[34] Heidegger is thus unequivocal that understanding, both as unreflective action and as 'mere seeing', is structured by something-as-something even when this structure is not explicitly articulated or perceptually manifest.

William Blattner claims that the articulation of understanding that Heidegger terms 'interpretation' is derivative. He writes that 'interpretation emerges when Dasein's dealings are disturbed, when Dasein confronts something it has not mastered already'.[35] In order to underpin this idea, Blattner highlights a passage that speaks of interpretation as being of 'what is understood, but still veiled (*Eingehüllten*)'.[36] Here, 'veiled' does not mean 'opaque, resistant or problematic', as Blattner presupposes, which would support his idea that interpretation sets in when understanding is disturbed. Rather, Heidegger merely wants to say that interpretation explicates what is already *implicit* in the totality already understood by *Dasein*. In other words, 'veiled' just means 'implicit' and not necessarily 'problematic', as Blattner has it. Thus, there is no need to assume that there must be a 'disturbance' that gives rise to interpretation. Rather, we should notice that interpretation is described as the development (*Ausbildung*) of understanding, or simply as understanding, only in its developed form.[37] Accordingly, Heidegger also speaks of an 'interpretation which understands' (*verstehenden Auslegung*).[38] Thus, there is not the sharp contrast that Blattner seeks to draw.

Rather, the point is that when we are absorbed in practical activity, we are not only dealing non-thematically with equipment, but also grasping some aspects or properties so that they come to figure in an explicit as-structure. For example, we might grasp one

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[32] 'In ihr [Auslegung] eignet sich das Verstehen sein verstandenes verstehend zu. In der Auslegung wird das Verstehen nicht etwas anderes, sondern es selbst' (ibid.: 188/148).

[33] *Pace* Blattner, W. 2007. Ontology, the *a priori*, and the primacy of practice: An aporia in Heidegger's early philosophy. In *Transcendental Heidegger*, ed. S. Crowell et al. 17. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

[34] 'Die ontische Unausgesprochenheit des "als" darf nicht dazu verführen, es als apriorische existenziale Verfassung des Verstehens zu übersehen' (Heidegger, M. 1997. *Being and Time*, translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, 190. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers; Heidegger, M. 1993. *Sein und Zeit*, 149. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag).

[35] Blattner, W. 2007. Ontology, the *a priori*, and the primacy of practice: An aporia in Heidegger's early philosophy. In *Transcendental Heidegger*, ed. S. Crowell et al. 15. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

[36] 'Die Zueignung des Verstandenen, aber noch Eingehüllten vollzieht die Enthüllung immer unter der Führung einer Hinsicht, die das fixiert, im Hinblick worauf das Verstandene ausgelegt werden soll' (Heidegger, M. 1997. *Being and Time*, translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, 191. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers; Heidegger, M. 1993. *Sein und Zeit*, 150. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag).

[37] Ibid: 188/148.

[38] Ibid.: 201/158.

tennis ball as being harder than another, and thus better suited to a serve, without breaking our absorbed, unreflective involvement in the activity of playing tennis. Hence, Heidegger says that all preparation, arranging, repairing, improving and supplementation involve interpretation, and not all of these activities need to arise from a disturbance of the absorbed coping. So rather than speaking of a necessary *transition* from a primordial level of understanding to a derivative level of interpretation – via a disturbance – we should describe the relation as an equiprimordial *interplay*.

It is important that the interplay of understanding and interpretation is not simply or even primarily an expression of the intelligibility of our practical, unreflective comportment. Heidegger emphasises this by using the example of text interpretation.[39] When we attempt to comprehend a text that is foreign to us, we consciously and reflectively articulate its different aspects in relation to an overall pre-understanding of the text's meaning.[40] Heidegger thus wants to claim that the structure of something-assomething is present in all ways of relating to the world – from unreflective action to text interpretation. Furthermore, he wants to describe the as-structure on all 'levels' as the interplay between understanding and interpretation. It is here that unreflective practical comportment acts as an important example of how an implicit (pre-)understanding of a whole is continuously articulated in the light of relevant differences in significance. Even if Heidegger attempts to give a proper phenomenological description of our unreflective actions and coping skills, and thereby avoids intellectualising this area of our life, he does not claim that the intelligibility of these actions is the primary mode of intelligibility in human life or that any form of reflection is derivative in relation to this level. As he puts it rather polemically in the 1929–1930 lecture series *The fundamental concepts of metaphysics*:

> [...] I attempted in *Being and Time* to provide a preliminary characterization of the *phenomenon of world* by interpreting *the way in which we at first and for the most part move about in our everyday world*. There I took my departure from what lies to hand in the everyday realm, from those things that we use and pursue, indeed in such a way that we do not really know of the peculiar character proper to such activity at all, and when we try to describe it we immediately misinterpret it by applying concepts and questions that have their source elsewhere [...] In and through this initial characterization of the phenomenon of world the task is to press on and point out the phenomenon of world as a problem. It never occurred to me, however, to try and claim or prove with this interpretation that the essence of man consists in the fact that he knows how to handle knives and forks or use the tram.[41]

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[39] Ibid.: 193ff./152f.

[40] This is the interplay Heidegger describes with the concept of the hermeneutical circle.

[41] '[I]n "Sein und Zeit" [versuchte ich] eine erste Kennzeichnung des *Weltphänomens* durch eine Interpretation der Art, *wie wir uns zunächst und zumeist alltäglich in unserer Welt bewegen*. Hierbei ging ich aus von dem, was uns alltäglich zuhanden ist, was wir gebrauchen und betreiben, und zwar so, daß wir von der Eigentümlichkeit dieses gebärens gar nich wissen und es, wenn wir es beschreiben sollen, alsbald mit Begriffen und Fragen mißdeuten, die anderswoher stammen [...] Von dieser ersten Kennzeichnung des Weltphänomens und durch sie hindurch gilt es vorzudringen zur Aufweisung des Weltphänomens als Problem. Es ist mir aber nie eingefallen, durch diese Interpretation behaupten und beweisen zu wollen, das Wesen des Menschen bestehe darin, das er mit Löffel und Gabel hantiert und auf der Straßenbahn fährt' (Heidegger, M. 1995. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World – finitude – solitude*, 177. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Heidegger, M. 2004. *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt – Endlichkeit – Einsamkeit*, 262f. Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann).

In *The fundamental concepts of metaphysics*, Heidegger also discusses the as-structure and puts forward a further motivation for his claim that this structure is fundamental to our being-in-the-world. In line with the description in *Being and Time*, Heidegger claims that the as-structure is an essential determination of the structure of world (*Wesensbestimmung der Weltstruktur*),[42] but he also goes on to argue that assertion would not be possible if it could not arise out of a prior experience of something-as-something.[43] On the one hand, Heidegger stresses that what is articulated in the assertion must already be in view (*im Blik sein*) as a unity. Using the example of a blackboard, Heidegger writes: 'I must already have had the blackboard in view *as* something *unitary* in order to take apart in a judgement what has been apprehended.'[44] In order to judge that there is a blackboard in the lecture hall, it must be in view and be grasped *as a unity*. Heidegger's reason for insisting that there is already unity in experience is that we do not add in thought (*hinzudenken*) the property 'black' to the board: 'The board is initially taken in this unity, and on the basis of and with respect to this unity it is then taken apart – yet in such a way that the unity not only remains, but precisely *makes itself known*.'[45] On the other hand, Heidegger insists – as the quote shows – that the unity provided by the as-structure is in itself a unity that can be announced through articulation.

   With this description, Heidegger has two aims: he seeks to avoid a picture of the relation between judgement and experience as if it were a synthesis of disparate parts, while at the same time insisting that the primordial unity in experience must be a unity to which we can reflectively relate[46] and announce in the judgement – and therefore it must always already be accesible to articulation in a judgement in a way that is not necessarily distortive.

   This reading runs counter to a foundationalist reading of Heidegger, which claims that the understanding expressed in unreflective action cannot be articulated in assertions that have a propositional structure, at least not without fundamentally distortive effects.[47] This reading claims to find support in Heidegger's description

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[42] Ibid.: 311/450.

[43] Ibid.: 301/436.

[44] 'Die Schwarze Tafel muß ich schon *als* etwas *Einheitliches* in Blick gehabt haben, um das Vernommene im Urteil auseinanderzulegen' (ibid.: 315/456).

[45] 'Zuerst ist sie in dieser Einheit genommen und wird auf dem Grunde und im Hinblick auf diese Einheit [in der Aussage] auseinandergenommen – aber so, daß die Einheit nicht nur bleibt, sondern sich gerade *bekundet*' (ibid.: 318/461).

[46] Heidegger begins his treatment of the as-structure in *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik* by saying that the idea of the as-structure as a fundamental structure of our being in the world expresses the idea of a qualitative difference between the behaviour (*Benehmen*) of animals and the conduct (*Verhalten*) of humans (ibid.: 274/396).

