

Hans-Georg Gadamer: Poetics and Truth in the Human Sciences

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The point is straightforward: in both philosophy and literature style is substance. Rhetorical amplitude and laconic contraction offer contrasting images of readings of the world... Within philosophy resides the perennial temptation of the poetic, either to be made welcome or to be rejected.

The Poetry of Thought, George Steiner.

Really, I am not a good writer; I am a speaker, a lecturer.

Writing and the Living Voice, Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Living in poetry is rather one of the ways through which we experience being moved within ourselves. In this only are humans able to find their self-fulfillment.

The Verse and the Whole, Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Modernity was, among other things, a gigantic exercise in abolishing individual responsibility other than that measured by the criteria of instrumental rationality and practical achievement.

Intimations of Postmodernity, Zygmunt Bauman.

Introduction.

My objective in this thesis is to reformulate how we think about theory in the human sciences. I focus my argument on Hans-Georg Gadamer's theme of methodological alienation in the human sciences. In addition, I focus on the following terms: *theoria*, poetics, truth, rhetoric, beauty. Gadamer's recovery of the question of truth (the "event of truth") and reformulation of what we do in conversation, provide an account of theory that permits us to break free of misconceptions that have pervaded the human sciences.

I discuss several key sociologists, writing at a critical time in the history of the sociology, during the 1960s and 1970s, by counter-pointing them with Gadamer's ideas. In doing so, we can see that they present the paradox of speech (i.e., how we make things known with words). Alvin Gouldner and C.W. Mills, for example, by focusing on the legacy of structural-functionalism, begin to assert a common theme that pointed to the linguistic nature of the problems of sociology. This theme is more fully explored in Chapter 2.

My methodology is Gadamerian insofar as my discussion rests on probing a series of questions considered by Gadamer. My presentation of ideas involves a conversational tendency, analogous in some ways to Gadamer's own Hegelian voice, but in no way corresponding to his. I proceed in a language of logical compositions. The key question is: What is theory in the human sciences? I do not formalize known rules of procedure but proceed through an encounter with Gadamer's language and several specific texts to set up a dialogue with the human sciences. To encounter Gadamer is to encounter the voices of Plato, Heidegger and Hegel.

This thesis develops a narrative about Gadamer's recovery of truth and its impact on the rhetorical norms of social theory. "Might it not be", Gadamer asks, "just a prejudice of modern times that the notion of progress that is in fact constitutive for the spirit of scientific research should be transferable to the whole of living culture?"¹ To what extent, then, does theory lie outside the metaphor of scientific research?

In Gadamer's view theory concerns our belonging (being-with-others), as a sharing in dialogue that simultaneously means our being "at home" in speech. If so, we can ask why theory is dominated by alien speech? Gadamer first articulates this theme in his doctoral studies on Plato's *Philebus*, published as *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, where in the chapter "Conversation and the Way We Come to Shared Understanding," he argues that Plato is concerned with the truth's "happening" in dialogue.²

Hence, Gadamer's major work, *Truth and Method*, concerns the question: "How do we live in *theoria* today?" Theory, then, it seems reasonable to say, is no longer reducible to the transference of scientific norms to social life (modern theory),

¹ Gadamer, Hans-Georg, "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy," in *Reason in the Age of Science*. Translated by Frederick G. Lawrence. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1983. pp.104-105.

² In his reading of Plato, Gadamer came to challenge Heidegger's reading of Plato as a major step toward "metaphysical thought's obliviousness to Being." [Translator's Introduction to Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Plato's Dialectical Ethics, Phenomenological Interpretations Relating to the 'Philebus'*. Translated and with an introduction by Robert M. Wallace. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.] At the same time Gadamer adopts Martin Heidegger's lifelong question of becoming at home in thinking. Heidegger writes in, "The Provenance of Thinking" (1973), "Are we already at home there? Hardly. What does it mean: to become at home in the province of thinking? It says: to attain a grounded residence in *Dasein* where thinking receives the determination of its essence. Parmenides provides us with a first hint as to which way the provenance of thinking is to be questioned. This hint is contained in the claim: "'Thinking and being' (i.e., perceiving and presencing) belong, namely, to one another." In Heidegger, Martin, *Four Seminars*, translated by Andrew Mitchell and Francois Raffoul. p. 93. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012.

rather it concerns the ancient question of truth; of speaking truth and not alienating truth. Once our theoretic awareness falls under the dominance of science, Gadamer argues, the natural link to the commonality of our understanding is broken. We lose our concern for the art of truth speaking, the rhetorical dimension of speaking, for we have now entered into alien models of speech. Speaking, therefore, with its power to generate a commonality of understanding and self-understanding, happens in the performative and rhetorical dimension of theory that cannot simply be subordinated to the norms of “science” – or as Gadamer would say, *method (methodological alienation)*.³ Gadamer states his intention: “Today one must say it with emphasis: The rationality of the rhetorical mode of argumentation, which seeks to bring “feelings” into play but fundamentally validates arguments and works with probability, is and remains a far stronger factor of our social determination than the certainties of science. Therefore I oriented myself expressly to rhetoric in *Truth and Method*, [...]”⁴

The human sciences, historically, reside in a tension, as it were a mid-point, between understanding truth as participation (found in the commonality of understanding and linguistic expression) and truth as objectification (following the norm of science). The way out, as Gadamer states, is to recover both rhetoric and truth. It will not strike us as odd that this mimics the ancient question of poetic and conceptual thinking. Still further, it resonates with Martin Heidegger’s comment as he struggled with Greek metaphysics: “Language is the most extensive way for the

³ In “Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy,” Gadamer writes “The commonality of all understanding as grounded, therefore, in its intrinsically linguistic quality seems to me to be an essential point in hermeneutic experience.” p. 110.

⁴ Gadamer, Hans-Georg, “On the Origins of Philosophical Hermeneutics”, in *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, translated by Robert R. Sullivan, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985. p. 182.

‘humanizing’ of beings (*poeticizing* beings) as well as for ‘dehumanizing’ human beings (*objectifying* them).”⁵

The human sciences are produced within of normative modes of knowing that has become symptomatic of modernity.⁶ Symptomatic that is of alien speech. Gadamer points to the hermeneutic universality of our linguistically communicative understanding, what he terms *Sprachlichkeit*, to show that we gain access to the communication of truth through speech and not method. Since we dialogue among beings we simultaneously author ourselves as ethical beings. Our modernity, therefore, presents to the human sciences a paradox in relation to the question of alien speech, pointing back, via Gadamer, to the Greeks and Plato’s *Phaedrus*. Plato’s distinctive struggle over the nature of *theoria* is vividly re-witnessed today in the question of modern theory: Truth and theory. Hence, our central question: “How are we to live in [modern] theory when we have become estranged (alienated) from the question of truth?”⁷

In his major work, *Truth and Method*, and in many other writings, Gadamer seeks to answer this question. Part of the trajectory of this work focuses attention on,

⁵ See, Heidegger, Martin. *Contributions to Philosophy (of The Event)*. Translated by Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012.

⁶ Theory, and specifically, social theory by, as Gadamer says “subscrib[es] to the logic of research and so present[s] itself as self-certifying, the interest in theoretical knowledge understands itself as extending humankind’s power by way of knowledge.” From “Praise of Theory.” In *Praise of Theory, Speeches and Essays*, translated by Chris Dawson, p. 23. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

⁷ Andrea Wilson Nightingale identifies this theme as central to Plato’s *Phaedrus* when she writes: “By offering in the *Phaedrus* a dramatization of and a meditation on the natures and varieties of alien discourse, Plato demands from the reader a vigilance concerning the *logoi*, external or internal, analytic or non-analytic.” From *Genres in Dialogue, Plato and the Construct of Philosophy*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995. p.166

among others, Plato, Martin Heidegger and Paul Celan as his journey unfolds. Our guiding theme is to show how hermeneutics and these figures help to illuminate the relation of truth and theory. One essential move for Gadamer is to show that art makes a special aesthetic and ethical claim upon us that cannot simply be understood as conceptually derived. Truth, in other words, is an experience that is not solely conceptual. Truth goes beyond the conceptual, but theory derives from truth. Art, in Gadamer's view, has its being in the living event of its appearance, or its performance. Thus it challenges us to rethink the dominant approach of the human sciences that has been governed by the rule of method, a challenge that art asks us to recognize because, as Gadamer argues, art itself lies in the universal meaning of *Sprachlichkeit* [linguisticity] as do the human sciences:

In my book *Truth and Method*, I began my considerations first of all with art, and not with science or even the "human sciences." Even within the human sciences it is art that brings the basic questions of human being to our awareness in such a unique way – indeed, in such a way that no resistance or objection against it arises. An artwork is like a model [*Vorbild*] for us in this regard.⁸

Art opens us to the question of truth. It is, in Gadamer's words, like a model. The modernist work of art especially, for him, takes on significance because, put simply, art defies rationalization and the technological world *by offering an alternative mode of being which addresses us beyond our conceptual schemes*. Hence, the poetry of Paul Celan is important to Gadamer since it points to the fact that language exists in the mystery of an encounter. Art itself points to something that is irrefutable, that always remains un-circumventable. Art too consists of the mystery of an encounter. When we

⁸ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "From Word to Concept: The Task of Hermeneutics as Philosophy." In *The Gadamer Reader, A Bouquet of the Later Writings*. Edited and translated by Richard E. Palmer. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007. p. 115.

encounter a poem, exemplified as we noted, in Gadamer's own encounter with the poems of Paul Celan, we see that the meaning of the poem is the poem itself, but also implies a dialogue. The poem, therefore, speaks. "The poem compels through the way it says what it says. Indeed, this holds for all rhetorical uses of language."⁹

The human sciences, we argue, require the rhetorical power of language to convey theoretically valid truth. A theoretically valid truth in Gadamer's view will also have a proximity to the good. Gadamer's work, therefore, relies on the recovery of the question of the truth of art to show how the communication of truth happens, along with our ethical attachment to the good, within the human sciences. He writes:

The hermeneutics developed here is not therefore, a methodology of the human sciences, but an attempt to understand *what the human sciences truly are, beyond their methodological self-consciousness*, and what connects them to the totality of our experience of the world.¹⁰

In his essay "From Word to Concept" he adds:

[...] hermeneutics is not a doctrine of methods for the humanities and social sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*] but rather a basic insight into what thinking and knowing mean for human beings in their practice life, even if one makes use of scientific methods.¹¹

For Gadamer, modernity's paradox is epitomized by the human sciences in many ways. Specifically in two attitudes: First, their assimilation of the ideal of the modern advancement of science and, second, their simultaneous movement toward the effacement of truth. As a point of departure, Gadamer, of course, turns to the experience of truth in art. What connects us to the totality of our experience of the world, according to Gadamer, is displayed by the work of art. Therefore, he reminds us,

⁹ "From Word to Concept," p. 115.

¹⁰ *Truth and Method* [First Edition], 1975. xiii.

¹¹ "From Word to Concept," p. 113.

art counters the dominance of science. When struck by the ancient artistry of the dialogue found in Plato, for example, we see that the locus of theory lies in the spoken art, where theory is more like an *event* than an *object*. It is this insight that lays a basis for considering our relation, not simply to art, but to the idea of theory as performative. It is Gadamer's twofold interest in the *presentation* and the *performance* (of art and theory) that contrasts to method and the dominant procedural approach to truth found historically in the human sciences. Hermeneutic identity and art allow us to recognize the different ways in which we communicate precision and truth. Gerald Bruns notes that:

Hermeneutic identity is not something to be construed like a meaning but something to be traced, like a pattern or arrangement: it is a formal intelligibility. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer calls this event (perhaps less than facetiously) "transformation into structure" [*die Verwandlung ins Gebilde*], a taking shape in which the work materializes as the thing it is *in our experience of it*.¹²

Art "speaks," the poem "speaks." How, then, might theory "speak"? Both art and speech concern, in some measure, this transformation, so does the authoring of theory. Every interpretation we make, while it concerns knowing the world, is a speaking, a speaking to me, you, us. What makes speaking possible is always there; speaking makes speaking possible. Theory is, therefore, in some measure always language speaking. In Gadamer's view, the phenomenon of *Sprachlichkeit* [linguisticity] is the way we voice something, including our writing; therefore, writing rests on the speaking voice. He claims that:

The way the voice is articulated as a speaking voice – perhaps even when one reads without making any sound – suggest that writtenness [*Schriftlichkeit*],

¹² Bruns, Gerald L. *On the Anarchy of Poetry and Philosophy: A Guide for the Unruly*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2006. p. 35.

even that of the alphabet, is an articulation of a high level of complexity. The voice that the writer or reader “hears” as he or she writes or reads clearly attains a far higher level of articulation than could any possible writtenness.¹³

Our entire experience of the world, therefore, is linguistically mediated by speech, which means that everything, even what is non-linguistic (i.e. art) is capable of linguistic interpretation.¹⁴ This does not mean that everything is language. Art speaks to us. Art, like the word, presents a limit to experience, one that resides in the poetic word or the work of art. In both we find the infinite task: to understand and establish new ways of speaking.

Speech encompasses the world. When we speak we are in the world. Speech concerns both our finitude and the infinite power of the word. Speech is the carrying on of the infinite conversation born out of our finitude. Our being “at home” in speech is a non-place in language, and language, as Schmidt says, “throws itself ever anew into a darkness beyond reach of its own reflexivity.”¹⁵ But there is a knowing that happens here, a knowing that cannot be brought under control. This is expressed in the poetic realm. Speech encapsulates us in the ethical dimension of our life struggle, a struggle that concerns the way we put ourselves into words, when seek to find the right word, when we seek to open ourselves to truth at the threshold of our lyrical utterances.

In contrast to method as knowing, we must look to modes of utterance and forms of authorship other than those belonging to science. Gadamer describes this other

¹³ Gadamer, Hans-Georg, “Hermeneutics Tracking the Trace [On Derrida],” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p. 389.

¹⁴ See Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Aesthetics and Hermeneutics.” In *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Translated by David E. Linge. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977. pp. 90-100.

¹⁵ Schmidt, Dennis, J. *Lyrical and Ethical Subjects: Essays on the Periphery of the Word, Freedom, and History*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005. p. 131.

knowing as rooted in our encounter with language, a knowing that concerns coming up with the right word at the right moment, a form of exactness in what we say, that is found in the Ancient concept of rhetoric.¹⁶

Truth and Method, therefore, sets before us two key questions. First, art is not necessarily linguistic but it does convey truth that is capable of interpretation (art constitutes a strong kind of evidence, yet its meaning is conceptually imprecise, e.g. it is not itself linguistic). How does our experience of art direct us to understand the restriction that scientific thought imposes on truth? Second, how might this help us to understand the norms of truth as they actually appear in the concerns of the human sciences? How might the poetic in other words, in contrast to science, offer a corrective to the dominant understanding of the human sciences and their communication of truth?

We are a part of the totality of language. We always stand in the stream of tradition. This is where we find and know ourselves through the other. Society concerns the conditionality of our being a part of the being of language. Speaking is not the before, or after thinking, but is its happening. Language is a phenomena of non-objectivity. Language, Gadamer says, concerns an “essential self-forgetfulness that characterizes the performative character of speech.”