[47] Dreyfus, H.L. 1991. *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Sein und Zeit Division 1*. Cambridge: MIT Press; Dreyfus, H.L. 2005. Overcoming the Myth of the Mental. In *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 79, 2: 47–65; Carman, T. 2003. *Heidegger's Analytic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

of the assertion as a 'derivative mode of interpretation' and his corresponding claim that the truth of an assertion is a derivative form of truth. More precisely, Heidegger's description of the assertion as an 'extreme derivate' is interpreted as implying a fundamental distinction between assetoric and pre-assetoric understanding and communication. Taylor Carman, for example, has stressed that interpretation is not only a part of understanding, but also 'equiprimordially' (*gleichursprünglich*) constituted by what Heidegger calls discourse (*Rede*). Following this connection between discourse as the 'expressive-communicative' dimension of practice and interpretation, Carman argues that the latter is not only expressed in our thoughts and experiences, but also in our overtly 'demonstrative practices'. He writes:

> To make an understanding explicit, to show the *how* known in know-how, is [...] to do something. [...] When I shrug my shoulders or wrinkle my nose, I make my attitude manifest and intelligible to anyone who sees my reaction, provided of course that we share the same general background understanding of the situation to begin with. Bodily postures and facial expressions are primitive instances of the elaboration and appropriation of understanding in overt demonstrative form, for they point up something understood *as* so understood.[48]

Carman's idea that bodily postures and facial expressions can be understood as the communicative and expressive aspect of what Heidegger calls interpretation seems a reasonable and fruitful reading. Heidegger himself does not emphasise this aspect of 'practical interpretive meaning', but it is in line with his overall approach. The problem is that this idea is coupled with the assumption that Heidegger believes that all forms of verbal-conceptual articulation, such as those in judgements and assertions, are distortive of practical interpretive meanings.[49] This reading overlooks the fact that Heidegger, at various points in *Being and Time*, distinguishes two forms of assertion – or more precisely, two ways in which meaning can be presented and communicated by being articulated in the propositional structure of an assertion. Following Heidegger's distinction between a hermeneutical and an apophantic as-structure, one may speak of a distinction between a hermeneutical and an apophantic perspective on the meaning of the assertion. *Thus, contrary to the foundationalist reading, the decisive distinction is not between pre-assetoric practice and the propositional structure of the assertion that allegedly betrays this practice, but is internal to the realm of assertion.*

The following passage is decisive in this connection:

> Our Being alongside entities within-the-world is concern, and this is Being which uncovers. To Dasein's disclosedness, however, discourse belongs essentially. Dasein expresses itself

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[48] Carman, T. 2003. *Heidegger's Analytic*, 211f. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[49] Ibid.: 219. Tugendhat *criticises* Heidegger for assuming that the hermeneutical as-structure of our practical comportment is pre-linguistic, in the radical sense that its meaning cannot be captured in assertions at all without transforming this meaning into the mode of present-at-hand (Tugendhat, E. 1979. *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbstbestimmung*, 187f. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag). His reading shares the assumption with the foundationalist reading that I wish to challenge.

[*spricht sich aus*]: it expresses itself as a Being-towards entities – a Being-towards which uncovers. And in assertion it expresses itself as such about entities which have been uncovered. Assertion communicates entities in the "how" of their uncoveredness. When Dasein is aware [*vernehmen*] of the communication, it brings itself through this awareness into an uncovering Being-towards the entities discussed.[50]

Here, Heidegger refers to our being insofar as it is concern (*Besorgen*), and speaks of the assertion as an expression of this practical comportment. He claims that such assertions express and communicate an entity to the extent that it is uncovered. This passage makes clear that Heidegger acknowledges that we are able to express our practical interpretative understanding in an undistorted manner through assertions. And, as Heidegger continues, another *Dasein* may grasp the assertion and thus bring itself, via the same uncovering 'Being-towards' (*Sein zu*), to the entity that is discussed (*besprochen*) as the speaker of the assertion. In this way, assertion allows us to express and share our interpretative understanding. A number of other passages confirm that Heidegger's intention is not to claim that assertions necessarily distort the intelligibility of unreflective action.[51] The passage quoted above, however, is the most important in the context of our investigation, because Heidegger immediately goes on to explicate how the assertion *may* become distortive and thus describes the assertion from an *apophantic* perspective. He stresses that what is expressed (*das Ausgesprochene*) can itself become something that can be taken up, utilised and expressed again. As such, the content of the assertion is no longer approached and grasped as an expression of a specific uncovering, but is instead passed along in a process of *Nachsprechen* – saying again what someone else has said. While this process of speaking again preserves the relation to the entity discussed, *Nachsprechen Dasein* – consciously or unconsciously – takes

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[50] 'Das Sein bei innerweltlichem Seienden, das Besorgen, ist entdeckend. Zur Erschlossenheit des Daseins aber gehört wesenhaft die Rede. Dasein spricht sich aus; *sich* – als entdeckendes Sein zu Seienden. Und es spricht sich als solches über entdecktes Seiendes aus in der Aussage. Die Aussage teilt das Seiende im Wie seiner Entdeckheit mit. Das die Mitteilung vernehmende Dasein bringt sich selbst im Vernehmen in das entdeckende Sein zum besprochenen Seienden' (Heidegger, M. 1997. *Being and Time*, translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, 266. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers; Heidegger, M. 1993. *Sein und Zeit*, 224. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag).

[51] In the following passage, Heidegger clearly indicates that not all forms of assertion present meaning in a distorted manner: 'Zwischen der im besorgenden Verstehen noch ganz eingehüllten Auslegung und dem extremen Gegenfall einer theoretischen Aussage über Vorhandenes gibt es mannigfache Zwischenstufen. Aussagen über Geschehnisse in der Umwelt, Schilderung des Zuhandenen, "Situationsberichte", Aufnahme und Fixierung eines "Tatbestandes", Beschreibung einer Sachlage, Erzählung des Vorgefallenen. Diese "Sätze" lassen sich nicht, ohne wesentliche Verkehrung ihres Sinnes, auf theoretische Aussagesätze zurückführen' (ibid.: 201/158). This passage speaks clearly against Tugendhat's reading (Tugendhat, E. 1979. Selbstbewußtsein und Selbstbestimmung, 187f. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag). The following passage also assumes that we can express and share meaning in undistorted way through discourse: 'Sichaussprechende Rede ist Mitteilung. Deren Seinstendenz zielt darauf, den Hörenden in die Teilnahme am erschlossenen Sein zum Beredeten der Rede zu bringen' (Heidegger, M. 1997. *Being and Time*, translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, 212. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers; Heidegger, M. 1993. *Sein und Zeit*, 168. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag).

itself to be exempted from 'the re-enactment of the uncovering' (*Nachvollzug des Entdeckens*, ibid.). In this way, 'that which has been expressed as such takes over Being-towards those entities which have been uncovered in the assertion'.[52] The meaning of the assertion becomes distorted when the Being-towards that is characteristic of the process of uncovering is replaced with what is expressed, the 'pure' meaning or content of the assertion.

Heidegger thinks that assertions can express what *Dasein* uncovers, and he understands the grasp (*Vernehmen*) of assertions as enabling participation in a disclosing directedness toward entities. But he adds that the assertion always already oscillates between being grasped in a hermeneutical manner, as an expression of an interpretative understanding, and as idle talk (*Gerede*), in which its meaning is abstracted from this horizon of understanding and instead reduced to what is expressed *in* the assertion, as if it were an object that could be isolated. In other words, in idle talk, the meaning of the assertion undergoes an *apophantic alienation*.

Heidegger also discusses another approach in which the meaning of the assertion may become alienated and thus distorted. In what he calls a *theoretical* approach, the meaning of the assertion is construed according to a framework that is foreign to the intelligibility of the interpretative understanding that is the horizon of the assertion. Heidegger's example here is the meaning of the assertion 'The hammer is heavy'. In the framework of a scientific approach, this is construed as referring to a specific weight, whereas according to the interpretative understanding of our practical comportment it might mean 'Too heavy! Hand me the other hammer!'[53] More generally, in the theoretical approach, the assertion undergoes a process of decontextualisation (*Entweltlichung*) that relates the assertion to the entity that it presumes to uncover in such a way that both are treated as determined entities. The assertion and the entity become *relata*, which are to be compared in a demonstration (*Ausweisung*). A comparison of fixed entities takes the place of an attempt to grasp the meaning of the assertion by grasping it within the horizon of the interpretative understanding in which it is situated. Thereby, a switch (*Umschaltung*) to a decontextualised theoretical apophansis has been completed.[54] In this way, the theoretical stance shares the assumption that also shapes our way of grasping assertions in idle talk – namely, that uncoveredness or meaning is preserved in that which is expressed by the assertion (*das Ausgesprochene*) as if it were an object.

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[52] 'Das Ausgesprochene als solches übernimmt das Sein zu dem in der Aussage entdeckten Seienden' (ibid.: 267/224).

[53] 'Zu schwer, den anderen Hammer!' (ibid.: 200/157).

[54] Ibid.: 267/225.

3   Foundationalism and Subjectivism in *Being and Time*

In one of his late articles, Gadamer states how he views *Being and Time* as expressing a linguistic turn within the tradition of phenomenology.[55] However, this characterisation is imprecise, in the sense that Heidegger does not ascribe a world-constituting role to language in *Being and Time*. Gadamer assumes that the Heidegger's later view on language – 'die Sprache ist das Haus des Seins'[56] – already shapes his thinking in *Being and Time*. Yet in fact, Heidegger here claims that language is *founded* upon *Dasein*'s practical familiarity and understanding of significance:

> But in significance itself, with which *Dasein* is always familiar, there lurks the ontological condition which makes it possible for *Dasein*, as something which understands and interprets, to disclose such things as "significations" (*Bedeutungen*); upon these, in turn, is founded the Being of words and of language.[57]

This view entails that our interpretative understanding of the as-structure in unreflective action is constituted independently of our acquisition of verbally mediated concepts. When Heidegger later came to think that language played a more primordial, world-constituting role, he added a handwritten note in the margin of his copy of *Being and Time*, rejecting the view of language as a purely 'added' (*aufgestockt*) phenomenon.[58] Gadamer follows Heidegger's development on this point. He claims that initiation into language opens up the possibility of experiencing the world, rather than merely living in an environment (*Umwelt*).[59]

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[55] 'Als Heidegger das Thema des Verstehens von einer Methodenlehre der Geisteswissenschaften zum Existenzial und Fundament einer Ontologie des Daseins erhob, stellte die hermeneutische Dimension nicht länger eine höherstufige Schicht der phänomenologischen Intentionalitäts-forschung dar, die in der leibhaftigen Wahrnehmen fundiert ist, sondern brachte auf europäischen Boden und in der Forschungsrichtung der Phänomenologie das zum Durchbruch, was als der ‚linguistic turn' in der angelsächsischen Logik fast gleichzeitig zum Zuge gelangte' (Gadamer, H.-G.1999. Destruktion und Dekonstruktion [1985]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 361. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

[56] 'Der Mensch aber ist nicht nur ein Lebewesen, das neben anderen Fähigkeiten auch die Sprache besitzt. Vielmehr ist die Sprache das Haus des Seins, darin wohnend, der Mensch eksistiert, indem er der Wahrheit des Seins, sie hütend, gehört' (Heidegger, M. 1996. Brief über den 'Humanismus' [1946]. In *Wegmarken*, 333. Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann).

[57] 'Die Bedeutsamkeit selbst aber, mit der das Dasein je schon vertraut ist, birgt in sich die ontologische Bedingung der Möglichkeit dafür, daß das verstehende Dasein als auslegendes so etwas wie "Bedeutungen" erschließen kann, die ihrerseits wieder das mögliche Sein von Wort und Sprache fundieren' (Heidegger, M. 1997. *Being and Time*, translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, 121. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers; Heidegger, M. 1993. *Sein und Zeit*, 87. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag). Carman, T. 2003. *Heidegger's Analytic*, 220ff. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[58] 'Unwahr. Sprache ist nicht aufgestockt, sondern *ist* das ursprüngliche Wesen der Wahrheit als Da' (Heidegger, M. 1993. *Sein und Zeit*, 447. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag).

[59] Cf. Sect. 4 in Chap. 5 above.

What is Heidegger's philosophical motivation for conceiving language as a founded phenomenon in *Being and time*? It cannot be that he denies that language is capable of expressing the intelligibility of our unreflective action. As we have seen, he acknowledges that the significances that structure our practical comportment can be expressed in assertions in a way that does not distort them.

The idea that practical intelligibility is in place independently of the initiation into language could be motivated by a particular view on the genesis of human intentionality. The assumption may be that the structure of practical intelligibility that Heidegger describes in *Being and Time* is identical to the structure of intelligibility in human infant and animal action. In this view, what is specific to meaning in the life of mature humans would be a layer that, in principle, could be isolated from that which is common to both mature and infant humans and (some) other animals. Given this, it would make sense to speak of a layer of significance that is part of our intentional life but which is constituted independently of our initiation into verbally mediated practices.

As we have seen earlier, Gadamer denies this idea of linguistic tradition as an 'added gift' (*zusätzliche Gabe*), an extra layer atop a core that we have in common with other animals. This is the point he emphasises in making a distinction between world and environment. McDowell also articulated this view in relation to his account of perception. In a programmatic passage, he writes:

> [There is a] temptation to think it must be possible to isolate what we have in common with [non-human animals] by stripping off what is special about us, so as to arrive at a residue that we can recognize as what figures in the perceptual lives of mere animals. [...] But it is not compulsory to attempt to accommodate the combination of something in common and a striking difference in this factorizing way [...] We do not need to say that we have what animals have, non-conceptual content, and we have something else as well, since we can conceptualize that content and they cannot. Instead we can say that we have what mere animals have, perceptual sensitivity to features of our environment, but we have it in a special form.[60]

Accordingly, our perceptual sensitivity to our environment is permeated with conceptual capacities when we are initiated into a linguistic tradition, and it is this that distinguishes us from non-human animals. McDowell finds support for his non-factorised model in Gadamer's distinction between environment and world[61] –

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[60] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 64. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Cf. Sect. 4 in Chap. 4 above.

[61] Ibid.: 114–119; Cf. Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 440–41. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 447–48. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). McDowell also follows Gadamer in tracing the thought back to Aristotle's notion of man as a rational animal (cf. Aristotle. *Politica*, I 2 1253a 9–18, ed. Ross, W.D. 1957. Oxford: Oxford University Press). Gadamer employs the Aristotelian model in defence against Koselleck, who accuses philosophical hermeneutics of overlooking basic structures that must be conceived of in abstraction from any kind of linguistic-conceptual mediation. According to Koselleck, these are 'meta-historical conditions' that we share with other animals (Koselleck, R./Gadamer, H.G. 2000. *Historik, Sprache und Hermeneutik. Eine Rede und Antwort*, ed. Schütt, H.P. 29. Heidelberg: Manutius Verlag). It is in his answer to Koselleck that Gadamer rejects the picture of our linguistically articulated reason as an 'added gift' (ibid: 47).

which is, in fact, a Heideggerian distinction, made precisely to reject the idea of 'a common core'. In *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger deals extensively with this question and proposes that animals have access (*Zugang*) to entities and exhibit a kind of behaviour (*Benehmen*), but that they are not able to grasp something-as-something. Their experience lacks the as-structure constitutive of our understanding of being. He sums up his point in the following way:

> The manifestness of beings as such, of beings *as* beings, belongs to world. This implies that bound up with world is this enigmatic "as", beings *as* such, or formulated in a formal way: "something *as* something", a possibility that is fundamentally closed to the animal.[62]

Since the as-structure is fundamental to all kinds of understanding, Heidegger does not assume a common core between human and animals consisting in the familiarity with significance (*Bedeutsamkeit*).

In principle, Heidegger could have had a different genetic concern in *Being and Time*, which could have inspired the idea of a layer of significance that is not permeated by linguisticality. He might have held the view that even if it is not present in the experience of other animals, a specific practical version of the structure something-as-something is common to the experiential life of both the infant and the mature human. According to this genetic view, the version of the as-structure mediated by verbal concepts would be an added level to this common core.[63] But there are no indications in any of Heidegger's texts that he considered human maturation to have any relevance for his conception of how the as-structure relates to language and concept use. In fact, as far as I know, Heidegger never reflects upon the specific genetic question of human maturation at all.

What motivates Heidegger's view on language as a founded phenomenon in *Being and Time*, if it is spurred neither by the idea of verbal articulation as derivative or by genetic concerns? In my view, it is probably the result of his methodological prioritisation of unreflective action in Division 1 of *Being and Time*. His extensive phenomenological investigations of our absorbed mode of understanding as it unfolds in everyday action made him acutely aware of the meaningful aspects of our environment that guide us, even if we do not have a name for them in advance. Phenomenological reflection on our practical comportment reveals myriad such aspects or 'significances' that vastly exceed our vocabulary. Indeed, one way to interpret this phenomenological finding is to assume that significance (*Bedeutsamkeit*) is a layer of meaning constituted independently of initiation into verbally mediated concepts. Yet, as our previous investigation has

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[62] 'Zu Welt gehört Offenbarkeit von Seiendem als solchem, von Seiendem *als* Seiendem. Darin liegt: Mit Welt geht zusammen dieses rätselhafte "als", Seiendes *als* solches, formal formuliert: "etwas als etwas", was dem Tier von Grund aus verschlossen ist' (Heidegger, M. 1995. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World – finitude – solitude*, 274. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Heidegger, M. 2004. *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt – Endlichkeit – Einsamkeit*, 397. Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann).