Hermeneutics draws our attention to an alienating effect of a technical way of relating to our speech. The poet is the witness of this. His word throws light on the collective experience of modernity found in the paradox of *technical speech*, *methodological* and *alien* speech, speech that disconnects us from being with others as

¹⁶ Gadamer, Hans-Georg and Jean Grondin. “A Look Back over the Collected Works and Their Effective History,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, pp. 421-423.

communicative partners in life. Gadamer says, we are neither “subjects on the one hand, nor objects, on the other.”¹⁷ What really matters, argues Gadamer, “is the human beings encounter with himself in relation to an other different from himself.”¹⁸ How we come to understand one another, and ourselves, cannot be embraced by method. Rather we participate “in an association with things with which we are dealing,” things that are already under way, where we already understand other people; it is not about contrasting methods.¹⁹

Method, then, sets itself apart from the way we participate in the living life of language. In this way we can see why, for Gadamer, method and poetics become an internal tension in the human sciences and beyond. Poetry involves forms of questioning, as Gadamer says, that do not let go of us. The one who speaks resides in living speech; we speak with the naming power of words in a linguistically mediated world in which we are able to experience and secure truth. While the experience of the word is an experience that “even in its communicative actuality, escapes capture and so remains always an unthinkable finitude.”²⁰ Consequently, Gadamer identifies the universality of science in terms of a curious yet binding tension: “The path of the West, which is also the path of science, has forced upon us the separation and never completely achievable unity of poetizing and thinking.”²¹ This speaks deeply to

¹⁷ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *The Beginning of Philosophy*. New York: Continuum, 1999. p. 31.

¹⁸ Ibid. pp. 22-23.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 30.

²⁰ Schmidt. p.114.

²¹ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Thinking and Poetizing in Heidegger and in Holderlin’s *Andenken*”, Hans-Georg Gadamer, in, *Heidegger Toward the Turn: Essays on the Work of the 1930s*, edited by James Risser. Albany: State University of New York, 1999. p.145.

Gadamer's affinity with Heidegger and his teaching, and, in turn, Heidegger's recurring concern with the primacy of the poetic as an opening up to the truth of *being* in the word.

Our focal question, in light of the conflict between participation and objectivity, is our relationship to the truth of the word. The truth of the word will not, notes Dennis Schmidt, be found "if we begin with the assumption that the word is unproblematically found in the written word or the sign."²² The self-understanding of the human sciences, because it is primarily a verbal experience, we can see, presupposes a question of our proximity to speech – to the living word. Schmidt adds: "...in its original form, reading is an act that mimes spoken speech. In other words, the experience of the written word returns us to the spoken word."²³

Things speak to us; we interpret what we hear and what we say, hear words that are spoken to us, words that convey an exactness about that which is true. We live in a universality of listening and speaking. We detect a living voice behind the written word. The truth of the word is not to be found in written word or sign. The truth of the word concerns the meaningfulness that occurs in what it is possible to say (*unconcealment*), meaning that we lack the word as much as we find the right word, so that something is there (that we listen too), which is what happens, for example, with the poetic word. To find the right word means we voice something in words. Seeking the right word is not about information but about questioning, seeing new questions. Finding the right word concerns the right understanding, which means a process of

²² Schmidt, p.107.

²³ Ibid. p.102.

questioning that remains open to unconcealment along the way. It concerns following a path and finding the right words that will reach out to the other person.

Jean-Luc Nancy speaks of the voice opening us to the other. Every word involves an indeterminate voice, or as he says, “Voice exists outside of both contradiction and unity.”²⁴ Our words, our way of speaking in this manner does not concern simply our use of words, since words, like human beings, can never be thought of as objects to be used, but rather they are testimony to our voicing something in living speech.

How, then, can we hear the truth of the word? How might this hearing of the word concern the human sciences? The human sciences experience the word, not in terms of living speech, but in terms of conceptual exactitude and abstraction. Thinking is tied to the grammatical concept of the proposition, yet it is here that we face in these spaces of concept formation our estrangement from the power of the truth of the word – the separation of the living voice from the truth of the word. The truth of what is said, according to Gadamer, concerns the way words show and display what is there when something is spoken about. He calls this the truth of the said [*Gesagtes*], that is, the truth of what is that comes to stand in speaking.²⁵ The living voice remains central to Gadamer’s work.

Dieter Misgeld notes in, “Poetry, Dialogue and Negotiation,” that it is Gadamer’s love of poetry that shapes his deep suspicion of any instrumental attitude

²⁴ Nancy, Jean-Luc. “Vox Clamans in Deserto.” In *The Birth to Presence*, translated by Brian Holmes & others. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993. p. 241.

²⁵ Gadamer, “Thinking and Poetizing in Heidegger and in Holderlin’s *Andenken*,” p. 149.

toward truth, knowledge and interpersonal relations.²⁶ We know too that poetry was the theme of his life since his youth. The poem is significant because it shows truth as *unconcealment*, when we recognize something to be there, to be present in poetic speaking that is not a consequence of judgment or logic, but rather concerns the way we can hear the rightness of what is being said.

Hermeneutics has nothing to do with providing a method (especially for the human sciences). Gadamer's vision of language is not about how we adopt procedures for the human sciences, rather hermeneutics provides the context for reconstructing our modernist view of theory and the world (the logical unfolding of metaphysics), one that is dominated by methodological estrangement, rooted in a metaphysical conception of the subject who stands over its objects of study – a subject who is external to himself. We come to find out that the path away from the poet now entails a return to the poet. Hermeneutics involves a recovery of the power of the poet's word and the power of the Greek conception of *theoria*, theory. What the poet reveals concerns the truth of the word and the way we experience truth and estrangement in the human sciences. In this way Gadamer defines his main thesis: *Truth is not Method*.

The hermeneutic speech challenges the logic speaking that governs human sciences: "One would really honor the realm of the *Geisteswissenschaften* [human sciences] much more adequately, I think, if we brought them back under the older

²⁶ Misgeld, Dieter. "Poetry, Dialogue and Negotiation." In, *Festivals of Interpretation: Essays on Hans-Georg Gadamer*, edited by Kathleen Wright. Albany: State University of New York, 1990.

concept of rhetoric, where one deals with believable statements and not scientifically compelling truths.”²⁷

The human sciences lie in proximity to the poetic. Like the poetic word event, the human sciences are concerned to use the power of the spoken word. In the broadest sense, we argue, this is what drives and shapes the deeper aspect of their activity. Strictly speaking, the human sciences have estranged themselves from the truth of words by adopting a restrictive view of the naming power of words. Their conceptuality is shaped by a tendency to treat language as an instrument or a system of signs. Yet, when language is in kinship with methodological ideal of objectivity, it creates a twofold loss: a loss of self-discovery and self-formation (being moved within ourselves by the word) and, as a consequence, a disenchanting attitude toward the communicative power of theory. The poet presents to his readers the word, and thus the concept, in the naming power of his words.

By turning to the posture of the sociologist, we see that his posture is composed of a fundamental relationship to dialogue and community, as is the poet's, but with a fundamental difference. Theory becomes alien to this kind of self-fulfillment, thus failing to approximate a dialogue with the other. What we find is that the sociologist is caught between living speech and theory and consequently is caught between the objectification of social life in theory and the objectification of his own self-formation.²⁸ This is the crux of the problem. In contrast to the poet's utterances, the externalization of truth, becomes an estranged knowing (objectification), that can only

²⁷ Gadamer and Grondin. Interview, p. 415.

²⁸ See, for example, Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Modern Theory and the Greeks.” In *The Beginning of Knowledge*. New York: Continuum, 2003. p.119-126.

be answered by returning to the poet, a return that evokes the power of the poet's word, that allows us to identify a fuller understanding of the importance and potency of the ethical and the lyrical aspects of theory.

The reassertion of the dialogic as a poetic space points a way to overcoming the dialogue of disenchantment, with its methodological alienation, its estrangement of knowing that happens in the human sciences. A shift is required in our view of language. Encapsulated by Gadamer's famous expression: Being that can be understood is language. Di Cesare notes, "*Truth and Method* converts a Heideggerian ontology into hermeneutics. Heidegger's fundamental ontology: There is no Being without the understanding of Being, according to Di Cesare, shows that "ontology must recover itself in hermeneutics – which means at the same time reestablish itself, as if after an illness, but also retreat or revoke itself. To put it differently: ontology necessarily becomes hermeneutics."²⁹

Being is now the question of understanding. The truth of the word shows us that what comes to stand in thinking is not simply a consequence of a proposition but involves in the Being of language itself. The poets cannot say what Being is, because they do not make any ontological claim about Being (they are not philosophers), but they bring forth words as an event of being that is happening in the poetic mode of presentation. We know that Plato's dialogues are displays of the natural performative mode of poetic speech and its tension with the dialectical speech. The Greek word had a power; it could both challenge and yet give birth to the enchantment of conceptual thinking. When we contain the word with the concept, as we do within the logic of the

²⁹ Di Cesare, Donatella. *Gadamer, A Philosophical Portrait*. Translated by Niall Keane. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013. p. 179.

human sciences, we at once situate ourselves in these two occurrences: the performative and the ontological.

Gadamer is sensitized to and critically suspicious of *conceptuality* [*Begrifflichkeit*], especially philosophical terminology, because the real being of language, what is being said, compromises the speaking voice. This suspicion underscores his work; it concerns how the terminology of concepts results in a loss of the concrete immediacy of truth. Conceptual speech resides in a speaking that goes on in all language, in the power of words. The mysterious power of language itself concerns how the truth of the word is disclosed in speech. The word lets us see, so that something is “there.”³⁰

Every word concerns experience; experience is a hermeneutic act, as the word opens us to the world. The poetic word can stand forth as true, yet the word can never, as Dennis Schmidt puts it, “bring itself to a concept, nor can it disclose itself to itself as such.”³¹ As a consequence of our finitude and the infinity of the word, every experience is open. Experience, therefore, transforms us. The poetic word comes to epitomize this. “Experience is the experience of human finitude.”³² There is no outside to experience or outside to our finitude. To think critically we must be open to experience and able to give birth to words that convey that experience conceptually. To think critically is to deconstruct and overcome acts that are forced upon us in recognizing our limits. It is the limits placed on understanding that force us to understand. Since the social sciences favor external description – implying a self-disposition of objectification – they create

³⁰ Gadamer, “Thinking and Poetizing in Heidegger and in Holderlin’s *Andenken*,” p. 150.

³¹ Schmidt, p. 114.

³² *Truth and Method*. [Second, Revised Edition] 2011. p. 357.

as well as become alienating and disruptive of the genuine power of dialogue in the expression of experience. The poet is a figure of non-instrumental identity as well as a counterpoint to the ideal of objectivity as the estrangement of truth. Poetry is dialogical, life becomes possible through our relationship with the other, the other as a positive limit, were we engage and share ourselves in dialectical movement of thought. It is this that truly illuminates our relationship to theory, especially in the human sciences.³³

Sociology, Bauman notes, offers solutions for the crisis in which it stands and consequently mirrors. Sociology is to be seen as a symptom of the crisis of western metaphysics, since, to use Carlo Sini's words, their preconceptions as science have been put to work as an "estranged knowing."³⁴ As we know, a key part of the human sciences concerns their communication with others, and, crucially, how others speak to them. Scientific conceptuality enters into to contest the value of everyday speech. Metaphysical thinking comes to engage and yet distort the realm of everyday communication by introducing a misunderstanding that consequently imposes itself, between the voice and the speaker, as a limitation on the being of language. Our second intention in this thesis is to show that it is this limitation, this vision of a scientific language that has shaped the so-called "crisis" of sociology.

The human sciences pose the problem of language and truth (in the Greek sense) because they are embedded in restrictive metaphysical assumptions. Contrary to

³³ Jean Grondin describes how Gadamer's recognition that the poem "[...] fed his doubts about science's monopolistic claim to corner truth." See, Grondin, Jean. *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003. p. 50.

³⁴ See Sini's, *Ethics of Writing*, translated by Silvia Benso and Brian Schroeder. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009 as he discusses Heidegger's work, especially, *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, where some interesting parallels can be found between Sini's writings and aspects of Gadamer's work (methodological knowing and estranged knowing, for example).

their desires, the human sciences come to question their grounding in a traditional metaphysics (method) as they seek alternate self-understandings. Gadamer offers a view to us for the identity of the human sciences that lie in their relationship to the living experience of the word, to the hermeneutic situatedness of the human being in the primacy of the spoken word, and into the infinite dialogue that escapes complete conceptual capture.

The human being encounters himself in relation to the other who is different from him.³⁵ This is a dialogical encounter. The “I-lessness” for speaking is always involved in what Gadamer terms the sphere of the “we.” Speech constitutes itself in the essential self-forgetfulness of language (i.e., grammar, structure and the syntax of language).³⁶ We simply speak. We also encounter language. We encounter something that goes beyond everything conceptual that now concerns the ethical and lyrical dimension of theory. Theory is an ethical encounter that occurs in the experience of conceptual capture. In striving to experience the word, in striving for conceptual understanding, we always experience ourselves in relation to the other. Speech preserves our belonging together. Poetry captures this encounter, for the poetic word

³⁵ Further understood, as a [...] “‘taking part’ in something, a participation that more closely resembles what takes place, for example, in the believer who is faced with a religious message than it does the relationship between subject and object that plays itself out in the natural sciences.” In Gadamer’s “Hermeneutic Access to the Beginning.” In *The Beginning of Philosophy*. New York: Continuum, 1998, pp. 30-31.

³⁶ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Man and Language.” In *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, translated and edited by David E. Linge. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976. pp. 64-65.

opens us to the world in a special way. The poetic word concerns the profound task involving the search for language (e.g., Mandelstam, Celan), while language “hides.”³⁷

Language, in Gadamer’s view, concerns thinking, “realized not in statements but as conversation [...]”³⁸ The decisive question then is how we play with the word, where, “the word is meant not as a statement but as something existing in itself” (as in, for example, the poetic word). Such words, Gadamer argues, are words that can truly speak. What makes a word truly a word, a word that speaks? He describes this as “a telling [*sagend*, saying] word.”³⁹ But what does a word tell that a concept does not, and what does the word concept mean, since a concept is a word? What hinders in the sociological way of speaking is the absence of poet’s way of releasing meaning into the concept. Speaking of the poets, Gadamer says, they “[...] are the ones who make use of the flexibility of the linguistic gamut beyond rules, beyond conventions, and who know how to bring the unsaid to speak within the possibilities that language itself offers.”⁴⁰

Speech is a conversation with ourselves that has already begun as a conversation with another. Our inner conversations repeatedly give voice to the word. Out of these words we find that truth and certainty develop in the dialectics of speech; in this way, truth, first and foremost, concerns how the word stands and the way one

³⁷ Schmidt, Dennis, J. *Lyrical and Ethical Subjects: Essays on the Periphery of the Word, Freedom, and History*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005. p. 115.

³⁸ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Boundaries of Language,” in *Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics*. Edited by Lawrence K. Smith. New York: Lexington Books, 2000. p. 16.

³⁹ Gadamer, “On the Truth of the Word,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p. 137.

⁴⁰ Gadamer, “Boundaries of Language,” pp. 12-13.

can stand by it.⁴¹ The poet's word is linguistically mediated in a world where we generate spaces for speech out of the unity of sense and sound. Concepts are words that still concern the living voice, because concepts occur in talking, saying, thinking, commentating, and speaking. Concepts, then, are not simply generated out of the spontaneity of human subjectivity, nor are they installed in talk by way of methodological detachment, rather they occur in our attempt to converse with one another, in a conversation that is created out of the logic of question and answer, "because I ask myself as I would ask another, and I speak to myself as another would speak to me."⁴²

Our ability to play with language, apparent in both the child and the poet, indicates an unending process that shows us that "a thinking conversation cannot simply be made in statements."⁴³ Truth in language becomes possible when the word is presided over not by a detached question, or "findings," given precedence by science, but by the word in which truth happens. At issue is truth saying, not method – methodological speech.