[63] This seems to be Dreyfus' genetic concern. Dreyfus, H.L. 2005. Overcoming the Myth of the Mental. In *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 79, 2: 65, n. 54 (the note numbers are incorrect – note 54 belongs with note flag 51 in the text).

shown, accepting this interpretation means to posit the aspect of significance as a layer of immediacy in our intentional life. As we have seen, this would render mysterious how we could be said to be responsible if we were guided by such significance.[64] Unreflective action would therefore be 'blind' according to the picture presented in *Being and Time*. Gadamer and McDowell can accept the phenomenological finding that there is a layer of significances that do not correspond to words in our vocabulary, but which guide us meaningfully in our unreflective action.[65] However, they argue that these aspects belong to a conceptually unified experience that is only accessible to us because we have been introduced into language.

Heidegger's conception of the as-structure in *Being and Time* is haunted not only by the positing of immediacy, but also by residual subjectivism. In my view, the transcendental project in *Being and Time* is still subject to a certain problematic prioritisation of subjectivity, which is a recurrent prejudice in the Kantian tradition of transcendental philosophy.[66] The lack of equipoise between subjective and objective in this phase of Heidegger's thinking is exhibited in the fact that he conceives the as-structure to be a feature of understanding, one of *Dasein*'s existential ways of being. It is a consequence of this assumption that Heidegger speaks of the projective character (*Entwurfscharakter*) of understanding.[67] This makes the structure of something-as-something an effect of understanding's 'projecting upon possibilities' (*Entwerfen auf Möglichkeiten*).[68] In other words, if one conceives our experience (with its intrinsic as-structure) as a *passive* phenomenon, as something that happens, and not as the result of an unconscious activity or synthesis on the part of the subject, then there is no room for the phenomenon of experience in *Being and Time*. This idea – that the structure of something-as-something is an effect of the projection of understanding – is problematic because it undermines the idea of experience as passive and creates a subjective imbalance.[69]

As mentioned, Heidegger's thought develops significantly after *Being and Time*. Perhaps one of the motivations behind the famous *Kehre* is an attempt to correct the unbalanced conception in which the as-structure is grounded in the projection of understanding. Gadamer, at least, understands the late Heidegger in this way, and

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[64] Heidegger's conception of significance in *Being and Time* is, in other words, a version of the Myth of the Given (cf. Sect. 2 in Chap. 3 above).

[65] In accounting for these aspects of our practical experience, the Aristotelian model of practical wisdom and the notion of demonstrative concepts play a central role (cf. Sects. 7 and 8 in Chap. 5 above).

[66] As we have seen, an unbalanced prioritisation of subjectivity haunts Kant's transcendental philosophy as well as Hegel's conception of perceptual experience (cf. Sects. 5 and 7 in Chap. 4).

[67] Heidegger, M. 1997. *Being and Time*, translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson 185. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers; Heidegger, M. 1993. *Sein und Zeit*, 145. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.

[68] Ibid.: 187/147.

[69] Cf. Sect. 7 in Chap. 4 above for a more detailed explanation of why we should hold on to the conception of experience as passive.

thus for him the as-structure is not ultimately grounded in a synthesis or activity on part of *Dasein*, but is the structure of our passive experience of the world (*Welterfahrung*). The emphasis on experience as a truly receptive or passive phenomenon is central to *Truth and Method*, as is the thought that it is our initiation into a natural language that opens up the possibility of experience of the world, in the sense of experiencing something as something. Gadamer uses the formula that 'being is language, i.e. self-presentation' in order to express the idea that learning to talk initiates us into the world, in the sense that it allows us to experience that which presents itself to us.[70] The notion of self-presentation (*Selbstsdarstellung*) attempts to capture the mediated nature of what is immediately and passively given to us.[71]

4   Gadamer's Interpretation of Assertion

Within his hermeneutic framework, Gadamer develops Heidegger's investigation of the meaning of assertion. The main aim of Heidegger's analysis of assertion is to sketch the genesis of idle talk and theoretical assertion as two methods of apophantic alienation, i.e. as objectifying (and thus distorted) perspectives on the meaning of the assertion. Even though Heidegger acknowledges that assertion is able to present meaning – even the meaning of unreflective action – in an undistorted manner, he does not explain how our understanding is able to resist the alienation that characterises assertions in idle talk and theoretical assertion. This is the question that constitutes the point of departure for Gadamer's approach to the phenomenon of assertion. By seeing how he conceives the non-objectifying mode of understanding, we will be able to grasp how the phenomenon of assertion testifies at once to the universality of linguisticality and the finitude of every particular linguistic act.

Gadamer's view on the status of the assertion is articulated in the 1957 article 'What is truth?' (*Was ist Wahrheit?*), in which Heidegger's influence is also manifest.[72] Here, Gadamer takes his point of departure from the intrinsic connection between reason and discourse (*Rede*) expressed in the Greek concept of *logos*. Gadamer states that this connection is made possible through the conviction that what is primarily preserved in discourse are the things themselves in their intelligibility. This happens in a specific and paradigmatic form of discourse, namely in assertions.[73] The Greek word for assertion is *apofansis*, and the paradigmatic form of discourse, in which the things are presented in their intelligibility or

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[70] Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 481. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G.1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 490. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[71] Cf. Sects. 8, 9, and 10 in Chap. 4 above.

[72] Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Was ist Wahrheit? [1957]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 57. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

[73] Ibid.: 47.

unconcealment, is called *logos apofantikos*.[74] The root of the noun *apofansis* is the verb *apopfainō*, which means to display or to make manifest. Hence Gadamer characterises the assertion as a making manifest (*Offenbarmachen*) or a presentation (*Vorliegenlassen*):

> One presents, and in this way how matters are presented to one is presented as well as imparted to the other. Aristotle says that a judgement is true when it lets that present itself as belonging together in discourse which also presents itself as belonging together in the subject matter itself; a judgement is false when it lets that present itself as belonging together in discourse which does not present itself as belonging together in the subject matter.[75]

However, it is precisely this idea of the assertion as a presentation of what is present (*Vorliegenlassen des Vorliegenden*) that is inadequate, since it does not fully disclose the nature of the assertion, according to Gadamer:

> It is not enough that that which is presented is also presented in assertion. Because the problem is precisely whether everything is presented such that it can be presented in discourse, and whether the very act of presenting what one can present does not lose the recognition of what is there and experienced anyway.[76]

This passage does not claim that assertions are incapable of expressing the content of our experience. Rather, Gadamer rather wants to say that all assertions do *more* than present that which is immediately present. The meaning of the assertion is a whole (*Ganzes*) that is not fully present in the content of the assertion itself, but which is nonetheless grasped when we understand the assertion. Heidegger hints at this by using the word *vernehmen* in the passage where he emphasises that we are able to grasp the meaning of an assertion in an undistorted way.[77] This German word means to hear, experience or take cognisance of something, but it is also, of course, etymologically connected to *Vernunft*. It is therefore a good word with which to characterise the non-objectifying form of reason that is at stake here. Gadamer's idea is therefore that the assertion implies a 'space' 'behind' it, which co-determines its ability to make manifest, but also that this space is present

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[74] Cf. Aristotle. *De Interpretatione*, 4 17a1–3, ed. Minio-Paluello, L. 2008. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[75] 'Man legt vor und auf diese Weise liegt vor, dem anderen eben so mitgeteilt, wie es einem selber vorliegt. So sagt Aristoteles: ein Urteil ist wahr, wenn es in der Rede zusammen vorliegen lässt, was in der Sache zusammen vorliegt; ein Urteil ist falsch, wenn es in der Rede zusammen vorliegen lässt, was in der Sache nicht zusammen vorliegt' (Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Was ist Wahrheit? [1957]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 47. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck); my translation). Cf. Aristotle. *Metaphysica* IX 10 1051b1–5, ed. W. Jaeger. 1957. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[76] 'Es genügt nicht, daß das, was vorliegt, in der Aussage auch vorgelegt wird. Denn das Problem ist gerade, ob alles so vorliegt, daß es in der Rede vorgelegt werden kann, und ob sich nicht dadurch, daß man vorlegt, was man vorlegen kann, die Anerkennung dessen verlegt, was gleichwohl ist und erfahren wird' (ibid.: 52; my translation).

[77] Heidegger, M. 1997. *Being and Time*, translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, 266. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers; Heidegger, M. 1993. *Sein und Zeit*, 224. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.

(*vorliegt*) in such a way that it is not itself made manifest in the assertion. Rather, it is concealed and therefore risks being ignored, thereby spurring the distorted conviction that it *is* the assertion in itself that makes manifest. In this description, we can recognise Heidegger's critique of the assumption regarding idle talk and theoretical assertions that meaning is preserved in that which is expressed by the assertion (*das Ausgesprochene*) as if it were an object.

Gadamer further specifies the concealed dimension of the assertion in the following way:

> There is no assertion that could solely be grasped on the basis of the content which it presents if one wants to capture the truth of the assertion. Every assertion has assumptions that it does not state. Only he who has these assumptions in mind (*mitdenken*) can really measure the truth of the assertion.[78]

That which is present in such a way that it is concealed in the assertion is termed the rational *motivation* or *presupposition*. Gadamer emphasises the connection to rationality when he speaks of how it is necessary 'to grasp the assertion *in its truth*' and 'measure (*ermessen*) *the truth* of a assertion' in order to understand the whole or the horizon in which it stands. He describes the nature of the rational motivation in the following way:

> Now I claim that the ultimate logical form of such a motivation is the question [. . .] But the primacy of the question *vis-à-vis* the assertion means that the assertion is essentially an answer. There is no assertion that does not represent a kind of answer. Therefore there is no understanding of any assertion that does not obtain its sole measure from a comprehension (*Verständnis*) of the question to which this assertion is an answer [. . .] When someone puts forward a claim that one does not understand, one seeks make it clear to oneself how he could arrive at such a claim. What question did he pose to which his assertion would be an answer?[79]

No doubt the vast majority of our assertions do not need to be approached through such hermeneutic reflection and have their implicit horizon of enquiry (*Fragehorisont*) spelled out and examined in this manner. The meaning of everyday assertions is so inextricably interwoven with our practices that it can be immediately discerned without being explicitly thematised. But the hermeneutic enterprise that becomes necessary in the face of more complex, initially incomprehensible assertions – such as those found in a difficult text – has the same basic structure as

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[78] 'Es gibt keine Aussage, die man allein auf den Inhalt hin, den sie vorlegt, auffassen kann, wenn man sie in ihrer Wahrheit erfassen will. Jede Aussage ist motiviert. Jede Aussage hat Voraussetzungen, die sie nicht aussagt. Nur wer diese Voraussetzungen mitdenkt, kann die Wahrheit einer Aussage wirklich ermessen' (Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Was ist Wahrheit? [1957]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 52. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck); my translation).

[79] 'Nun behaupte ich: die letzte logische Form solcher Motivation jeder Aussage ist die Frage. [. . .] Der Primat der Frage gegenüber der Aussage bedeutet aber, daß die Aussage wesenhaft Antwort ist. Es gibt keine Aussage die nicht eine Art Antwort darstellt. Daher gibt es kein Verstehen irgendeiner Aussage, das nicht aus dem Verständnis der Frage, auf der sie antwortet, ihren alleinigen Maßstab gewinnt. [. . .] Wenn jemand eine Behauptung aufstellt, die man nicht versteht, dann sucht man klarzumachen, wie er dazu kommt. Welche Frage hat er sich gestellt, auf die seine Aussage eine Antwort ist?' (ibid.; my translation).

the one that we could direct toward a banal statement in our everyday practice. In both cases, the aim is to reach the rational motivation that is not present in the assertion, but which must be understood in order to enable an assessment of the truth of the assertion.

Gadamer essentially completes the reinterpretation of the nature of assertions initiated by Heidegger. According to a dominant trend in Western philosophy, assertions present things in their unconcealment (*Unverborgenheit*). As Gadamer notes, this is the idea that the assertion is a presentation of that which is present. What remains problematic about this idea, and what makes it an *apophanticism*, is the presupposition that the intelligibility of the things that the assertion makes manifest is *in* the assertion itself. By contrast, Gadamer claims that an assertion only makes manifest because it has a rational motivation that must be implicitly or explicitly understood in order to assess its truth. Gadamer conceptualises this motivation as having the logical structure of a question, which enables him to redefine the assertion as an answer to a question. In this way, Gadamer retains the idea that our discourse is able to disclose the world as we experience it, but also the experience of unreflective practices. It is therefore crucial not to read his herme-neutic critique of apophanticism as a rejection of the important role that assertions and judgements must play in our understanding of what meaning is. Philosophical hermeneutics' contribution is the claim that the ability of discourse to preserve things in their unconcealment depends upon our assertions being understood as answers, in order to bring meaning out of its apophantic alienation.

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer comments twice on the status of the assertion. In one instance, he uses the example of an interrogation in order to illustrate his critique of the apophantic alienation of meaning. In the interrogation, the horizon of meaning of the assertion is covered up with methodological rigour, leaving only the 'pure' meaning – which is what goes on record. However, because the interro-gation insists that meaning is only what is made explicitly present in the assertions, the meaning of what is said is distorted. Gadamer contrasts this artificial situation with what it is to make oneself understood:

> To say what one means – to make oneself understood – means to hold what is said together with an infinity of what is not said in one unified meaning and to ensure that it is understood in this way. Someone who speaks in this way may well use only the most ordinary and common words and still be able to express what is unsaid and is to be said.[80]

Here, what appears to be a pure presentation of meaning is achieved because the intangible dimension of meaning – as methodologically excised in the interrogation – remains in play. It is decisive for Gadamer to emphasise that this non-reductive

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[80] 'Sagen was man meint, sich Verständlichmachen, halt im Gegenteil das Gesagte mit einer Unendlichkeit des Ungesagten in der Einheit eines Sinnes zusammen und lässt es so verstanden werden. Wer in dieser Weise spricht, mag nur die gewöhnlichsten und gewohntesten Worte gebrauchen und vermag doch eben dadurch zu Sprache zu bringen, was ungesagt und zu sagen ist' (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 464. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 473. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

way of grasping the meaning of an assertion is not the result of a method, or even necessarily the consequence of a reflective act. On the contrary, in our everyday use of assertions we always already grasp meaning in this way, and thus unreflectively bear witness to 'the intangibility of that which is still the purest reproduction of meaning' (*die Ungreifbarkeit dessen was doch die reinste Wiedergabe des Sinnes ist*).[81]

In a different passage of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer confirms the idea developed in 'What is Truth?' – namely, interpreting assertion as an answer to a question. In fact, he now sublates (*aufhebt*) the assertion into the movement of dialogue:

> What characterizes a dialogue, in contrast with the rigid set of statements that demand to be set down in writing, is precisely this: that in dialogue spoken language – in the process of question and answer, giving and taking, talking at cross purposes and seeing each other's point – performs the communication of meaning that, with respect to the written tradition, is the task of hermeneutics. Hence it is more than a metaphor; it is a memory of what originally was the case, to describe the task of hermeneutics as entering into dialogue with the text.[82]

As the quote shows, Gadamer also understands the process of interpreting *texts* as the dialectics of question and answer. The text as a unity of meaning is threatened by the same danger as the assertion, namely being perceived as containing its meaning 'within it' in an objectified form. In order to counter this threat, the interpreter must engage in a dialogue with the text and thereby transform its meaning into spoken language. Although this is often a much more complicated and laborious task, the procedure is essentially the same as when one is faced with a single assertion that cannot initially be understood. In the case of interpreting texts, it is a matter of reconstructing the rational motivation and articulating the question to which the text is an answer, thereby bringing the meaning of the text out of its apophantic alienation and back into 'the living present of communication, which is always fundamentally realised in question and answer'.[83] As Gadamer makes clear, the idea of transposing the text back into 'the living present of communication' once again describes the process of understanding in the human sciences that was earlier conceived as the fusion between the horizon of the interpreter and the text.

As we have seen, Heidegger claims that the structure of something-as-something is fundamental to our being-in-world, whether this structure is explicitly present in our experience or not. He does not pretend to be able to make sense of this structure through an analysis of individual states, but rather focuses on how it is present in

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[81] Ibid.

[82] 'Das eben charakterisiert der Gespräch – gegenüber der erstarrten Form der zur schriftlichen Fixierung drängenden Aussage –, daß hier die Sprache in Frage und Antwort, im Geben und Nehmen, im Aneinandervorbeireden und Miteinanderübereinkommen jene Sinnkommunikation vollzieht, deren kunstvolle Erarbeitung gegenüber literarischer Überlieferung die Aufgabe der Hermeneutik ist. Es ist daher mehr als eine Metapher – es ist eine Erinnerung an das Ursprüngliche, wenn sich die hermeneutische Aufgabe als ein In-das-Gesprächkommen mit dem Text begreift' (ibid.: 361f./374).

[83] Ibid.: 362/374.

different forms of practices as such. In this way, the as-structure is conceived as the interplay between an encompassing and implicit understanding and an ongoing articulation of this understanding in a specific interpretation. In his two main examples – unreflective action and the reading of a text – he stresses the dynamic character of the relation between these two aspects.

In his interpretation of the assertion, Gadamer shows how Heidegger's view of the as-structure also counts for practices that are explicitly linguistic and conceptual, with a particular focus on intersubjective understanding. Heidegger demonstrates the tendency of idle talk and theoretical assertion to effectuate an alienation of meaning. Even though he acknowledges that the assertion can present and communicate meaning in a undistorted manner, he does not explain how we are to make sense of the relation between the assertion as distorting and as disclosing. This circumstance is the background for a problematic reading that claims that only our more or less conscious bodily postures and facial expressions are able to convey the intelligibility of our practical comportment in an undistorted manner. When Heidegger speaks of the possibility of adequate instances of 'assertion', this is taken metaphorically as referring to this 'silent', bodily level of expression. On the other hand, all linguistic-conceptual articulations in real assertions and judgements are conceived as necessarily derivative, abstract and decontextualised.[84] The phenomenological concern behind this reading is that a concession that assertions are in fact able to express the meaning of unreflective action seems to construe this dimension of human life in an intellectualist manner. More specifically, it threatens to overlook our inability to convey in words the particular significances of unreflective practices and forms of (expert) craftsmanship.