Dennis Schmidt reminds us "we have lost something of the capacity to open ourselves to the real force of language especially at the moment of its greatest concentration, in the poem."⁴⁴ The poetic power of speech becomes a focal point for understanding linguistic estrangement in human sciences, and, specifically, in

⁴¹ "On the Truth of the Word," p. 137.

⁴² "Boundaries of Language." p.16.

⁴³ Gadamer, "Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language," in *Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, pp.40-41.

⁴⁴ Schmidt, Dennis, J. *Lyrical and Ethical Subjects: Essays on the Periphery of the Word, Freedom, and History*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005. p. 30.

sociology. Zygmunt Bauman and Gianni Vattimo have respectively identified the way the human sciences mimic the struggle of modernity. Therefore, while the hermeneutic conception of poetic language speaks to the anarchic potential of speech and the word, the poetic word now becomes essential to grasping our relationship to critical thinking and modern social life because hermeneutics speaks simultaneously to the state of sociology and our experience of modern life.

We recall how Bauman spoke of sociology as obsessed with its own crisis while it also presents itself as a way of solving social crisis. Both modernity and the human sciences share the “crisis of the dissolution of metaphysics.”⁴⁵ In Vattimo’s view: “[...] hermeneutics does not invent or discover but rather receives and struggles to respond to the decline of modern metaphysics and the Eurocentric view of the world.”⁴⁶

My argument is that we are speakers first and foremost. Our lives and our world is the infinity of speech. We live in the possibility of being true (saying what is true) and in the possibilities of our self-understanding (of the truth of being). This truth mimics the truth of language. However, this ‘mystery’ is only a ‘mystery’ from the point of view of the norm of ‘science’. We recognize our speech when we are with others because we recognize others. Gadamer says the ontological priority of the hermeneutics of speech shows that the human sciences are in this universality of human communication. Our concern, then with the linguistic generation of theory, our having to know and to say, looks different to science. Knowledge built on the truth of speech is

⁴⁵ Vattimo, Gianni and Santiago Zabala. *Hermeneutic Communism, From Heidegger to Marx*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001. pp. 110-111.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 96-97.

different to knowledge built on ‘science’. Knowledge is social, not an isolated dialogue from the values of speech. The event of truth occurs in our linguistic being with others. In other words, it occurs beyond ‘science’.

The Rhetorical and Ethical Dimension of the Vocation of *Theoria*

In this chapter, I focus on the rhetorical and ethical dimension of theory. Why is theory rhetorical? When we speak, we bring something to understanding. We wish to establish why speech, which precedes all logos, defines theory in the human sciences. We learn from Plato that the vocation of *theoria* is rhetorical. When Gadamer revisits Plato, he draws our attention to this. Speaking is the space of mediation in which understanding happens; it is where “true being” and “being true” are in harmony. The expression of true knowledge requires the recognition of the practical value of understanding, in other words, our ability to speak to one another with understanding. Gadamer tells us that one who knows a *techne*, but does not understand it, would be impotent and alien to the authorship of their *logoi*, as we find at the core of Plato’s *Apology*. In natural speech, we find words to say what we want to say to each other. In this chapter, we conclude that Gadamer’s conception of saying and truth, emerging out of Heidegger’s thinking on being and speech, shows why theory is a claim about authentic speaking (dialectical ethics). The way we speak, our hermeneutic speech, our choice of responsibility regarding our rhetoric, is ethical. It defines the good as fundamental to the identity of the theorist.

Hermeneutics, Dennis J. Schmidt says, is ultimately “an ethical struggle to put oneself in words.”⁴⁷ Searching for the right word is a matter of understanding and this is fundamental to the hermeneutic performance of language. Gadamer says, “Life interprets itself.” Life itself has a hermeneutic structure.”⁴⁸ Understanding, then, is the core of hermeneutics. There is an indissoluble connection between thinking and speaking, which, as Gadamer says, compels hermeneutics to become philosophy. Hermeneutics rests on this insight. “Hermeneutics is above all a practice, the art of understanding and of making something understood to someone else. It is the heart of all education that wants to teach how to philosophize. In it, what one has to exercise above all is the ear, the sensitivity for perceiving prior determinations, anticipations, and imprints that reside in concepts.”⁴⁹ In other words, every thinker is a type of poet with an ear for the word. The thinker makes the word speak.

The human sciences, it follows, are the open task of better and better understanding, that resides in the finitude of every speaker. In other words, hermeneutics cannot be appropriated by science, adopted, or “used” in any way. Hermeneutics is language, or, to use a specific term that Gadamer adopts, it is *linguisticity* [*Sprachlichkeit*]; words come forth and happen in the universality of

⁴⁷ Schmidt, Dennis, J. *Lyrical and Ethical Subjects: Essays on the Periphery of the Word, Freedom, and History*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005. p. 131.

⁴⁸ *Truth and Method*. [Second, Revised Edition] 2011. p. 226.

⁴⁹ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey In *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer: The Library of Living Philosophers Volume XXIV*, edited by Lewis Edwin Hahn. Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1997. p. 17.

speech. Gadamer says language is extensive with the world; language is not something that is discrete to us. Thus he says: “Language in words is [...] linguisticality.”⁵⁰

Hermeneutics, we can see, concerns how we understand, and understanding constitutes the nature and scope of the human sciences. The most pertinent action of understanding is speech. Our struggle to speak, to put ourselves in words, anticipates the other and the bringing to presence our relation to being.

Schmidt addresses the performance of language. The main point is that we cannot remove ourselves from the performance of language. He speaks of our *fidelity*, our attachment to speech in the way we perform thinking and words. He notes that by staying close to the performative saying of words and the way they work, we experience language itself. Experiencing language in this way means we are less likely to be dislocated from our place in understanding. The importance of this is that in understanding we “understand ourselves as ethical subjects”.⁵¹ As we communicate, and communicate ideas, Gadamer says, we are not simply communicating concepts but we are, equally, communicating ourselves as ethical and lyrical subjects.

Schmidt sees a shift in our understanding of the question of the relation of the poetic word and politics today. He notes that Plato and Gadamer both pose the question of the poetic and the political as the relation between the possibilities of language and political actions. Our relationship between writing and speaking now becomes central to the struggle in the human sciences since it concerns how we theorize our selfhood (“moral bearing”) and work toward our lyrical creation (“poetics”) of theory.

⁵⁰ Gadamer and Grondin, “A Look Back over the Collected Works and Their Effective History,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p. 420.

⁵¹ Schmidt, Dennis, J. *Lyrical and Ethical Subjects: Essays on the Periphery of the Word, Freedom, and History*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005. p. 5.

Social Theory & the Question of Hermeneutic Truth

We can now see that we are dealing with truth claims that can be characterized as both ethical and lyrical. Gerald Burns clarifies the “event” (of truth) this way: “Gadamer’s idea, derived already from his reading of the Platonic dialogues, is that the work of art is more of an event than it is an object, in which the main question to ask about the work is not “Is it Art?” or “What is it?” or even “How is it made?” but “How does it happen?”⁵²

So what does truth mean in this context? Specifically, we have to ask what does “hermeneutic truth” mean? We ask this because truth, for example, in the human sciences, has developed within the horizon of science. Truth, in Gadamer’s view, is what happens when we understand, and understanding is a product of conversation. Truth of the word, meant in conversation, connects with the primitive sense of truth as *aletheia* (for the Greeks), the way of saying that makes something visible to us because it says something that is part of the living process of being understood.⁵³

So truth, in this sense, is not about the statements that we make, in the detached vocabulary of science, but the way we have of making words assert themselves and the way they stand as true for us. Truth, in this way, is to be understood as an event of understanding and not a procedure.

Ultimately understanding, all understanding, is already given in self-understanding. What we misunderstand in the human sciences, is that we cannot escape

⁵² Bruns, Gerald L. “Ancients and Moderns: Gadamer’s Aesthetic Theory and the Poetry of Paul Celan.” In *On the Anarchy of Poetry and Philosophy: A Guide for the Unruly*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2006. p. 33-34.

⁵³ Gadamer, “On the Truth of the Word,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p. 137.

our hermeneutic identity. What lies beyond all the methodology of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, says Gadamer, and beyond all epistemology, is the “unity of dialogue and dialectic that in a surprising manner link Hegel and Plato to one another”, because now “the mystery of the question, the motivating interest that precedes all knowledge and interpretation, took center stage.”⁵⁴

Hermeneutics lies outside the worldview of science, and thus can challenge it and bring into question its own universal claims. Di Cesare writes:

Experience unifies perceptions and concepts into universality, which actually overshadows the universality of science. But it differs from the universality of science too: it is a universality at once open to and inseparable from experienced perceptions. This universality, which must be distinguished from the abstract, universal concept of science, shows the constitutive openness of experience, which is always changing and transformable.⁵⁵

Understanding, therefore, is not to be mistaken as an alternative way to describe the methods of the human sciences, or as offering a method of understanding, rather, it is a question of appreciating how understanding occurs in them. What occurs in understanding, Gadamer reminds us, is the “event of truth.” In this way, the underlying struggle of the human sciences now mimics Plato’s famous discussion of the ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy, as a concern with the language of sociology.

Heidegger exposed a key problem within the human (historical) sciences, in his lectures on ontology of human “facticity” (how being opens up and circumscribes the respective “there” ... namely, *Dasein*, and hermeneutics (that interprets the

⁵⁴ Gadamer, “The Heritage of Hegel,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p. 332.

⁵⁵ Di Cesare, *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait*, p. 104.

communicating of this “facticity”), is explicitly explored, and extended, at the core of Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*.

In this context Heidegger wrote that:

Dilthey adopted Scheiermacher’s concept of hermeneutics, defining it as “the formulation of rules of understanding” (technique of interpreting written words), but he supported it with an analysis of understanding...in the context of his research on the development of the human sciences. But it is precisely here that a disastrous limitation in disposition shows itself. The decisive epochs in the actual development of hermeneutics (patristic period and Luther) remained hidden from him, since he always investigated hermeneutics as a theme only to the extent that it displayed a tendency to what he himself considered to be its essential dimension – a methodology for the hermeneutical human sciences.⁵⁶

Alvin Gouldner, Peter Berger, Alan Blum, C. W. Mills, Richard Brown and Zygmunt Bauman have all declared the ossification of language in the human sciences, a claim that parallels Gadamer’s specific hermeneutic challenge to the scientific conceptual language of the human sciences. I will draw special attention to the writings of the social theorist Zygmunt Bauman. Bauman’s work, especially following his publication, in 1978, of *Hermeneutics and Social Science: Approaches to Understanding* – a work that traces the significance of hermeneutics to critical theory in the human sciences – marks a turning point, as a profound reshaping in his style of thinking and writing provides a prolific body of shifting investigations and configurations of theory.⁵⁷ The key, it seems, especially in Bauman’s later works, is his

⁵⁶ Heidegger, Martin. *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, translated by John van Buren. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999. p. 11.

⁵⁷ Peter Beilharz’s book, *Zygmunt Bauman, Dialectic of Modernity*. London: Sage Publications, (2000), one of several studies on Bauman’s thought to be published in recent years, offers a clear summary of his ideas. It opens, however, with the poignant and striking proclamation: “Does Sociology have a future? In one perspective Bauman might be its last man.” (Preface).

writing and style and its relationship to the pluralistic epistemological claims, and richly theoretical claims, he can make about social life.

Poetics and Truth

Speech concerns and simultaneously reveals a tension between our “membership in society and the sovereignty of investigation.”⁵⁸ Consequently, Gadamer asks, “What brings together both methodological access to our world and the conditions of our social life?”⁵⁹ The answer to this question lies in how words show truth’s presence, how we can hear truth in the word. This is why poetic speech matters.

In Zbigniew Herbert’s words, we read the “writing of the clouds” and remain faithful to “uncertain clarity.”⁶⁰ Everything points away from a reductive truth to truth that resounds in words, words that are not containable as fixed concepts. W. H. Auden wrote: “One demands two things of a poem. First, it must be a well-made verbal object that does honor to the language in which it is written. Second, it must say something significant about a reality common to us all, put from a unique perspective. What the poet says has never been said before, once it has been said, his *readers recognize its validity for themselves* [*my emphasis*].”⁶¹ What we learn from the above is something

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 311.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 311. He adds to the point by asking: “where can we find an orientation, a philosophical justification, for a scientific and critical effort which shares the modern ideal of method and yet which does not lose the conditions of sociality with and justification of our practical living?”

⁶⁰ Herbert, Zbigniew. “To Ryszard Krywicki – a Letter” p. 21, and, “Mr. Cogito and the Imagination” p. 19. In *Report from a Besieged City*. New York: Ecco Press, 1985.

⁶¹ From the Forward by W. H. Auden to *Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems*, translated and introduced by George L. Kline. London: Penguin Books Inc., 1973.

akin to what Gadamer recognizes as the power of the poetic word to speak communicatively with a community.

Poetry draws our attention to the way we have become technicians of our own lives, for it captures the very distinct way in which the nature of human understanding occurs in speech. Gadamer's poetic path, differing from Heidegger's, remains intimate with insights that place the figure of the poet at the center of philosophy.⁶² In his *Autobiographical Reflections*, Gadamer says that we are aware that conceptual explication is never exhausted by the poetic image. Speaking is not something that originally exists for us (subjectively) rather; it is something that happens in our relation to others. Truth, for example, is amplified by the power of the poetic word and our relation to others, for the poetic word concerns a sharing of expression and understanding that occurs in hermeneutic experience, as it were, before conceptual clarification; poetic diction, then, is not restricted by conceptual determinants.

Heidegger's interest in the poet Paul Celan, according to Gadamer, is tied to the fact that: "Celan too, was a poet of the most extreme *Sprachenot* [linguistic need] a situation which pressed him with the limit of an ultimate falling silent. Heidegger, also "wanted to overcome the thinking of metaphysics, and so he tried over and over to invert language, so to speak, for, language itself, to him, was the language of

⁶² From, Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "On the Origins of Philosophical Hermeneutics." In *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Philosophical Apprenticeships*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985. pp. 192-193. Gadamer reminds us that in the poetic: "conceptual explication cannot exhaust the content of poetic creation," thus, the poetic is key, insofar as the poem "possesses a dialogical relationship of a unique kind," exemplified by the modern hermetic poetry of Paul Celan. Understanding happens in different ways of speaking, especially, for example, in the address of a poem, and, as Gadamer says, "the relationship of philosophy and poetry stands at the center of [his] undertaking" explaining the hermeneutic problem of understanding and speech.

metaphysics.”⁶³ Celan, according to Gadamer, wanted to find a counter language, a counterword, which concerns the way the poet seeks an authentic way of speaking that, for Gadamer, is about searching for the right word.

Everywhere the poet is present to us, yet in the classic story presented by Plato, the poet is recognized as an antagonist and a friend of knowledge. The intimacy between poet and thinker was especially visible in the Pre-Socratics. Pre-Socratics, such as Parmenides, or Empedocles, asserted philosophical ideas born within poetic diction. The origins of Greek sciences, then, took place in the free space of creative production, creative diction and open speech.⁶⁴ Ever since Plato the poetic remains a part of philosophy, evident to any reader of Plato’s own language.⁶⁵ Gadamer describes it this way, “The Platonic dialogue stands by itself, so much so that through its poetic mimesis, it could establish the dialectical character of the dialogue.”⁶⁶

Theorists become aware of this yet, as Gadamer remarks, it “remains concealed [to us] under particular epistemological conditions of modernity.”⁶⁷ The Greeks provide an “opposition to the constructivism of the modern sciences,” a distinction between “the intelligible world and the masterable world...” that play out at

⁶³ Gadamer, “Thinking and Poetizing in Heidegger and in Holderlin’s *Andenken*,” p. 160.