Gadamer's interpretation of the meaning of assertions may be able to address this underlying worry of this foundationalist approach. He makes clear that the inability of the assertion in itself to express our experience and intentions is not only relevant when it comes to unreflective action, but is also problematic for verbal-conceptual intersubjective communication. The meaning of an assertion is always liable to be conceived in a way that alienates and therefore distorts it. If we are to grasp its meaning, an utterance must always be understood as part of an implicit whole. In a programmatic passage, Gadamer writes:

> Every word breaks forth as if from a center and is related to a whole, through which alone it is a word. Every word causes the whole of the language to which it belongs to resonate and the whole world-view that underlies it to appear. Thus every word, as the event of a moment, carries with it the unsaid, to which it is related by responding and summoning. The occasionality of human speech is not a casual imperfection of its expressive power; it is, rather, the logical expression of the living virtuality of speech that brings a totality of meaning

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[84] Carman, T. 2003. *Heidegger's Analytic*, 218f. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

into play, without being able to express it totally. All human speaking is finite in such a way that there is laid up within it an infinity of meaning to be explicated and laid out.[85]

From this perspective, it seems natural that an assertion *considered in itself* will inevitably fail to capture the meaning of our unreflective actions. However, the impossibility of expressing the significances that guide an expert craftsman in his practice should not force us to conclude that unreflective action or 'absorbed coping' expresses an as-structure that is incompatible with conceptual-linguistic articulation. Rather, we can maintain – as Heidegger does in his famous hammer example – that our assertions are often only grasped adequately in light of the silent but demonstratively accessible context in which they appear. There is no need to claim a fundamental limit to our verbal-conceptual articulation in assertions if we conceive the meaning of the assertion in the manner Gadamer proposes. His understanding of meaning as an interplay between part and implicit whole is *confirmed* by the fact that there are situations in which the assertion – for example, 'Do it like this' accompanied by pointing or a practical demonstration – is the only adequate way to express an underlying interpretative understanding.

We have seen how linguisticality (*Sprachlichkeit*), a *terminus technicus* in Gadamer's thinking, signifies that every apparent limit to what can be expressed in words only points to the infinite process of further thinking and discourse. This implies that our reason can break free of the schematisations and the conventions of opinion that make our linguistic understanding seem confined, but without leaving the bounds of language. Furthermore, it has become clear that the finitude of our understanding does not threaten this idea. On the contrary, Heidegger and Gadamer's reflections on the nature of assertion reveal that the aspect of linguisticality and the aspect of finitude are complementary. The fact that a proposition (or on a 'higher' level, a text or interpretation) is limited does not undermine the idea of linguisticality. Rather, the whole in which a specific proposition is situated is a space that is accessible to understanding. In this way, the limit implied by our finitude is itself drawn within the medium of linguistic understanding. The phenomenological rearticulation of the status of assertion thus provides a framework for understanding how the 'highest principle of hermeneutics' – namely, that we are never able to completely say what we want to say – can be reconciled with the idea that language comprehends everything that can ever be an object.

It is important to remember that even if lingusiticality cannot be limited, this does not imply that the boundary of our finitude can be transgressed. The whole,

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[85] 'Ein jedes Wort bricht wie aus einer Mitte hervor und hat bezug auf ein Ganzes, durch das es allein Wort ist. Ein jedes Wort läßt das ganze der Sprache, der es angehört, antönen und das Ganze der Weltansicht, die ihm zugrundeliegt, erscheinen. Ein jedes Wort läßt daher auch, als das Geschehen eines Augenblicks, das Ungesagte mit da sein, auf das es sich antwortend und winkend bezieht. Die Okkasionalität der menschlichen Rede ist nicht eine gelegentliche Unvollkommenheit ihrer Aussagekraft – sie ist vielmehr der logische Ausdruck der lebendigen Virtualität des Redens, das ein Ganzes von Sinn, ohne es ganz sagen zu können, ins Spiel bringt. Alles menschliche Sprechen ist in der Weise endlich, daß eine Unendlichkeit des auszufaltenden und auszulegenden Sinnes in ihm angelegt ist' (Gadamer, H.-G. 2004. *Truth and Method*, 454. London and New York: Continuum; Gadamer, H.-G. 1990. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 462. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck)).

which acts as the presupposition or motivation of a concrete proposition, can never be made entirely present. Gadamer makes this clear in 'Was ist Wahrheit?' when he speaks of the dialectic of question and answer:

> It is surely not always easy to find the precise question to which an assertion really is an answer. It is especially not easy because a question, again, is not a simple origin (*ein einfaches Erstes*) into which we may transfer (*versetzen*) ourselves at will. This is because every question is in itself an answer. That is the dialectical movement in which we entangle ourselves here. Every question is motivated. Even its meaning is never completely present in a way that can be encountered within the question.[86]

Again, 'finitude' does not imply that we need to posit something that is *fundamentally* inaccessible to linguistic articulation. It means that in every linguistic act, meaning is not fully present, but that every linguistic act presupposes this meaning as the whole in which it is placed. This whole is not present at hand (*vorliegt*), it is not available (*verfügbar*) to our understanding as an object and it cannot be made completely present – and yet this whole is nothing more than the infinite horizon of our understanding. Questioning forms the basis of Gadamer's model for understanding his idea of the finitude of meaning. A good question has a sense of direction (*Richtungssinn*) that breaks up the ossified structures of our linguistic conventions and opens up a space of possible answers. There is no definite answer available to our understanding in the process of questioning itself. Rather, questioning examines alternatives or possibilities. As such, meaning, as it appears in this process, cannot be conceived as something that can be completely objectified in propositional structures that are present in the availability (*Verfügbarkeit*) to the subject of understanding. The primacy of the question (*Vorrang der Frage*) reveals meaning as characterised by a certain irreducible openness (*Offenheit*).

5   Avoiding Both Apophanticism and the Myth of the Given

McDowell has recently taken an explicit step away from an apophantic conception of meaning by rejecting what he assumed in *Mind and World*, namely that experience has *propositional* content, while maintaining that it has *conceptual* content.[87]

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[86] 'Es ist sicherlich nicht immer leicht, *die* Frage zu finden, auf die eine Aussage wirklich Antwort ist. Es ist vor allem deshalb nicht leicht, weil auch eine Frage wiederum kein einfaches Erstes ist, in das wir uns nach Belieben versetzen können. Denn jede Frage ist selber Antwort. Das ist die Dialektik, in die wir uns hier verstricken. Jede Frage ist motiviert. Auch ihr Sinn ist niemals vollständig in ihr anzutreffen' (Gadamer, H.-G. 1999. Was ist Wahrheit? [1957]. In *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 52f. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck); my translation).

[87] In *Mind and World*, McDowell propounds a propositional model of perception that he describes as follows: 'In a particular experience in which one is not misled, what one takes in is *that things are thus and so*. *That things are thus and so* is the content of the experience, and it can also be the content of a judgment' (McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 26. Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

In order to understand his new conception of the hermeneutical discussion of the meaning of assertion, we must first make sense of McDowell's distinction between two forms of conceptual content, namely the *intuitional* content of perception and the *propositional* content of assertion and judgement. This distinction rests on the idea that whereas the propositional content of assertions and judgements is discursively articulated, intuitional content is not. In an assertion or judgement, we perform an act of explicating content discursively, whereas intuitional content is unarticulated.[88] Intuitional content is to be understood in the sense of *Anschauung*, as 'having in view'. McDowell explains the significance of the idea of intuitional content by relating it to his idea of forming new demonstrative concepts in response to conceptually unified aspects of an intuition. Using the example of visual experience, he writes:

> Visual intuitions typically present one with visible characteristics of objects that one is not equipped to attribute to the objects by making appropriate predications in claims or judgments. To make such an aspect of the content of an intuition into the content associated with a capacity that is discursive in the primary sense, one would need to carve it out, as it were, from the categorically unified but as yet unarticulated content of the intuition by determining it to be the meaning of a linguistic expression, which one thereby sets up as a means for making that content explicit. (This might be a matter of coining an adjective. Or the expression might be one like "having that shade of colour".)[89]

The important idea here is expressed in the metaphor of 'carving out', i.e. that we can exploit a potential for a discursive capacity (a capacity to make judgements) that is already present *in* the capacities actualised in the intuitional content. Most of the content of our intuitions is not extracted and redeployed in discursive activity, and as such it is easily forgotten. However, this does not mean that its conceptual form *could not* be exploited discursively.[90] The idea of carving out applies even in cases where we do *not* need to form a new discursive capacity to exploit some aspect of the intuition in, say, a judgement. Also, in the case where the conceptual aspect articulated corresponds to a capacity that we already possess (e.g. when we judge that there is a chair in the corner of the room), there is a difference between the discursive articulation and the intuitional 'having in view'. Why should we insist on intuitional content as a pre-predicative form of *conceptuality* that is constitutive for our experience? The motivation here is simply to avoid the Myth of the Given, i.e. to allow that experience can rationally constrain our thinking.