⁶⁴ *The Beginnings of Knowledge*, Gadamer’s Naples lectures, concern his deepening interest in the Pre-Socratics and their relation to the beginnings of Greek philosophy.

⁶⁵ Seth Bernadette characterizes the relationship in this way, “Plato does not simply oppose philosophy to poetry and contrast reason with the indulgence of the passions; he has philosophy invade the territory of poetry and claim for itself what seems to be the indisputable domain of poetry.” p. X1. *The Tragedy and Comedy of Life, Plato’s Philebus*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009.

⁶⁶ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Philosophy and Poetry.” In *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986. p. 133.

⁶⁷ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Greek Philosophy and Modern Theory.” In *The Beginnings of Knowledge*. New York: Continuum, p. 121.

both a linguistic and a personal level.⁶⁸ Any linguistic practice that objectifies speech, positions us in a paradox since language is a non-objectifying phenomena, meaning that an “essential self-forgetfulness characterizes the performative character of [all] speech.”⁶⁹

Robert A. Nisbet's comment in his *The Sociological Tradition*, that all theory has “moral origins” and that all great sociologists, regardless of their scientific aspirations, “have never ceased to be artists,” resonates broadly across the human sciences. Why? It is a claim that theory is the language of art and the art of language, reminding us of the ethical and artistic nature of sociological theory.⁷⁰ Once more the ethical and lyrical paradox of modern theory appears. Our concern, now, according to Gadamer, is to find a way of “leading [our] language, estranged from its native sense of saying something, back to the common way of saying things and to the communality that supports this way of saying.”⁷¹

The Dialogue Between Ancient and Modern Theory

Charles Taylor recalls how the great achievement of the seventeenth century scientific revolution was to develop “a language for nature that was purged of human meanings. This was a revolution, because the earlier scientific languages, largely influenced by Plato and Aristotle, were saturated with purpose-and-value-terms. These could only have traveled along with a good part of the way of life of the

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 121.

⁶⁹ Ibid. pp.124-125.

⁷⁰ Nisbet, Robert A. *The Sociological Tradition*. New York: Basic Books, 1966. pp.18-19.

⁷¹ Gadamer, “On the Origins of Philosophical Hermeneutics,” in *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Philosophical Apprenticeships*, p.181.

civilizations that nourished them. But the new austere languages could be adopted elsewhere more easily.” He adds:

We can see how different the situation is with the languages of ‘social science.’” These too have traveled, but very much as a result of the cultural influence of and cultural alignment with the West. Moreover they seem incapable of achieving the kind of universality we find in the natural sciences... [T]his difference in the fate of the two kinds of “science” is connected to the fact that the languages of the human sciences have always drawn for their intelligibility on our ordinary understanding of what it is to be a human agent, live in society, have moral convictions, aspire to happiness and so forth.⁷²

Truth, for Gadamer, can appear in listening to the word of the other that occurs in dialogue. He challenges the legitimacy of the human sciences as “science” by illuminating the way the question of truth occurs in them, not from a scientific viewpoint but in the universality of the hermeneutic process of human understanding that resides in our experience of language and our finitude.

The estrangement of truth inheres in the methodology of the human sciences.⁷³ “Method,” for Gadamer, does not apply to what happens in the human sciences, at least in its Cartesian conception, because there is no way one can stand as an objectifying observer as a privileged observing subject. He writes: “Human beings cannot be observed from the secure viewpoint of a researcher.”⁷⁴ Rather, we can only observe from within the “stream of tradition,” where we are “being conditioned,” and know the other and his views “on the basis of one’s own conditionality.” Our

⁷² Taylor, Charles. “Gadamer on the Human Sciences.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, edited by Robert J. Dostal, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002. pp.130-131.

⁷³ *Truth and Method*. [Second, Revised Edition], p. 7.

⁷⁴ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *The Beginning of Philosophy*, translated by Rob Coltman. New York: Continuum, p. 29.

conditionality (social context, epoch, prejudices) concerns our experience of the world. In this way, we always live in a dialectic that places us both in history, and a “cultural tradition, i.e. philosophy,” but also in the dialectic of “moral questions.”⁷⁵

Hermeneutics puts the priority on conversation as a sharing and participation that we encounter in language, hermeneutics, as we have seen, places universality beyond science. In the human sciences, we are compelled to “recognize that all understanding is interwoven with concepts and reject any theory that does not accept the intimate unity of word and subject matter.”⁷⁶

Understanding happens in the “forgetfulness” of language itself (we forget grammar, structure, syntax), according to Gadamer. Language is always what we speak, and speaking is not the reflective state of the statement. Our struggle to speak is where wanting to say and understanding coexist as a performative force, where we struggle to find ourselves in the words we speak; this is the event of language itself. Di Cesare puts this well by saying that understanding “...is thought to be possible and is presupposed as a condition by speakers.”⁷⁷

Speakers struggle not simply to communicate information but also to communicate who they are or are not. We are language. For Gadamer we belong to language in ways that cannot be accounted for in theory.

Broadly speaking, Gadamer, as Schmidt puts it, is not theorizing “about language.”⁷⁸ He explains his Gadamerian perception this way:

⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 28.

⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 404.

⁷⁷ Di Cesare, Donatella Ester. *Utopia of Understanding: Between Babel and Auschwitz*. Albany: State University of New York, 2012. p. 154.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 3.

Following the performance of language is not the same as theorizing about language. Being attentive to the performance of the word does not mean interpreting the meaning that is signified by any particular words. Such interpretations only function as a sort of noise that distracts us from the silent event of language speaking itself. Nor does it mean circumscribing the possibilities of meaning outlined by any particular language, or even language as such. Our intimacy with language is found in attending to the performance of language. We follow this intimacy of the word once we become attentive to how language offers something to be thought.⁷⁹

Understanding in the human sciences, noted Heidegger, happens in the truth dimension of language. Without this truth dimension of language, we lose our sense of shared experience in the world. Which, as hermeneutics shows, lies outside of the logic of science. Gadamer adapts Heidegger's existential image of understanding and places it into the context of shared understanding as language. "*Dasein*," he writes, "... projects itself on its own potentiality, for being has always already 'been.'"⁸⁰ Since to understand implies one has already begun to understand, we are already in what we understand; this is already a shared experience, a sharing and participating.

Conceptual value, therefore, comes forth in thinking conversation that is never completely understood. It also comes from experience, the path from our perceptions to our conceptual efforts, while understanding is a struggle to bring forth a meaning that we wish to communicate. Heidegger saw that the hermeneutic circle concerns an ontologically positive significance of language, since existence understands itself. Heidegger calls this, *Dasein*. Gadamer takes Heidegger's insight and emphasizes how understanding always involves understanding the other as well as oneself.

⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 3.

⁸⁰ *Truth and Method*, [Second, Revised Edition], 2011. p. 264.

The dominant touchstone of sociological reason – method – erases or silences truth's appearing in the universal act of saying.⁸¹ Sociological speech naturally resists the very universality of hermeneutic speech with a special kind of alienated speech. Alienated in this way, the theorist cannot recover without seeing the crucial role of understanding the other in universality of speech. In Gadamer's view, language is not an ideal system of signs, i.e. treating language as a kind of form, but rather is the very power of saying of words, their speculative essence that can and does express the right and the true. Nicholas Davey notes that the "dual claim" found in Gadamer concerning writing and speaking, that I am attaching to the question of the language of sociology, poses several problems that need to be addressed. For Gadamer the idea that we really understand the word when:

The vitality of the spoken word does not derive just from the singular power of delivery but also from the power of that which comes to life in the speaking word. Within such words a totality of meaning openly comes into play... In this way, Gadamer's remark shows that hermeneutic experience has at its core the rigor of uninterrupted listening. What one hears is not just the spoken but the way the spoken brings into presence what remains unsaid. Hermeneutic listening is not a matter of acoustic responsiveness but of being able to discern within what one listens to, that which asserts itself as truth. Gadamer suggests that words which bring a meant content into language are themselves a speculative event, for their truth comes forth in what is said in them.⁸²

Understanding concerns the priority of speech, for speech is where understanding takes place and comes to presentation – it is the power of presentation. We see further that speech has its universal significance in this dimension of

⁸¹ Gadamer says that understanding and speech make a special claim to universality, such that, "We can express everything in words and can try to come to agreement about everything." *Truth and Method*, p. 548.

⁸² Davey, Nicholas. "On the Other Side of Writing." In *Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, edited by Lawrence K. Schmidt. New York: Lexington Books, 2000, p. 88.

language.⁸³ Speech is where concepts form in living language, in the living tensions of language – in the spoken word – for what makes concepts possible is not, itself, a “concept,” (this determines the difference between a *universal hermeneutics* and a *transcendental hermeneutics*).⁸⁴ Hermeneutics points us in the direction of a reconstruction of rationality, reliant on Gadamer’s careful reading of the Greeks, Hegel, and Heidegger, in terms of showing how we experience meaning in the language of speech and the hermeneutics of the voice.⁸⁵ We have a world because we are primordially linguistic beings.⁸⁶ Our primordial speaking, as we shall see, is an ethical life. Writing and texts convey the past to us. Not only this, but our words speak to us as the happening of history. Our words generate the intelligible before, and in contrast to any notion of concept formation found in “sciences.” We are already speaking as speaking beings as the concept is coming to birth. Even in our inner conversations we presuppose this other to whom we speak.⁸⁷

⁸³ “The language that lives in speech – which comprehends all understanding, including that of the interpretation of texts – is so much bound up with thinking and interpretation that we have too little left if we ignore the actual content of what languages hand down to us and try to consider language only as form.” *Truth and Method*, p. 405.

⁸⁴ Karl-Otto Apel’s distinction between these two conceptions of hermeneutics is discussed later. Apel seeks to reconcile analytic and hermeneutic approaches in his work.

⁸⁵ See, for example, James Risser’s “The Voice of the Other in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics.” He writes: “Accordingly, it is not enough to say that in philosophical hermeneutics the experience of meaning is linguistic; one must immediately add to this the more specific claim that this experience of meaning takes shape in the language of speech, in living language, and as such hermeneutics is of the voice.” p. 389. In *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, The Library of Living Philosophers Volume XXIV*, edited by Lewis Edwin Hahn. Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1997.

⁸⁶ *Truth and Method*, pp. 443-444.

⁸⁷ Ideas that are developed in, “The Ontological Shift of Hermeneutics Guided by Language” in *Truth and Method*, pp. 427, 428, & 432. “The articulation of words and things that each language performs in its own way always constitutes a primary natural

Concepts, Gadamer says, “are only what they are in their functioning, and this functioning always rests on the natural logic of language.”⁸⁸ Gadamer points to the intimacy of speaking and writing, and how the play of each is animated by conversation. He says: “In hermeneutics the orality of conversations allegedly takes precedence over the written form of the text. In truth there is no real opposition. What is written, has to be read, and so it too ‘stands under the voice.’”⁸⁹

Speech is not a representational sign. Voice leaves us and enters us in an enigmatic encounter that Jean-Luc Nancy declares... In the context of sociological reason methodological thinking takes us into a position of the world of objective mastery, through an assumption of the value of the representational sign that is as a technical vision of our relationship to truth. What is set up within the human sciences is the legitimation of science as a type of “loss” of speech.

If you like, the human sciences take us away from the sign’s origin in living speech, and in Gadamer’s view, away from life. It thereby assumes a version of linguistic production that merely distances and subordinates the voice, and, significantly, the experience of language itself. The non-speculative view of scientific language now positions the theorist, as it were, in a paradox of his or her voicing. Gadamer has no real problems, broadly speaking, with scientific methods but rather that what occurs within the self-understanding of the human sciences, is a tension

way of forming concepts that is different from the system of scientific concept formation.” p. 433.

⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 93.

⁸⁹ Reply to James Risser, Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, The Library of Living Philosophers Volume XXIV*, edited by Lewis Edwin Hahn, Open Court, Chicago & La Salle, Illinois, 1997. p. 403.

between truth (*aletheia*) and logical form (as in *method*), a result of the subordination of the voice.

Sociological reason and the modern methodological ethos are not simply in opposition to truth. Rather, we fail to recognize what happens to truth in the methodological outlook. The human sciences face the problem of language when they ask how they create conceptual value.⁹⁰ Heidegger identified how conceptual work came to “determine the epoch of modernity in the west [by displacing] experience with procedural processes,” underscoring the growing the priority of the statement.⁹¹

Gadamer asks: What happens in a statement?⁹² He says that the:

“statement” as a [...] boundary was probably the fate of western civilization. Following the extreme preference for the “apophasis,” the statement, our civilization developed a corresponding logic. It is the classical logic of judgment, the logic founded on the concept judgment. The preference for this form of speaking, which represents only one possibility within the rich variety of linguistic expression, implied a particulate abstraction that has proved important for the development of doctrine systems, for example, the monologue of science, whose standard model is Euclid’s system.⁹³

What is a statement in this context? In general, the statement operates in advancing a conceptual vocabulary in abstraction from living speech that tries to, as it were, conceal the speaker. Statements, as found in the law, focus on the *logically controllable*. In this way, the logical statement compels speaking to fall silent; in many ways this echoes Plato’s *Phaedrus* concerning the priority of speaking over writing.

Gadamer summarizes his position this way:

⁹⁰ Gadamer, “Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language,” p. 43.

⁹¹ Heidegger, Martin. *Parmenides*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. p. 128.

⁹² Gadamer, “Boundaries of Language,” p. 15.

⁹³ *Ibid.* p. 15.

The statement can never say all that there is to say. We could also formulate this so: everything that constitutes for us a context for a thought initiates fundamental and unending process. From the hermeneutic standpoint I would say that no conversation ends before it has led to a real agreement. Perhaps one should also add that because of this there is fundamentally no conversation that actually ends, since a real agreement, a complete and total agreement between two people would contradict the essence of their individuality. That we never, in truth, actually carry a conversation to its end and often do not come to an agreement are the limitations of our temporality, finitude, and bias. Metaphysics speaks of Aristotle's God, who does not know any of this. The boundary of language is therefore in truth the boundary drawn by our temporality, by the discursivity of our talking, saying, thinking, communicating and speaking. Here the structure becomes quite explicit. It is called conversation, because it is question and answer, because I ask myself as I would ask another, and I speak to myself as another would speak to me. Augustine already referred to this way of putting it. Everybody is in conversation with himself. Even when he is in conversation with another, he has to remain in conversation with himself, if he thinks."⁹⁴

Gadamer tells us our encounter with language is not in statements but in conversation. Writing is not far from this experience of language. Writing has its origins in speaking. In "On the Other Side of Writing," Davey describes how, "Gadamer prioritizes the spoken word over the written word because the voice is able to de-scribe; it allows the written text to address us anew, as an other, as if from without."⁹⁵ Writing, theory, and conceptual work, if viewed from the point of view of the power of the spoken word, allows us to conclude, along with Gadamer, as he draws on Plato's *Seventh Letter*, that "the meaning of all presentation fixed in writing is still supported by something else that is conveyed only in living conversation."⁹⁶ Davey notes that, "the spoken rendition of a text must aim at a singular, unifying interpretation

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 16..

⁹⁵ Davey, "On the Other Side of Writing." p. 91.

⁹⁶ Gadamer, "Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language." pp. 44-46.

of the text but not (and this is of paramount importance) to the end of achieving a hermeneutic closure, but to the end of speculatively opening the text as to allow the unsaid within it to come forth. The words of Catherine Pickstock are in this context very sage: ‘genuine intellectual clarity is obtainable only when that which is “known” is allowed to remain open and mysterious: an attitude synonymous with a kind of reverence.’⁹⁷

Our ability to speak, to speak to one another, even across cultures, says Gadamer, is revealed in “poetry, the lyrical poem, [which] is the best instance of the particularity and foreignness of language” that puts translation at the center of speech and language, reminding us of Heidegger’s remark that all speech is a translation.⁹⁸

Our encounter with language is not about statements but about a conversation. Speech, Gadamer tells us, “implies pre-established words with general meanings, at the same time, a constant process of concept formation is going on, by means of which the life of language develops.”⁹⁹ Speech (*logos*), concerns a limit and transcendence, an openness and concealedness, yet, as the Greeks understood, speech (*logos*) was also the self-forming of individuals for social life, a consequence of open debate and discussion.¹⁰⁰ Gadamer says language is a constant process of concept formation. “The

⁹⁷ Davey, “On the Other Side of Writing.” p. 89.

⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 16.

⁹⁹ *Truth and Method*, [Second, Revised Edition], 2011. p. 427.

¹⁰⁰ In his essay “Heidegger and Hegel,” Gadamer makes this point about disconcealment [or truth] in speech: “disconcealment is not only essentially tied to concealment, but also to the defining though hidden work of the latter: as language, to shelter “being” concealed within itself. Thought is dependent upon the ground of language insofar as language is not merely a system of signs for the purpose of communication and transmission of information. Where there is real language, the thing to be designated is not known prior to the act of designation. Rather within our language relationship to the world, that which is spoken of is itself first articulated

articulation of words and things that each language performs in its own way, constituting a primary and natural way of forming concepts that is different from the system of scientific concept formation”.¹⁰¹ Speech, even if it recedes from a living authenticity, as in writing, which Plato contends?

Today when we ask the question what is the nature of theory, we repeat Plato’s question concerning the authenticity of speech and its relation to writing.¹⁰² In the background of all written texts is speaking. Gadamer considers our changed relationship to the spoken word, the way the sign is seen in concept formation, especially when treated as “self-evident” to us in the language of “unambiguous designation,” the scientific ideal that continues unchanged.”¹⁰³

Plato’s *Phaedrus* contends that writing was a distortion of the spoken word. Gadamer understands that this discussion reveals how speech lies behind writing; when we write we are always returning to the nature of speech. The Greeks had a magical language, but a word for language did not exist; they used *logos*, words that are spoken. Gadamer observes: “With *logos*, precisely that upon which the inner forgetfulness of speech is essentially drawn is pushed into view – the world itself, which is evoked by speech, lifted into presence, and brought into articulation and

through language’s constitutive structuring of our being in the world. Speaking remains tied to the language as a whole, the hermeneutic virtuality of discourse which surpasses at any moment that which has been said.” Gadamer, “Hegel and Heidegger,” in *Hegel’s Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976. p. 115.

¹⁰¹ *Truth and Method*. [Second, Revised Edition], 2011. p. 433.

¹⁰² Plato’s contention, discussed in the *Phaedrus*, is that the *written word is only a copy of the spoken word*. Gadamer appears to establish the debate in terms of the gap between technical and natural language, between “theoretical reason” and “practical reason.”

¹⁰³ *Truth and Method*. [Second, Revised Edition], 2011. p. 432.

communicative participation. In speaking about things, the things are there; it is in speech and speaking with one another that the world and the experiential world of human beings constructs itself and not in the objectification that (vis-à-vis the communicative transmission of the insights of one person to the insight of another) bases itself on objectivity and purports to be knowledge for everyone.”¹⁰⁴

The Beautiful as Exemplary of what lies Beyond the Concept

Gadamer’s discussion in *Truth and Method*, and the later work, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, points to the shift away from art, as such, to the question of beauty as something that is communicated “independently of the concept.”¹⁰⁵ In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer asked what is the relationship of the beautiful to language? He took art as a starting point for *Truth and Method*, to show the wide compass of hermeneutics and to place it within the universal meaning of *Sprachlichkeit* – linguisticity. Further, this universal meaning of *Sprachlichkeit* connects with his concern to show how, by using the concept of the beautiful, he could “substantiate the universality of hermeneutics.”¹⁰⁶

Truth and Method alerts us to why the experience of language lies outside the modernist frame. When we understand art we do not control it or dominate it. Schmidt reminds us that “remembering ancient thought helps us to see more clearly that in the

¹⁰⁴ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Greek Philosophy and Modern Thought.” In *The Beginning of Knowledge*. New York: Continuum, 2003. p. 125.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 12.

¹⁰⁶ Gadamer, “The Art Work in Word and Image,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Works*, pp. 203-204.

beautiful and art we encounter a significance that goes beyond everything conceptual.”¹⁰⁷

Truth in art is a transformative event of understanding and this experience of art *always exceeds the concept*. As we shall see, how we experience art is close to the nature of the experience of language. Gadamer says the beautiful is thinking ideas without concepts. In our encounter with art, therefore, we encounter something whose significance goes beyond everything conceptual.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion.

Alan Blum, remarkably, in his work *Theorizing* (1974), claims that sociology will speak truly when it can convert its speech. What did he mean by this claim that sociology had to “convert” its speech? The introductory chapter provides an overview of his dialectics of speech – the speculative dialectics of the word – of our proximity to an encounter with the emergence of truth is dialogue. Was Blum also thinking of something similar to what we find in Gadamer’s remark when he wrote, “the meaning of the word method must change”?¹⁰⁹ Each chapter considers these two questions in light of our outline of Gadamer’s hermeneutics of truth and theory.

Chapter 1, “The Rhetorical and Ethical Dimension of the Vocation of *Theoria*,” offers an account of why self-alienation happens in the self-objectification of speech and how this requires that we attend to the question of moral self-understanding and the authoring of theory. The authoring of *theoria* then concerns the question of *self-hood*,

¹⁰⁷ Schmidt, p. 13.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 13.

¹⁰⁹ Gadamer, *The Beginning of Philosophy*, p. 30.

or more specifically, the style of theory and how theory presupposes a hermeneutic identity based in shared conversation. This chapter, therefore, pivots on the rhetorical nature of *theoria* and the question of language. We consider why, when we speak, we bring something to understanding; why, in other words, theory is rhetorical; why this has a non-metaphysical meaning; why speaking is the space of mediation in which understanding happens. To express true knowledge requires recognizing the practical value of understanding, our ability to speak with understanding.¹¹⁰ Gadamer tells us that one who knows a *techne*, but does not understand it, would be quite impotent, would be alien to the authorship of their *logoi*.¹¹¹

In chapter 2, “Social Theory & the Question of Hermeneutic Truth,” I discuss how we can discern an underlying theme, not always directly signified, found widely across the human sciences that contains one message: the human sciences are an activity that is close to art, ethics, lyricism and truth. A key question that is, as it were, suspended in the human sciences, is the question of truth. First, we consider Gadamer’s guiding idea that truth is the art of saying, and the way in which he identifies the voice of the poet as one that is not built on an objective distancing, on conceptuality. Second, we consider how, especially in the human sciences, our displacement from the poet’s truth conceals our being in common with others, leading to an estranged knowing that takes the form of a weakened sense of the commonality of speaking with others, and that is ultimately felt as disenchantment. We argue that it is possible to discern – across a series of social theorists, including Merton, Nisbet,

¹¹⁰ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Hermeneutics as a Theoretical and Practical Task.” In *Reason in the Age of Science*. Translated by Frederick G. Lawrence. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001. p. 119.

¹¹¹ Gadamer, “Hermeneutics as a Theoretical and Practical Task,” p. 119.

Brown, Berger, and especially Alvin Gouldner (*The Coming Crisis of Sociology, Enter Plato*) and the later work of Zygmunt Bauman (*Liquid Modernity*) – an underlying connection, an identification of the problem of theory as a consequence of a disconnection within the moral and lyrical dimensions of the speaking being as theorist.

Alvin Gouldner, C. W. Mills and Richard Brown were among those writers whose interrogation of the human sciences were actually excavating metaphysical assumptions while addressing the problems of social theory. Gouldner saw sociology as a social-political problem, not a scientific problem. This is evident when he identified what he called their “goodness and potency” (the place of moral self-discovery and self-formation) that he felt had been compromised. He spoke of an ethical approach concerning (1) the imaginative participation in communication and, (2) the moral meaning of our linguistic actions in the human sciences.¹¹² Our participation in the world of questions and problems could not be reached effectively or conveyed effectively with the meaning of method as objectification. Gadamer spoke of the meaning of *method* found in the Greeks. He wrote, regarding this image of method in this way: “[T]his meaning of ‘method’ as going along with presupposes that we already find ourselves in the middle of the game and can occupy no neutral standpoint – even if we strive very hard for objectivity and put our prejudices at risk.”¹¹³ Richard Harvey Brown would identify sociology in moral terms saying that objectifying discourse

¹¹² Gouldner, Alvin. *The Coming Crisis of Sociology*. New York: Basic Books, 1975. p .485.

¹¹³ Gadamer, *The Beginning of Philosophy*, p. 30.

disempowers ordinary citizens.¹¹⁴ The human sciences must consider themselves along a dimension that heightens their *moral self-understanding*.¹¹⁵

In chapter 3, “Poetics and Truth,” my approach is to discuss why the poet’s word finds its fulfillment in a participatory conception of truth. In this thesis, this is the point at which I explicitly develop my interpretation of the human sciences and their poetics. Why is the poet an exemplar in Gadamer’s thinking, a thinking that considers the implications of pure language and truth saying? Gadamer’s reflections on the poet Paul Celan, in many ways echo Heidegger’s reflection on this poet and the importance of poetry to the elucidation of *Dasein*, but as we shall see they differ on a key point, which is central also to his challenge to the modernist conception of the poem as “monological.” Celan claims in his famous *Meridian* speech that a poem, the purest form of language, exists “in the mystery of an encounter (*im Geheimnis der Begegnung*).” In this way he contradicts Heidegger’s views on poetic speech.¹¹⁶ In fact, both Celan and Gadamer contradict this key point of Heidegger’s legacy concerning our encounter with the mystery of language itself as monological. In this chapter Gadamer’s short study, “Who Am I and Who Are You” [1973], prompts our discussion alongside Gadamer’s earlier discussion, “Plato and the Poets” [1934], of the dialogical nature of the poetic utterance. These essays deal at length with the question of escaping

¹¹⁴ See, Richard H. Brown’s works to see the extent of his project, *Social Science as Civic Discourse, Essays on the Intervention, Legitimation, and Uses of Social Theory*, (1989), *Society as Text, Essays On Rhetoric, Reason, and Reality* (1987) and, of course, *A Poetic For Sociology, Toward a Logic of Discovery for the Human Sciences*, (1977).

¹¹⁵ See, for example, Zygmunt Bauman’s, *Postmodernity and Its Discontents* (1997) *Postmodern Ethics* (1993) and *Liquid Modernity* (2000), for example, to see how this problem has shaped his life work.

¹¹⁶ Lyon, James, K. “The Meridian: An Implicit Dialogue with Heidegger.” In *Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger: An Unresolved Conversation, 1951-1970*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006. p. 132.

the suspicion of the word, the aesthetic seductiveness of the word, and the degrading of the word (sophistry).

I will argue, following Gadamer's reflections on the poet, that truth is the art of saying.¹¹⁷ Truth is dialogical. Poetic speaking is not about any scientific truth of "interpretation," rather a poem's truth derives from living speech, our dialogical encounter with each other in the play of words, moving in an unbroken circularity between the individual and the general. I will further argue at length that it is Gadamer's emphasis on speech and theory that is key to understanding the problem of theory. We comprehend, but not within methodological validity as in the sciences, because "the facts which they [the human sciences] thematize are mediated to a large extent by speech."¹¹⁸

In chapter 4 of the thesis, "The Dialogue Between Ancient and Modern Theory," I argue that it is the Ancient Greek concept of *theoria* that offers a critique of the human sciences. Although *Truth and Method* only faintly shows the impact of Greek theory, since this work was mostly concerned with developing a hermeneutic theory, it becomes evident that an important understanding of theory concerns Gadamer's reflections on Greek *theoria*. Gadamer, as Donatella Di Cesare notes, thought of his studies on Greek thought "as the best and most original part of this philosophical activity."¹¹⁹ And, indeed, this is true in many ways. Hence, it is Gadamer's recovery of ancient *theoria* that is explored in this chapter. The limit of

¹¹⁷ Risser, James. *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other: Re-reading Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997. pp. 151-157.

¹¹⁸ "Hermeneutics and Social Science", Hans-Georg Gadamer, in, *Cultural Hermeneutics*, Dordrecht-Holland, Boston, D. Reidel Pub. Co. 1975.

¹¹⁹ Di Cesare, *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait*, p. 1.

modern theory is not only key for Gadamer but, I argue, we find an emphasis on the Greeks in such theorists as Alan Blum, especially in his book, *Theorizing*, and also in Alvin Gouldner's writings, especially *Enter Plato*.

Di Cesare sheds further light on Gadamer's focus on Greek *theoria* and modern theory by suggesting, "Both are bound up with each other through the circularity of understanding. Reading Greek philosophy represents a challenge, since it calls into question modern customs and prejudices. Hermeneutics accepts this challenge and lets itself be led by the Greeks in a circular openness of an infinite dialogue. The actuality of Greek philosophy becomes hermeneutic itself, understood as the philosophical reappraisal of the dialogue with the Greeks because, despite the breaks and interruptions, continuity persists."¹²⁰ Thus, Gadamer's famous phrase that says that an encounter with the Greeks is an "encounter with ourselves" becomes the theme of this chapter.¹²¹

In Chapter 5, "Theory and Beauty," I take up Gadamer's description of beauty to illuminate theory. Beauty and the recovery of truth go hand in hand. Beauty and truth offer a way of discussing the concept of *self-validation*. Beauty is not a copy nor is it a representation of something. Gadamer writes the beautiful is the "most important ontological function" because beauty mediates "between idea and appearance."¹²² Beauty, then, is ontological. "Beauty of itself, presents itself," which means "that it's being is such that it makes itself immediately evident."¹²³ Hence, "[t]hrough the analogical function of the beautiful, which Plato has described in unforgettable terms, a

¹²⁰ Di Cesare, *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait*, p. 123.

¹²¹ Gadamer, *The Beginning of Knowledge*, p. 119.

¹²² Ibid. p. 476.