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[88] McDowell, J. 2009. Avoiding the Myth of the Given. In *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 262. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[89] Ibid.: 263. McDowell allows for the possibility that we may in some cases 'bypass language' and 'directly equip' ourselves with a discursive capacity. When I see a new shade of colour, for example, I may carve it out without overt assertion or inner judgement, in a way that still allows me to recognise another instance of the shade elsewhere or later. In this way, I can be said to have bypassed language and acquired a discursive capacity. This possibility, however, does not undermine the central status of language, since the capacity for linguistic expression by way of a demonstrative judgement (explicitly identifying the shade I have acquired) is still the context in which this activity is intelligible.

[90] Ibid.: 265.

Only if we hold on to the idea that the form of an intuition is conceptual can we make sense of the notion that to enjoy the content of a specific intuition is to be entitled to the belief or judgement that, for example, a cube is 'that shade of colour'.

From the viewpoint of Heidegger and Gadamer, McDowell's change of position makes sense. The idea that our perceptual experience does not consist of already articulated propositional structures is fundamental to Heidegger. In fact, McDowell's position in *Mind and World*, that experiences are structured as propositions, seems to express an objectifying approach to meaning, the avoidance of which is the prime aim of the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology. By contrast, the alternative idea, that experience is an intuitional 'having in view' that still implicitly has the structure of something-as-something, is congenial to hermeneutic phenomenology.

One could misconstrue McDowell as seeking to claim that the bits of content carved out are free-floating properties (e.g. 'red' or 'that shade of colour') that are only connected to a thing when we subsequently bring them together in discursive activity. This picture seems un-phenomenological in the sense that we do not carve out or articulate a separate property that must be rejoined with an object in a further step, since properties are always already experienced as being related to objects. Such a view is also transcendentally unacceptable. In this case, our experience would not be a self-presentation of an aspect of reality. It could not directly bring a certain object with certain properties into view, but could only present us with materials that would enable us to construe or synthesise the relation between thing and property through intellectual work, e.g. by bringing together the significances 'red' and 'cube' in discursive activity. This would undermine the idea of experience as a direct openness to the world, in favour of a kind of subjective idealism or constructivism. McDowell warns against the 'constructivist' interpretation by stressing that the contents put together in discursive activity are *not* 'self-standing building blocks'.[91] The properties that intuitional content brings directly into view are always already properties of objects.[92] Heidegger almost seems to echo McDowell when he warns that what is articulated in the assertion must already be in view (*im Blik sein*) *as* a unity. As we have seen, Heidegger's reason for insisting that there is unity already in experience is precisely that we do not, in thought (*hinzudenken*), add the property 'black' to the board. Rather, we experience the blackboard as a unity – and we announce this unity by articulating it in an assertion.

There is an important distinction to be made between McDowell's minimal empiricism and Heidegger and Gadamer's interest in experience and assertion. Their purpose is not to show how intentionality can be conceived as unproblematic, but rather, through phenomenological means, to articulate the encompassing horizon of our experience in order to avoid its objectification. McDowell's change of

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[91] Ibid.: 263.

[92] McDowell writes: 'Intuitions [. . .] directly bring objects into view through bringing their properties into view' (ibid.: 268). By emphasising 'their' in this sentence, we would avoid the constructivist interpretation.

position, on the other hand, is not motivated by such phenomenological concerns, i.e. by the conviction that an apophantic picture of experience fails to do justice to the phenomenon of experience as it presents itself to us when we reflect upon it. Rather, he now seeks to avoid an inferentialist conception of the relation between experience and judgement by denying that it is to be understood as a relation between aspects of propositional content. Instead, he claims that whereas judgement and assertions are discursively articulated in propositional structures, experiences – cases of 'having-in-view' – are unarticulated, although they still have the as-structure. According to McDowell, his new conception should remove all suspicion that conceptualism is committed to the view that we make an (unconscious) inference when we articulate an aspect of our intuitional content in a judgement. By contrast, Heidegger's agenda is phenomenological – he tries to uncover the phenomenon of world through an analysis of something-as-something and by taking his departure in the 'the way in which we at first and for the most part move about in our everyday world'.[93] According to this phenomenological description, our perceptually guided activity in the world unfolds as the interplay between some degree of articulation and an implicit, unarticulated experiential whole within which the articulated aspects are grasped. In other words, unlike McDowell, hermeneutic phenomenology describes perception as articulated to some extent, because this is in line with how the phenomenon appears to us when we reflect upon it.[94] Heidegger's picture is still compatible with McDowell's emphasis on non-inferentialism, because at the most basic level there is, according to both approaches, no inference between two aspects of propositional content – instead, there is a perpetual activity of articulation.

Still, the approach of hermeneutic phenomenology to the phenomenon of meaning is much more exploratory than McDowell's approach – which, inspired by Wittgenstein's idea of philosophical quietism, is solely aimed at dissolving some seeming fundamental difficulties in our conception of ourselves as creatures responsive to meaning. In order to get a glimpse of the exploratory horizon of hermeneutic phenomenology, we can return to *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, in which Heidegger warns that our enquiry into the status of the as-structure becomes inadequate (*unangemessen*) if it is isolated from our worldview. He writes:

> The aforementioned basis of metaphysics and its orientation towards propositional truth is indeed necessary in a certain respect, yet it is *not originary*. It is this lack of originality

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[93] Heidegger, M. 1995. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World – finitude – solitude*, 177. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Heidegger, M. 2004. *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt – Endlichkeit – Einsamkeit*, 262. Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann.

[94] As Thybo Jensen points out, there might be cases when we are, say, lost in thought and 'our eyes takes a stroll' without any grasping of particular aspects or objects (Thybo Jensen, R. 2008. *Perception and Action: An Analogical Approach*, 143. Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen (Faculty of Humanities)). Most of the time, however, perception brings our surroundings into view – not in a completely unarticulated manner, but in a way that always already includes a certain grasping of specific features or aspects.

which has obstructed the proper unfolding of the question of world hitherto. It is this connection between metaphysics and logic that has become self-evident to us which, without our immediately seeing it, has hindered the development of an originary problematic that would open access to the problem of world.[95]

In the world, beings (*Seienden*) are given *as* such but also *within* a whole (*im Ganzen*), and we must have both of these aspects in view in order to avoid a distorted conception of experience. In *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger points to two specific risks in abstracting the as-structure from its embeddedness in our world-view. On the one hand, it can become unclear how our relation to the world differs from the 'behaviour' particular to other animals, insofar that it may be admitted that animals also 'experience' 'something-as-something' in a certain sense. On the other hand, Heidegger thinks that the philosophical tradition has analysed the structure of assertion in an abstract manner that cannot be used to understand the way the as-structure is given in, for example, unreflective action. In order to prevent an abstract interpretation of the as-structure, Heidegger points to pragmatic practices as an example of a relevant horizon of intelligibility for understanding the nature of the structure something-as-something. Using an example of an assertion from a lecture situation – 'The blackboard is inconveniently placed' – he writes:

> What is decisive in this interpretation of assertion is that we do not make a judgement in relation to an isolated object, but in this judgement we speak out of this whole which we have already experienced and are familiar with, and which we call the lecture theatre [. . .] [E]verything depends on already seeing, in the apparently narrow and limited character of the assertion "The board is badly positioned", how what the assertion is about (namely the badly positioned board) is manifest from *out of a whole*, out of a whole that we do not at all explicitly or specifically grasp as such. Yet precisely this realm within which we always already move is what we initially designate schematically as the "as a whole".[96]

The whole in which the assertion figures is *Dasein*'s interpretative understanding of itself in the familiar context of the lecture hall. The aspect of the world that forms

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[95] 'Die gekennzeichnete Basis der Metaphysik und ihre Orientierung an der Wahrheit des Satzes ist zwar in gewisser Hinsicht notwendig, aber doch nicht ursprünglich. Diese Nichtursprünglichkeit hat bisher die rechte Entfaltung des Weltproblems hintangehalten. Dieser selbstverständlich gewordene Zusammenhang zwischen Metaphysik und Logik ist es, der, ohne daß wir es sogleich sehen, verhindert, die ursprüngliche Problematik zu entwickeln, die das Weltproblem zugänglich macht' (Heidegger, M. 1995. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World – finitude – solitude*, 290. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Heidegger, M. 2004. *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt – Endlichkeit – Einsamkeit*, 420f. Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann).

[96] 'Das entscheidende dieser Interpretation der Aussage ist dies, dass wir nicht mit Bezug auf ein isoliertes Objekt urteilen, sondern in diesem Urteil aus diesem schon erfahrenen und bekannten Ganzen heraussprechen, das wir den Hörsaal nennen [. . .] Vielmehr liegt alles schon daran, schon in der scheinbaren Enge und Begrenztheit der Aussage – die Tafel steht ungünstig – zu sehen, wie das, worüber ausgesagt wird, die ungünstig stehende Tafel, aus einem Ganzen heraus offenbar ist, aus einem Ganzen, das wir als solches gar nicht ausdrücklich und eigens erfassen. Aber gerade dies, worin wir uns immer schon bewegen. Was wir zunächst schematisch als das "im Ganzen" bezeichnen' (ibid.: 347f./503ff.).

the content of the assertion is only given to us by virtue of its embeddedness in a specific practice with a particular horizon of intelligibility. Therefore the meaning of the assertion is not contained 'within it', but is a part of this motivational horizon, within which it is grasped if it is understood. Ultimately, Heidegger stresses that its meaning cannot be separated from the inexplicit whole of our experience as such, our world-view *im Ganzen*. Heidegger's emphasis on the pragmatic horizons of intelligibility emphasises that the concept of objectivity should be broadly construed so as to avoid ontological prejudices about what is real. In other words, we should acknowledge that the objective subject matter of thought can consist not only of blackboards and red cubes, but also, for example, a board placed in an inconvenient position.

In Division 2 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger emphasises further existential and temporal horizons for the meaning of the as-structure. One of these is expressed in his claim that understanding expresses *Dasein*'s own potentiality-for-being.[97] According to Heidegger's famous formula, '*Dasein* is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it.'[98] This means that through all of *Dasein*'s articulated understanding in different practices, it continues to articulate and develop a conception of its Being. This Being is thus constantly at stake, even in the way that we are guided by salient significances in our unreflective action. Indeed, Heidegger is unequivocal that *Dasein*'s absorbed practical comportment remains related to the question of 'who' *Dasein* is.[99] Even the most seemingly trivial experiences can be or can become crucially important, because they are related to the virtual horizon of who we understand ourselves to be. For Heidegger, it is important that this dimension of experience can be more or less reflectively transparent to us in the way in which we relate ourselves to the world. In fact, his distinction between authentic and inauthentic understanding essentially relates to this question of transparency.[100] Frequently, we are unable to grasp how our actions express a certain conception of who we are. Furthermore, it is often not immediately transparent to us that a certain experience has profound significance for our self-understanding, let alone how or why this is the case. Therefore this dimension of understanding does not necessarily become apparent if we are required to give an account for a particular course of action. Heidegger's point is not in conflict with the idea that *Dasein* is constitutively responsive to the demand to give an account (*logon didonai*). However, in Heidegger's view, our unreflective action is not only different in structure from that of other animals because we are accountable, but also because 'who' we understand ourselves to be permeates even our responses to practical significances. He points to an existential dimension of

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[97] Heidegger, M. 1997. *Being and Time*, translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, 185. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers; Heidegger, M. 1993. *Sein und Zeit*, 144. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.

[98] 'Es [Dasein] ist vielmehr dadurch ontisch ausgezeichnet, daß es in diesem Seienden in seinem Sein *um* dieses Sein selbst geht' (ibid.: 32/12).

[99] Ibid.: 149ff./113ff.

[100] Ibid.: 186/146.

'mineness' (*Jemeinigkeit*) that is intrinsic to all understanding, and which in order to be grasped properly may require a focus that is broader than the immediate situation in which are required to give an account. Even if we can acknowledge our ownership of the action in response to the demand to give an account, and in many cases even come up with a satisfactory answer, the intrinsic self-conception *expressed in the action* may at first be completely unclear to us.

These remarks are merely meant to hint at a further horizon of enquiry. It is beyond the scope of the present investigation to discuss how the analyses of Division 2 of *Being and Time*, let alone Heidegger's later work, might articulate existential and temporal dimensions that can help us move beyond the conception of meaning as a purely apophantic phenomenon. However, the reconstruction of philosophical hermeneutics in the light of McDowell's empiricism has articulated an adequate framework for such a project. With the critique of Givenness, the concept of perceptual experience and the ontology of self-presentation, as well as with the situated and historical concept of objectivity, I have attempted to reinvigorate philosophical hermeneutics as a position that combines some of the defining insights from both the analytic and the continental tradition without falling victim to the objectivistic scientism that characterises much of the former or the irrationalism that haunts the latter tradition. Within the framework of this reconstructed hermeneutics, the next logical step would be to enquire further into the existential and temporal (as well as ethical, political and aesthetical) dimensions of meaning than has been possible in this investigation.[101]

In closing, it is appropriate to comment on the 'problem of world', which Heidegger claims is the ultimate subject matter of his work.[102] As for McDowell, he subscribes to Wittgenstein's claim that the world is everything that is the case.[103] His motivation for this is that it allows us to see how there needs to be 'no gap between thought, as such, and the world': '[. . .] one can think, for instance, *that spring has begun*, and that very same thing, *that spring has begun*, can be the case'.[104] In *Mind and World*, McDowell still conceives the openness to the layout of reality in our

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[101] I have taken a few first steps in this direction by examining some of the existential dimensions of Heidegger's (and Gadamer's) philosophy that can be read as a critical development of McDowell's concept of freedom. Cf. Thaning, M.S. 2013. Freiheit und Verantwortung bei Heidegger und Gadamer. In *Frei sein, frei handeln: Freiheit zwischen theoretischer und praktischer Philosophie*, ed. Angelo, D. et al. 29–57. Freiburg: Verlag Karl Alber; Thaning, M.S. (forthcoming). Eine sokratische Interpretation des Freiheitsbegriffs in Sein und Zeit. In *Heidegger in Marburg* (Schriftenreihe der Martin Heidegger Gesellschaft), ed. Figal, G. Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann. As for the temporal dimensions emphasised in *Being and Time*, I think these are more adequately addressed in philosophical hermeneutics (cf. Sects. 1, 2, 3, and 4 in Chap. 5 above).

[102] Cf. Heidegger, M. 1995. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World – finitude – solitude*, 177. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Heidegger, M. 2004. *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt – Endlichkeit – Einsamkeit*, 263. Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann.

[103] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 27. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Cf. Wittgenstein, L. 1984. *Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus*, §1. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag.

[104] Ibid.

perceptual experience as a matter of directly taking in propositional content
(i.e. facts).[105] Recently, he has changed his position so that experience is no longer
understood as propositionally structured, but rather as something that brings our
surroundings into view. In order to achieve discursively articulated content, an aspect
that is already grasped or carved out can be announced in the demonstrative judgement
– yet his new position still conceives the world as everything that is the case.[106]

However, from the perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology, such a conception
of the world is problematic because it reduces the whole to the sum of its parts. In *The
Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger says, paraphrasing a popular
proverb, that this kind of thinking is not able to see the world for the (disparate)
beings (*sieht vor lauter Seiendem die Welt nicht*).[107] The objection expressed meta-
phorically here is not that the world is something – a 'simultaneously manifest' entity
or being – over and above the multitude of disparate aspects that we can carve out and
discursively articulate, just as the forest is not a thing over and above the sum of its
trees. Rather, the point is that the Wittgensteinian concept of the world belies our
finite experiential dimension, in which world is the implicit horizon that cannot be
made fully accessible to our understanding, even in principle, and which therefore
determines our understanding in ways that we cannot fully comprehend.

As we have seen, McDowell endorses this view of understanding as finite and
dependent. But why, then, does he hold on to the idea of the world as everything
that is the case? Apparently, he does so because he thinks that nothing less can close
the gap between mind and world: 'When one thinks truly, what one thinks is what *is*
the case.'[108] Even without accepting a Wittgensteinian conception of the world, we
can hold on to the idea that, at best, thought can embrace reality. This is the point of
maintaining that meaning is dialectically constituted. As Heidegger stresses, when
we discursively articulate and thus 'carve out' a feature of experience in a judge-
ment, we also at the same time make manifest the unity of the feature that we
experience. In other words, we *announce* its unity in a judgement by discursively
articulating it. The unity that we announce in the judgement – the inconveniently
placed blackboard – is also *ein Seiendes*, an aspect of the layout of reality. As such,
in Heidegger's hermeneutic conception, which stresses the dynamic relation
between the whole and its parts, there is no gap between what the judgement
articulates and the layout of reality. However, if we conceive the world as the
sum or *total* of all such aspects, as McDowell recommends, we would be unable to
see the forest for the trees.

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[105] '[…] *that things* are thus and so is also, if one is not misled, an aspect of the layout of the world:
it is how things are' (McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 26. Cambridge: Harvard University
Press).

[106] McDowell, J. 2008. Responses. In *John McDowell: Experience, norm and nature*,
ed. Lindgaard, J. 238. London: John Wiley.

[107] Heidegger, M. 1995. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World – finitude – solitude*,
348. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Heidegger, M. 2004. *Die Grundbegriffe der
Metaphysik: Welt – Endlichkeit – Einsamkeit*, 504. Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann.

[108] McDowell, J. 1996. *Mind and World*, 27. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

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Index