¹²³ Ibid. p. 476.

structural characteristic of the being of the beautiful becomes visible, and with it an element of the structure of being in general.”¹²⁴

Beauty concerns a bringing forth that can grasp the evidentness of truth. Such evidentness, as we find in beauty, also belongs, as Gadamer notes, to the tradition of rhetoric.¹²⁵ Beauty becomes the measure of theory. By reminding us that concepts require the living event of speech, of language, to occur. Beauty, along with the sense of the word, the rightness of the assertion, shows commonality and mutual understanding. Both the image and word share a something that is non-circumventable; they both represent through themselves, like beauty. Beauty shows something is there; it is not this or that thing, but rather a showing that something happens. This special way of showing concerns the human sciences for it is something that is achieved beyond method (and conceptual speech). Such a happening is what Gadamer calls the “there” that is not nothing. This points back to Parmenides, and the conception that: “Thinking is only in the being of the there.” “In the ‘there’ it is uttered, and through this the being of the thought is ‘there’. That is what Parmenides intended.”¹²⁶

In Chapter 6 we return to our key theme. Why do we claim that theory is closer to poetics than science? We focus on one social theorist, at this point in our journey, to find our answer. Zygmunt Bauman is a compelling and dominant figure in the sociological world. What we can detect in his work is a striving to show how modernity impacts lives as well as how it also impacts the question of the human sciences.

¹²⁴ Ibid. p. 479.

¹²⁵ Ibid. p. 479.

¹²⁶ Gadamer, “Thinking and Poetizing in Heidegger and in Holderlin’s *Andenken*,” p. 150.

Significantly, Bauman concludes *Liquid Modernity* (2000), with the section “Afterthoughts: On Writing and Writing Sociology.” Here he discusses his own attitude toward writing. Peter Beilharz describes that Bauman’s style of theorizing over the years is characterized by a shift in both voice and style more than theoretical consistency.¹²⁷ Bauman’s authoring style of analysis reflects the changing social impact of modernity. Therefore it is also a critique of the authoring of theory in the human sciences. Hence he asks about his own *writerliness* that concerns his own conceptual versatility seen as simultaneously a response to social life and the changing role of the social theorist. By transforming theory into a deep meditation, by displaying both the lyrical and ethical power of his voice, he invites his readers to participate in his conceptual dialogue, his living dialogue and conceptual expression, that informs and guides us to share in his theoretical understanding. In this way his work affirms the lyrical in sociological thinking.

We can see that Bauman’s love of literature and writers directly shape his approach to social theorizing, which allows him to convincingly register new social realities, to address with urgency social and political affairs, and to become a more effective theorist. In this section, I have shown that it is the impact of hermeneutic universality on the universality of theory that overcomes the metaphysical limitations imposed by the scientific viewpoint. Bauman’s theorizing, therefore, de-emphasizes the ‘metaphysical’, and, instead emphasizes the ‘rhetorical ethics’ of our theoretical speech. This re-conceptualization of the human sciences concerns, specifically, the power of truth of the word, not by way of the logical concept of judgment, but by way

¹²⁷ Beilharz, Peter. “Following the Human Condition.” In *Dialectic of Modernity*. London: Sage Publications, 2000.

of what can be communicated in the commonality of mutual understanding, where the word displays its unrestricted power to speak. The role of the voice in the word never brings itself to a fixed form; the word always remains an opening onto the world, conceptually and emotionally, and it remains in the unthinkable finitude of our being.

Bauman shows how the *logoi* of theory, exists for us in a true tension of our self-discovery as theoretical beings (our theoretical lives, our living in *theoria*) in terms of the ethical and lyrical dimension of discovery, of authoring ourselves. We see this, especially, in his *Postmodern Ethics* (1993), which, as Peter Beilharz notes, displays why Bauman's sociology is "properly the realm of the other. But this will not relieve me of the responsibility to look inward, nor can it resolve the pain of existential solitude. One can tell about one's existence, but cannot share it. *Being with others does not relieve us of existential singularity.*"¹²⁸

My concluding argument concerns this claim: When Gadamer writes: "We should doubt the human sciences current self-understanding, because they do not fully recognize what the mode of truth is in their whole procedure,"¹²⁹ he makes clear that the whole procedure of the human sciences is not about method but about whom we are as human beings. Once understood, the human sciences have no longer to hide their work behind technical structures of discourse, since this only misdirects them and the public away from the question of truth. To conclude, I will develop some of the ramifications of Gadamer's approach to the question of truth, in the following chapters.

¹²⁸ Beilharz, "Following the Human Condition," p. 149.

¹²⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 100.

Chapter 1.

The Rhetorical and Ethical Dimension of the Vocation of *Theoria*

We learn from Plato that the vocation of *theoria* is rhetorical. In this chapter we consider why when we speak we bring something to understanding: why theory is rhetorical. Speaking is the space of mediation in which understanding happens. To express true knowledge requires recognizing the practical value of understanding, our ability to speak with understanding.¹³⁰ Gadamer tells us that one who knows a *techne*, but does not understand it, would be quite impotent, would be alien to the authorship of their *logoi*.¹³¹ Natural speech is where we find words to say what we want to say to others.

Di Cesare captures Gadamer's conception of speaking by drawing an important contrast to Wittgenstein and Heidegger. She writes:

For Wittgenstein, the perspectives of the speakers dominate. On the basis of the grammar of the game, and speaking is "part of the activity" in which a remnant of subjectivity emerges. In Gadamer's view, the speaker's perspective is overcome by the common perspective of the language game. However, this does not result in a hypostasis of language. In this way, Gadamer's position should also be distinguished from Heidegger's since, for Gadamer. It is not language that speaks; it is rather the speakers. Whereas for Wittgenstein the subject retains mastery, for Heidegger it is language. Gadamer's position between the two reflects the "medial" character of play, which casts light on the active process, which is nonetheless undergone, of dialogue.¹³²

¹³⁰ Gadamer, "Hermeneutics as a Theoretical and Practical Task," p. 119.

¹³¹ Gadamer, "Hermeneutics as a Theoretical and Practical Task," p. 119.

¹³² Di Cesare, *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait*, p. 165.

Our relation to the art of speaking concerns true knowledge epitomized by the Platonic dialogue, *Phaedrus*, as Gadamer reminds us:

Phaedrus was dedicated to the task of endowing rhetoric with a more profound meaning and of allowing it a share of philosophical thus it was asked there exactly what facet of rhetoric was *techné*. The perspective laid open in the *Phaedrus* were also at root of Aristotelian Rhetoric, which presents more a philosophy of human life as determined by speech than a technical doctrine about the art of speaking.¹³³

The human sciences seek an innocent (*neutral*) technical speech, deeply concerned with the authoring of scientific speech that follows in the legacy of modern science yet has forgotten the truths that lie in this ancient heritage. But what is neutral speech? There is none, i.e. there is no innocent methodological speech, for there is no transparency in human life, only better and better understanding, the ongoing dialogue we have with ourselves and others. Truth cannot be fixed in any set of propositions. Any claim to a neutral understanding would be a contradiction of genuine understanding.

Understanding makes its own claim to validity determined by the endless dialogue of the soul in speech. Speaking itself shares universality with understanding and interpreting. Gadamer says that “One can talk about everything, and everything one says has to be able to be understood.”¹³⁴ As speaking beings we are ethically bound by the non-transparency of speech.

One never fully says what they want to say, for saying is always hermeneutic – a hermeneutic event. But one’s saying is also released by the event of understanding. The Greek imperative in philosophy concerns seeing theory as a process of life-formation (ethical self-transformation), as a matter of one’s relation to their temporal

¹³³ Ibid. p. 119.

¹³⁴ Ibid. p. 119.

being, reflected in speech, in its rhetorical dimension that shapes the vocation of *theoria*. The *logi Sokratikoi* (Socrates dialogues) tell us that the Greeks did not treat theory as disenchantment. Plato's writings, following Socrates' death, provided a picture of the dialogue as conversations with others. As one encounters the Greeks¹³⁵ the question of the disenchantment of the word in modern theory strikes one. Concept formation, in this regard, is seen as a transformation that occurs in the metaphors of everyday speech, that when put into a "scientific viewpoint" succumbs to a linguistic misunderstanding about the nature of *theoria*. Consequently, the paradox *theoria* is the way "science itself is in conflict with our human consciousness of value."¹³⁶

Ulrich Beck argues, in the age of scientism (*Risk Society*, 2000), the alienation plays out in terms of the question of the *good* (*vital values*). Seemingly, the human sciences carry a crisis that manifests itself as a recurring and repeated question about its own self-identity, especially in relationship to language and the language of science that has been carried over from the Greeks. Gadamer reminds us that the *good* (the human good) lies in dialogue, for dialogue is, as he puts it, the "dynamis of the good," held together by the structure of our speech.¹³⁷ It is remarkable, he writes:

how this "guiding of the soul" combined with highly theoretical expositions of the principles of dialectic. Socrates – in his typically secretive, oracular way – supports his arguments with appeals to obscure

¹³⁵ This is also true of other sociological thinkers concerned with the nature of theory, including Alvin Gouldner, and Alan Blum, for example, as we shall see later.

¹³⁶ "Theory, Technology and Practice", in, *The Enigma of Health*, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Stanford University Press, 1996. p.9.

¹³⁷ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "The Dialectic of the Good in the *Philebus*." In *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986. p. 109.

sources of knowledge and even vague dreams. Plainly he makes no claim that what he says is authoritative. Rather, he sets the listener free once again to recognize himself in what is said. In this way, Socrates does indeed get his partner to enter into the dialectical movement voluntarily.¹³⁸

We are all grounded in the leap into the *logoi*, when we first enter the transcendental gaze of philosophy. We are at a threshold; we discover ourselves in the living event of thinking. But when the gesture of the *logical* ethos moves toward the formalization of speech that has ramifications beyond doing good science. Today, the formalization of speaking creates the transcendental space of speech (that is formally “abstract”), but in no way dialectical, as in the utterances of actual speech, but in a scientific modeling of speech. Consequently, the need to reframe this ideal of *scientific speech* occurs because the problems of science and modernity continue to exist at a personal level of our theory-speech. This is why theory-speech and literary-speech (i.e. the Platonic dialogues), for some, provide a model that links knowledge and character (historically found in the figure of Socrates), by linking prose style to theory, to challenge a modernistic understanding of theory.

Plato holds before us the Greek sense of living speech, found in the enchantment of the question, preceding, as it were, any dialectic of interpretation, because understanding is an event found in the priority of the question,¹³⁹ represented in the figure of Socrates, where “thought [remains] in close proximity to the linguistic world-experience as a whole,”¹⁴⁰ as we participate in the enchantment of the question.

¹³⁸ Ibid. p. 109.

¹³⁹ *Truth and Method*. [Second, Revised Edition], p. 467.

¹⁴⁰ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “The Philosophical Foundations of the Twentieth Century.” In *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Stanford: University of California Press, 1976. The Greeks, for Gadamer, are “exemplary to us today because they resisted the dogmatism

The logic of science absorbs truth into itself; it is this theme, evident in Heidegger's thinking that becomes a key to Gadamer's own project. Once the *logi* is transformed into *methodic* thinking, it translates itself into the priority of the truth of objects, over the truth of saying. Therefore, we now recreate ourselves [in scientific thinking], not on the event of truth in living speech, but in an estranged speech that cancels, or, distances the event of theory, found in the finitude of our lives and the infinity of our speech.

Truth is the continuous *semeiosis* of speech – the inner infinity of speech – that embodies us in its event. Truth, then, is how we live in [and inhabit] language: therefore, our living interpretation (truth as event), remains in contrast to *scientific* distancing, our control and our anonymous domination by the dogmatism of concepts. Truth and *theoria* have, as we know, a distinct meaning for the Greeks. And, as Gadamer shows, it is the phenomenon of language that holds us back and exemplifies our finitude. Greek thinking therefore resists the bad infinity of the “endlessly progressive” stance of modern thought.¹⁴¹

Gadamer says, "All thinking is confined to language, as a limit as well as a possibility. This experience is in every interpretation that is itself linguistic in character."¹⁴² Language is similar in conception to the spirit, “that transcends

of concepts and the ‘urge to system.’ “Thanks to this resistance they were able to conceive the phenomena that dominate our quarrel with our own tradition, such as the self and self-consciousness, that thus also the entire realm of ethical and political being, without falling into the dilemma of modern subjectivism.” p. 128.

¹⁴¹ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “On the Philosophic Element in the Sciences and the Scientific Character of Philosophy.” In *The Age of Reason*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001. p. 16.

¹⁴² Gadamer, “The Philosophical Foundations of the Twentieth Century,” p. 127.

subjectivity.”¹⁴³ Thought, then, its transcendental gesture lies in the Pre-Socratic opening of poetic-logic – such as we find in the mythic and poetic speech of *Parmenides*.

Plato’s concern is with making speeches (with the art of speaking) and it is speaking that underlies understanding. For example, an interpreter who, for example, only reproduced words and sentences would alienate “the conversation’s intelligibility” where conversation naturally lives.¹⁴⁴ Put simply, the intelligibility of the concept is not a matter of the science of language but of living language. An interpreter reproduces not what is said in exact terms but “what the other person wants to say and said in that he left much unsaid.”¹⁴⁵ What the interpreter is doing, is possible, because of “the inner infinity that belongs to all common understanding.”¹⁴⁶ Speech is, for Gadamer, a self-forgetting that also characterizes its very virtuality.

Why Speech Defines the Human Sciences

Life is articulating life in speech. Speech involves a self-reflection that clarifies the relation we have to ourselves as individuals and to our lives. Life interprets life in the hermeneutic structure of speech. Truth, guided by the ethos of scientific practice, a self-certifying act, is an act that estranges truth and dislocates the theorist from the way life articulates itself in speech.

¹⁴³ Ibid. p. 128.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Man and Language.” In *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Stanford: University of California Press 1976. p. 68.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 68.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 68.

Speech is hermeneutic phenomena and its universal significance,¹⁴⁷ thus there is no strong distinction between scientific speaking and non-scientific speaking, since each concerns rhetoric.¹⁴⁸ Gadamer, by drawing deeply on both the Greeks and Heidegger¹⁴⁹ reaches this central idea: spoken words are the origin of concepts.¹⁵⁰

In this way, social theory is not simply an acquisition of methodological rhetoric.¹⁵¹ Rather it resides in something that precedes method. Our natural concept formation, when locked into a vision of language as objectifiable, blocks a proper understanding of how words form concepts through their productive ambiguity.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ *Truth and Method*, [Second, Revised Edition] 2011, p. 405.

¹⁴⁸ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "Language and Understanding." In *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Late Writings*, edited by Richard E. Palmer. Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2007. p. 100-107.

¹⁴⁹ Gadamer, then, resists the ideal of a sociology that is a pure cognitive social science that reconstructs the "speaking being as object." In this way, for example, Gadamer's understanding differs with Nicolas Luhmann's cognitive view of sociology, detached from any philosophical (that is Classical and Enlightenment) conception of a human science and its anthropocentric dimensions. See, Moeller, Hans-Georg. *The Radical Luhmann*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

¹⁵⁰ Gadamer says that both Aristotle and Plato saw the logical ideal of the ordered arrangement of concepts [logic] as taking precedence over the living metaphoricity of language, on which all natural concept formation depends. But they knew it differently to how that precedence appears in our conception of modern theory.

¹⁵¹ *Truth and Method*, [Second, Revised Edition] 2011, p.431.

¹⁵² See, Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "Dialectic and Sophism in Plato's Seventh Letter." In *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*. Translated by P. Christopher Smith. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980. pp. 110-111. "The productivity of this dialectic is the positive side of the ineradicable weakness from which the procedure of conceptual determination suffers... But Plato knows full well that this source of all aporia is also the source of *euporia* which is active in discourse....An unequivocal, precise coordination of the sign world with the world of facts, i.e., of the world of which we are master with the world which we seek to master by ordering it with signs, is not language. The whole basis of language and seeking, the very thing which makes it possible, is ambiguity or 'metaphor,' as the grammar and rhetoric of a later time will call it." p.111.

Our natural attitude to the language of concept formation, our conversation, happens when we refine our thoughts, not limit or block them. As hermeneutic subjects we can see ourselves taken up by our words, exemplified by the ancient alliance between rhetoric and poetics – that means, in both the unity and multiplicity of the meaning capacity of words, that is not covered by logic.¹⁵³ By bringing Plato and hermeneutics together Gadamer shows how conversation – dialogue – weaves human speech in theory. One proceeds to human understanding, as Risser notes, by way of dialogical inquiry.¹⁵⁴ Gadamer’s point is that the way we proceed to understanding is not through logical demonstration. In the human sciences, language is not merely a path to the verification, or falsifiability of statements: but rather a path to knowing ourselves as a sharing with others where we are already taken up in the movement of thought. The scientific view of speech only conceals this real speculative and dialectical movement of language, of the play of the word, the natural formation of concepts, in alienating effects.

“The truth of speech,” Gadamer says, “exists in the adequacy of speech to the thing i.e., as adequation of the presentation through speech to the presented thing.”¹⁵⁵ Conceptuality and truth, therefore happen in speech that proves valid, a logos of speech that makes something discernable to us in the very intelligibility of what is being said,

¹⁵³ Ibid. p. 426.

¹⁵⁴ Risser points out in “The Voice of the Other in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics”, that in Gadamer’s emphasis on the finitude of human understanding, “one proceeds toward understanding only through dialogical inquiry where one encounters the living word in memory (Mnemosyne). “Here is this space not just of the voice, but of the voice of an other, logical demonstration yields to the power of communication in language where one must find the right words to convince the other. Here in this space of the voice of understanding occurs as a communicative event.” p. 380.

¹⁵⁵ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “What is Truth?” In *Hermeneutics and Truth*. Edited by Brice R. Wachterhauser. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994. p. 36.

where the words being spoken live up to themselves, and are not simply arbitrary, and, not simply empty.¹⁵⁶ Authentic speech, we may recall, is the concern of the rhetorician, according to Socrates. Socrates' defense of living speech and its relationship to writing rested on the question of authentically speaking to others. The intimacy of valid speech spoken to another is compared with written speech that is speaking to everyone. In some measure, we could say, the question becomes for theory not how scientific it can be but how it communicates with its audience. Also, how self-knowledge, self-understanding, play a role in this as a vehicle for avoiding self-alienation in speech. The dialectic of the dialogues is then presented as a form in which writing and speech merge more meaningfully to convey ideas.¹⁵⁷

When we move from word to concept we are not simply predicating our statements but opening ourselves to the speculative way words form concepts – into concepts that can then speak to us. Gadamer does not establish a theory of the foundations of the human sciences but rather shows how [hermeneutic] speech, the inner infinity of speech, is located – paradoxically – in the human sciences. The human sciences generate their own self-estrangement, as they infinitely re-arrange their

¹⁵⁶ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "Philosophy and Poetry." In *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*. Edited by Robert Bernasconi. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1986. p. 139.

¹⁵⁷ Mary Nichols' book, *Socrates on Friendship and Community*, presents this thesis that appears in Plato, with insight. See, Nichols, Mary P. *Socrates on Friendship and Community: Reflections on Plato's Symposium, Phaedrus, and Lysis*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009. "Through friendship we experience both our own as not wholly our own and another as not wholly other. It is such an experience, I shall argue, that characterizes philosophy. Only by experiencing our own as other do we become aware of our need or incompleteness that leads us to pursue wisdom; only by experiencing another as our own do we have any reason to suppose that learning is possible." p. 1. This point corresponds to aspects of this work inspired by Gadamer that pays attention to the alienating effects of the human sciences and the possibilities of social knowledge, or the claims of social theory, that historically permeates them.

rhetorical self-conception as a “science;” this, broadly speaking, Gadamer calls their methodological alienation. Thus their logic, as they aspire to be “scientific” leads to their ambivalence about Truth; for their self-certifying manner estranges this truth, and inhibits theory as they lose their hermeneutic efficacy of speech.

Theory involves the *givenness* of the interior dialogue of the soul with itself. Our interior dialogue puts words into our mouths, offering us, simultaneously, a way forward beyond the alienation of speech.¹⁵⁸ Our living enchantment with thinking recalls the Greeks; it is a Socratic enchantment, where we are always hermeneutically spoken. Mary P. Nichols describes, for example, how Plato [*Gorgias*] links the soul and rhetoric: “following his reference to virtue as a goal of rhetoric, Socrates observes that one cannot know the nature of the soul without also knowing the nature of the whole.”¹⁵⁹

Speech, word, living conversation, carries us along a path toward ourselves as a care of the soul, how we work on ourselves in society with others, even if we misuse our speech. Jan Patocka argues, following Plato that the care of the soul takes place in conversation.¹⁶⁰ Conversation is where our souls act, and are acted upon, in speeches where “manifesting and showing are always a showing to someone.”¹⁶¹ Speech ties us together and reminds us of this bond, the *wholeness* that precedes and connects us. Such wholeness is the manifesting of something where we understand the whole stamp

¹⁵⁸ *Truth and Method*, [Second, Revised Edition], 2011, pp. 551, 556.

¹⁵⁹ Nichols, Mary P. “A Genuine Art of Rhetoric.” In *Socrates on Friendship and Community: Reflections on Plato’s Symposium, Phaedrus, and Lysis*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009. p. 137.

¹⁶⁰ Patocka, Jan. *Plato and Europe*. Translated by Petr Lom. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002. p. 132.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 132.

of a thing for the thing itself “... the *sense for being*.”¹⁶² A fragment presupposes this sense of the whole, a subject presupposes a unity in difference, and this unity of difference is speech. Therefore, as Patocka puts it, to work through the work of oneself happens in society, “in a society with others, because in the end no one will escape this situation.” To which he adds, “And then there is that third thing, *the relation to one’s own* temporal and eternal *being*, to one’s own body, to one’s own bodily existence and to what awaits us all – that is, to death.”¹⁶³ Our conversation of the soul is with itself and with others, and this is where the care of the soul happens; it happens with others. Nichols also affirmed this point when she says, echoing Socrates: “Speeches connect souls together.”¹⁶⁴

A word is multiplicity and unity [one and many]; in our dialectical relationship to words we express ourselves. The human sciences, therefore, are closer to this quality of the metaphoricity of the word, thus connecting our natural concept formation, and our theorizing, back to living language. Once one seeks to transcend living language with a “scientific vocabulary” [words], one steps into a world encoded by an implicit alienation of speech.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Ibid. p. 132.

¹⁶³ Ibid, p. 135.

¹⁶⁴ Nichols, Mary P. “A Genuine Art of Rhetoric.” In *Socrates on Friendship and Community: Reflections on Plato’s Symposium, Phaedrus, and Lysis*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009. p. 137. p. 137.

¹⁶⁵ It is this implicit alienation of the word that we understand, in part, is to be found in the particular structure of the social theorizing of Zygmunt Bauman and others who have been influenced by hermeneutics.

Gadamer asks: are we not dealing, when it comes to the human sciences, with an alienated understanding?¹⁶⁶ He speaks of our alienated understanding, or self-estrangement, linked to a suspicion of language, leading to the suppression of the dialectic of the spoken word.¹⁶⁷ A consequence is the alienation of speech (and the alienation of truth).¹⁶⁸ A scientific self-representation of what theory and the theorist are, establishes a discontinuity between knowledge and ethics, theorist and community, built as it were, on a dual consciousness between a studious “objectivity” and the personal values held by a theorist.¹⁶⁹

Language lives as “the single word, whose virtuality opens for us the infinity of discourse, of speaking with another, of the freedom of ‘expressing oneself’ and ‘letting oneself be expressed’.”¹⁷⁰ Gadamer argues language is “something ‘non-objective’ and intangible, whose objectification in a text is always the occasion that ‘determines its non-objectivity.’”¹⁷¹ Gadamer’s concern is not to explain the foundations of the human sciences but rather show why the reflexive nature of speaking

¹⁶⁶ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “The Scope and Function of Hermeneutic Reflection.” In *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Translated by David E. Linge. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976. p. 27.

¹⁶⁷ Gadamer writes, “Modernity is characterised by a universal, critical reservation about the world picture of language and the enticing power of language.” See, Gadamer, “Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language,” p. 40.

¹⁶⁸ See Blumenberg’s early work on the metaphors of modernity that function on this prevailing assumption. Blumenberg, Hans. *Paradigm for a Metaphorology*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010.

¹⁶⁹ Personified in Peter L. Berger’s thinking on the human sciences. Berger, for example, describes such a situation in his work with the expression “dual citizenship.” Berger, Peter L. *The Adventures of an Accidental Sociologist: How to Explain the World Without Becoming A Bore*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2011. p. 206.

¹⁷⁰ *Truth and Method*, [Second, Revised Edition], P. 553.

¹⁷¹ Figal, Günter. “The Doing of the Thing Itself: Gadamer’s Hermeneutic Ontology of Language.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*. Edited by Robert J. Dostal. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

(as a conversation of the soul with others and itself) is the founding model that defines the human sciences. In this view, language is the priority of the spoken word and the proximity of language and truth. We can express everything in words and can try to come to agreement about things.¹⁷² When we objectify language we can lose touch with ourselves.

Poiesis and *poietes* indicate for the Greeks a very specific sense of poetic creation. Gadamer's emphasis on the hermeneutic character of poetic speech has drawn on this to show a complex impact. He seeks to show how the poem reveals a fundamental aspect of language in the question of the truth of the word, but also how this understanding of the poetic provides insight into the power of language, and thus, the language of theory.

Gadamer addresses the priority of the poet in revealing truth: "we have to concern ourselves, as philosophers, with the voice of poetry, and to be near to poetry and the arts generally, as was already emphasized by Schelling in German Idealism. This I have done throughout my life. The volume of my collected works which is at the printers right now [GW9 (1993)] contains nothing but interpretations of poetry."¹⁷³

A poet's voice, it is argued, lies in proximity to concept formation, and, ultimately, indicates why theory has a special relationship to poetic speech. For both have the capacity to bring being into language in the *unhiddenness* of the assertion.¹⁷⁴ We are reminded that for Gadamer, as with the Greeks, their attitude to the word is

¹⁷² *Truth and Method*, [Second, Revised Edition], 2011, p. 548.

¹⁷³ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Gadamer in Conversation, Reflections and Commentary*. Edited by Richard E. Palmer, New Haven: Yale University, 2001. pp.110-111.

¹⁷⁴ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "What is Truth?" In *Hermeneutics and Truth*. Edited by Brice R. Wachterhasuer. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994. p. 36.

different to a modern view of the word. The peculiar uniqueness of the poetic word indicates a capacity for the word to stand for itself. Words are non-verifiable, but not false. As Gadamer says “To speak of truth in poetry is to ask how the poetic word finds fulfillment precisely by refusing external verification of any kind.”¹⁷⁵

Saying and Understanding.

The virtuality of speaking words, (*lingusticality*) poses the *not-yet-said* that always remains in the background of what we say, and the *not-yet-understood* always lies in the background of understanding.¹⁷⁶ Then we are looking specifically at language not as a “set of a pre-given meanings but [as] a ‘coming to language’ from a constant reserve into an event in which meaning announces itself.”¹⁷⁷ Quoting Gadamer, “Hermeneutics is this: knowing how much of the un-said remains in what is said.”¹⁷⁸ We do not simply apply concepts to all sorts of things, but in Gadamer’s view, they remain speculative concepts (the way the finite word points to the infinite) that “come forward in the movement of thought springing from the spirit of language and the power of intuition.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “On the Contribution of Poetry to Truth.” In *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*. Edited by, Robert Bernasconi. Translated by Nicolas Walker. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986. pp. 110-111.

¹⁷⁶ Di Cesare, Donatella Ester, *Utopia of Understanding*, pp.7-8. Linguisticity (*Sprachlichkeit*), Di Cesare says is, “the virtuality of the not-yet-said that always remains in the background of understanding. It is the possibility of what is evoked and invoked having a voice in language. Thus, linguisticity always yearns for language. p. 25.

¹⁷⁷ Gadamer, “On the Contribution of Poetry to Truth,” p. 66.

¹⁷⁸ Quotation appears in Di Cesare’s book, and has been “modified” from the original interview. See, Di Cesare, *Utopia of Understanding*, p. 25.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. pp. 66-68.

How does *the priority of poetic speaking* in language apply to concept formation, as well as theory, and, how might they be illuminated by this insight?¹⁸⁰ We belong to the experience of language, but self-estrangement and alienation occurs, especially in the human sciences, when the emphasis on method, with its suspicion of ordinary language, dominates the way we reveal things. What is clear is that hermeneutic experience, rooted in the dialogue, changes our perception of our knowing-self and our conception of the concept as a living word.

The human sciences exist, in this way, in an animated and engaged conversation that works descriptively and creatively with concepts. For Gadamer, the human sciences stand on the language we speak, which is the “pre-given content of all subsequent logical analysis.”¹⁸¹ Thus, understanding, social consciousness, and truth, are all dialogical actions. Hermeneutics, seemingly offers a theory of truth and understanding that impacts the self-understanding of the human sciences. We can now consider how we concretize theory in the movement of thought, not by thinking against language (as an obstacle) but rather by thinking with it.¹⁸²

If theory shares this power of language, it is similar to the mimetic qualities found in poetic speech, then our ability to make things manifest to one another, in speech and in theory, presents something that can be known because of what is communicated. Speech, like the poem, or the literary work, and theory, in some measure exist in what is communicated by them. Truth is common to each. Truth is not

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. p.113.

¹⁸¹ Gadamer, “What is Truth?” p. 39.

Gadamer, “Don’t think against language, think with it,” in *Gadamer in Conversation, Reflections and Commentary*, p. 68.

imposed. The true is not an idea or a concept that comes afterwards, but is something that speech opens before us in the way we communicate ideas and share them.

Consequently, the participatory nature of theory, and the event-like nature of theory, resides in the hermeneutic perception of ontology of speech that is never purely abstract. Gadamer had learnt from Heidegger, of the hermeneutic *facticity* of speech. Speech, then, imparts being.

Speech (as conversation) puts a limit on any sovereign self-possession (*subjectivism*), or claims of transparency (*neutrality*) while opening us up to the very possibilities of what we are as conversational beings.¹⁸³ Methodological thinking blocks self-recognition by blocking our sense of the participatory whole, that is not objectifiable. Between speakers something remains irreducible, which is the structure of hermeneutic experience in its continuously communicative forms, not to be confused with the multiplicity of interpretations (*relativism*). It involves recognizing the capacity of language to open us to the sharing in the true, the beautiful, and the good, in genuine speech.

Truth, for Gadamer, cannot be a pre-given thing (definition), because truth is announced with others in our participation in speech (in dialogue as the priority of the question), which means we cannot simply institutionally or procedurally define truth; truth occurs in the play of understanding. In fact, there is no way to close truth down into a definition. Truth is not imposed.

¹⁸³ In “The Scope of Hermeneutical Reflection”, and following Heidegger, Gadamer establishes that understanding mobilizes a moment of the *loss of self* meaning that the occurrence of understanding cannot be grasped as a simple activity of consciousness that understands: “but is itself a mode of the event of being.” Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Edited and translated by David E. Linge. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976. p. 50.

Theory is the purest connection there is between true being and being true.¹⁸⁴

The human sciences rest on this. With our “supposed knowledge” and their “real knowledge” this is what is always at stake.¹⁸⁵ Modern theory compels us to embrace the estrangement of being (being-as-saying) and truth (where the word as word speaks), since *methodos* is where the question of truth is already decided within this paradigm and its assumptions. All of which compels the thinker into a procedural theorizing-self who has difficulty in adequately recognizing the immanence of truth within language.

Truth, in Gadamer’s view, is the temporalizing of *Dasein*, that makes possible the letting be of entities in speech, not understood as *a logic or method*, but, as a recurring self-discovery of being that occurs in speech. Being is there in the language we speak. It is in accepting language as an event (a speech event) that we understand that we are constantly in the process of concept formation. The Pre-Socratics opened this question to us in a remarkable way (as in the birth of philosophical speech), as with Parmenides. The virtuality of speech that precedes all *logos*, thus, allows us a different context for understanding the crisis of theory. In which we no longer thinking about closed language games, or meta-theory, but finding the right tools (style of writing) for making theory work. Because, as Gadamer says, the experience of meaning takes place in our understanding that is wholly and universally verbal. What is held in check by *methodos*, or our analytical tools,¹⁸⁶ our putting together of a series of interrelated propositions upon which we build theory, or putting together logically interrelated

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 36.

¹⁸⁵ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Truth in the Human Sciences.” In *Hermeneutics and Truth*. Edited by Brice R. Wachterhauser. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994.

¹⁸⁶ See, Rueschemeyer, Dietrich. *Usable Theory, Analytic Tools for Social and Political Research*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009. pp. 4-6. Presenting his view of theory as building an empirical social theory,

theoretical propositions, is the speculative potentiality of how we live in genuine dialogue. Here the truth of the word requires no such constitutive systematic structure to express itself as theory. What is rescinded, in fact, in this outlook, is the dimension of human reality that hermeneutics opens us to, and thus their paradox, which the human sciences remain rooted in.

The human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) so obviously understand themselves by analogy to the natural sciences that the idealist echo implied in the idea of *Geist* fades into the background.¹⁸⁷

We argue that speech articulates us; it is our being in the world. Once the ethicality and authenticity of the theorist's speech is compromised, so is the identity of the theorist. When we recognize that all speaking is rhetorical, we can overcome the limits of modern speech tied to the suppression of the rhetorical dimension of language. We have explored the relationship between such speech and self-alienation in the human sciences. Identifying how theorizing in the human sciences is internally linked to the adoption of a non-rhetorical horizon limits the conceptual power of those sciences. By placing rhetoric at the center of his work, Gadamer shows that our concern regarding the alienating effects of modern theory is due to the inadequate way we would ethically and lyrically restrict the process of theorizing.

¹⁸⁷ See, Gadamer, "The Problem of Method" in *Truth and Method* [Second Revised Edition]. p. 3.

Chapter 2.

Social Theory and its Relationship to the Question of Hermeneutic Truth.

In this chapter I claim that Gadamer sees the human sciences as rooted in the power of language's access to truth. Here, we bring the question of truth into proximity with the human sciences. We explain why, in his view, truth is illuminated by art and poetry. In *Truth of the Work of Art*, among other texts, Gadamer makes clear that truth happens in linguistic encounters and encounters with art. What he means is that we know things since we are bound by being and language in the power of the word. The encounters we have, in speaking theory, have nothing to do with an "object" or things that we get to know through "objective cognition". Rather, when we look at art and poetry we can envisage how truth in the nature of theory and concept formation is not the result of method. Gadamer's arguments on the nature of art and poetry help to reveal the place of truth in the nature of theory and concept formation. To know truth is to know that truth occurs without a concept. Once we recognize this, we know that we are not suspending ourselves in the objectivist illusion or the naturalization of theory. We perform theory in light of our ethicality of speaking and through our lyrical sensibility.

We return to Alvin Gouldner and C. W. Mills to show how the notion of truth was already at play in their work. I argue that social theory, in contrast to any scientific pre-conception, is a relationship, if not a living embodiment of the verbalization of truth. The claim is that there is a closer relationship between lyrical and ethical

expression in social theory, in contrast to a scientific conception of speech, because theory itself is a form of speech that cannot be understood as methodological. Truth matters to the human sciences because they are a discipline of questioning and inquiring that involves our self-formation, both as non-alien souls and as speakers.

What I intend to show, broadly, is why the problem of theorizing modern life is remedied or corrected by understanding Gadamer's main theme: the location of truth in the authoring of the social theorist. But before I do this I want to further flesh out my argument as to why the human sciences had, by seemingly avoiding the question of truth, actually located and identified it. Let's begin by considering some example of how social scientists, as early as the 1950s, were reflecting on their practices before we turn to the key theme of this chapter: the extension of the question of truth to the human sciences.

In 1952, C. Wright Mills wrote a paper for his students entitled, "On Intellectual Craftsmanship," that was subsequently published as an appendix to his famous book, *The Sociological Imagination*. Mills expresses his commitment to the sociological project in terms of writing and research practices; his aim is to support the creation of good sociologists and good social analysts. Underlying his concern, however, is an effort to grasp how theory (and method) has, in fact, become a hindrance to the discipline. In various ways, we find sociologists addressing this problem. In this section we consider who they were and their arguments.

In doing so, we argue that the underlying theme, although not always directly signified by these writers, nevertheless upon closer observation, concerns making a claim that the human sciences are an activity that is closer to art, ethics, lyricism and

truth. A key question, therefore, has been suspended in the human sciences: this was the question of truth. How do they recognize their truth? Gadamer's insight that we are neither to be subsumed under an ontology or a metaphysics, rather we reside in an "in-between", in the space that is the life of language itself, the space of truth, that involves recognizing the very instability of hermeneutical openness, that makes conceptual expression possible without ossification, it presupposes an ontology that is not simply an ontology, and a metaphysics that is not simply a metaphysics. It presupposes the place of truth in the human sciences. Underlying the human sciences, therefore, is a tension in the fact that life interprets itself, gives voice, and orients us to life. The human sciences have sought, naturally in quite different ways, to re-capture this condition in their work. This is where we discover the hermeneutic condition found in the human sciences, alluded to with such words as: *art*, *rhetoric humanism* and *ethics*, as we shall see.¹⁸⁸

The truth comes into view and is simultaneously posed by the human sciences. That accounts for Gadamer's injunction: truth is not method. The so-called "crisis" of the human sciences concerns our relation to the truth-bearing aspects of our saying, the interplay of poetic and political speech, that is quite other than the detachment and rigor that is imposed with the term *method*. Hence, we can hear this in Mills' way of stating the problem: "Social scientists make up a rationale and a ritual for the alienation inherent in most human observation and intellectual work today. They

¹⁸⁸ Di Cesare reminds us in Gadamer's view of language there is no "language of metaphysics" (as there is, say, with Heidegger), because, following Gadamer, language is "always only the one we speak with others." [*Dialogue and Dialectic*. p. 48]. See, Di Cesare's discussion of hermeneutics and metaphysics, "in between" and the already condition of always being in the middle of a dialogue, in "On the Language of Metaphysic" section, in her work, *Gadamer, A Philosophical Portrait*, pp. 124-125.

have developed several stereotypical ways of writing, which do away with full experience by keeping them detached throughout their operation. It is as if they are deadly afraid to take the chance of modifying themselves in the process of their work.”¹⁸⁹

Mills’ address to mainstream sociology of the late 1950s and early 1960s was to say that they were linguistically bound by institutional restraints and that this consequently restricted the sociological word and open conversation. He writes: “In brief, ‘methods’ are simply ways of asking and answering questions, with some assurance that the answers are more or less durable. ‘Theory’ is simply paying close attention to the words one uses, especially their degree of generality and their inter-relations. What method and theory properly amount to is clarity of conception and ingenuity of procedure, and most important, in sociology just now, the release rather than the restriction of the sociological imagination.”¹⁹⁰ Mills does not confront the question the way Gadamer does, but it remains clear that the generation of concepts as alienating is due to the absence of the linguistic orientation to truth. Mills’ key expression, the sociological imagination encapsulates the problem at the core of the discipline. Mills does not think that sociologists need to be imaginative; rather, he is identifying a language trap in the social sciences that alienates the theorist. Let us look at another version of the story, this time we turn to Peter L. Berger.

In *Adventures of an Accidental Sociologist: How to Explain the World Without Becoming a Bore* (2011), a summary of his career, Berger explains why Sociology has

¹⁸⁹ Mills, C.W. “Sociological Poetry.” In *The Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C. W. Mills*. Selected and Introduced by John H. Summers. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. pp. 33-34.

¹⁹⁰ Mills, “On Intellectual Craftsmanship,” in *The Politics of Truth*.

become equated with boredom.¹⁹¹ Again, we see that if a sociologist draws back into a system of thought, into an alienated position, then and something akin to boredom happens. The solution, according to Berger is to understand what “good sociology” is. He writes that sociology “has a kinship with good novels, from which one can learn a lot about society.”¹⁹² Boredom occurs through the disenchantment that abounds in the language of sociology. What is common to Mills and Berger is the language of sociology and linguistic disenchantment. What happens is that what is forgotten, as Dennis Schmidt says, is that language is in the first place an enactment of who we are. Let us look at one further approach to the linguistic disenchantment of the human sciences.

Robert Nisbet, in *The Sociological Tradition* (1966) claims that; “great sociologists never ceased to be moral philosophers,”¹⁹³ (with what he calls “moral aspiration”) and, second, that the “central ideas of sociology” result from an “intuitive and artistic frame of thought.”¹⁹⁴ Berger and Nisbet both identify a linguistic disenchantment, a world of disassociated concepts, that can be corrected by attending to the relevance of art and ethics: specifically, when we speak and write the language of theory. Emile Durkheim is intelligible, for example, because of the way he is an artist. He further points out that figures like Tonnies, Weber, and Simmel, “...were not working with finite and ordered problems in front of them. Each was, with deep intuition, with profound imaginative grasp, reacting to the world around them, even as

¹⁹¹ Berger, *Adventures of an Accidental Sociologist*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁹² Ibid. p.13.

¹⁹³ Nisbet, Robert. *The Sociological Tradition*. New York: Basic Books, 1966. p. 18.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 18.

does an artist, and also, like a artist, objectifying internal and only partly conscious, states of mind.”¹⁹⁵

Berger repeats Nisbet’s earlier claim.¹⁹⁶ Theorizing remains the site of a struggle over formulating and reformulating the Enlightenment project. Berger, for example, wrote:

I had called my approach to sociology “humanistic”. I would now question whether this was felicitous adjective, though I would not quarrel with the basic intention. I had intended two meanings: One *was to stress the contribution of sociology to a humane society [my emphasis]*, based on its debunking of the myths legitimating cruelty and oppression. I suppose that this came out of the Enlightenment tradition. But more relevant was the second meaning, sociology as one of the humanities (or *Geisteswissenschaften*), closely related to history and philosophy but also to the intuitions of the literary imagination.¹⁹⁷

Nisbet, and Berger do not, strictly speaking, question method (or the philosophical roots of formal theory) nor do they question theory and its form of validity as argument, but they do reference their proximity both to “literature” and “philosophy,” pointing to the question of an ethics of speech and to the rhetorical structure of conceptual analysis.

Brown, Mills and Gouldner all add to this picture during a critical period of self-questioning in the 1960s. Brown asked for example: “what recourse is there for the social thinker who knows himself to be made in signs, who sees society as a collective

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 19.

¹⁹⁶ Merton claims that the teaching of Albert Solomon had an impact on his self-conception as a theorist, referring to a course taught by Solomon called “Balzac as Sociologist” of which Berger says “this was an image of the sociologist that was imprinted on my mind, and it has stayed that way ever since, even if its youthful exuberance has been moderated over the years.” See “Balzac on Twelfth Street” in *Adventures of an Accidental Sociologist*, p. 13.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. pp. 25-26.

syntax, and yet who fears to speak for the love and despair of language?”¹⁹⁸ Unhooked for the realm of ethical and linguistic dimension of their practice, the alienated social scientist is caught in a conflict between scientific language and commonsense language, implicitly seeing the task of philosophy and the task of science as different.¹⁹⁹ For Gadamer as we know, the answer to these problems lies in extending the question of truth to the human sciences. The scientific performance of our utterances, the doing of science, distances and estranges us from the truth of language.

Richard Brown says, “The use of scientific methodology does not permit the social scientist to avoid rhetorical discourse. Instead, the scientist’s lack of self-consciousness about the assumptions and limits of such a method of logic results in using a naive and immoral rhetoric. This is the rhetoric of antirhetoric, a pretence that truth claims can have an absolute foundation.”²⁰⁰

In *The Social Construction of Reality*, (1996), Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann claim: “The objectivity of the social world means that it confronts man as something outside himself. The decisive question is whether he still retains the awareness that, however “objectivated”, the social world was made by men – and, therefore, can be remade by them.”²⁰¹ This theme runs through *The Scared Canopy*, resting on the thesis that the externalization of the world is our abiding experience.

Oddly, this almost seems like a description of sociology; sociology describes a world

¹⁹⁸ Brown, Richard Harvey. *Society as Text: Essays on Rhetoric, Reason, and Reality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989. pp.172-173.

¹⁹⁹ See, Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “On the Philosophical Element in the Sciences and the Scientific Character of Philosophy.” *Reason in the Age of Science*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2000.

²⁰⁰ Brown, *Society as Text*, p. 88.

²⁰¹ *The Social Construction of Reality, A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, Anchor Books, New York, 1966, p. 89.

that sociology appears to sustain as not only a point of departure but as an actual contributor to. As we know, this also amounts to a treating of his internal dialogue as somehow insufficient, thereby limiting the very nature of the ethicality of speech through which the person speaks, both to themselves and others.

Berger and Luckmann convey this sense of the social as an alienated encounter, a subtle interplay between social and theoretical alienation: the “social,” as it were, in Bauman’s words, an “abstract text.”²⁰² This paradox appears in Gouldner’s study, the problem of an alienated self-conception of the human sciences, that in turn involves a turning away from the self-forming reflexiveness of life. Gouldner speaks of a “Reflexive Sociology” that “seeks to transform as well as to know the alien world outside the sociologist as well as the alien world inside him.”²⁰³

In these two assessments we see that something is blocked in our view of social life and that this emanates from within the language of the human sciences.

Recently, Zygmunt Bauman has recapitulated the question: “In the order of things construed by sociological discourse, the status of morality is awkward and ambiguous.”²⁰⁴ Because the social sciences put the sovereignty of society over the individual, it creates self-confidence in social theory that has important consequences

²⁰² This is also a theme, as we shall discuss later, that Zygmunt Bauman takes up in his work, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989).

²⁰³ Gouldner, Alvin. “Toward a Reflexive Sociology.” In *The Coming Crisis of Sociology*. New York: Basic Books, 1970. p. 489. In this work after identifying the problems of social theory effectively (as moral and critical), he offers a problematic answer that in some measure, without irony, identifies the circularity of the theorist with the problem of modernity.

²⁰⁴ Bauman, Zygmunt. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 169.

for the question of morality.²⁰⁵ Since the practice of sociology is deeply empowered by an implicit moral detachment: “Most common sociological practice does not seem to endow “being with others” (i.e. being with other human beings) with a special status or significance.”²⁰⁶ The question of theory, caught up in the journey of science, and in turn, the question of truth guided by “logic” (within a methodological frame) managed, in part, to avoid its own metaphysical foundations. That explains why, “Most sociological narratives do without reference to morality.”²⁰⁷ But, as Gadamer wants to show, the theorist cannot be detached from speech because it is our speech that compels our moral existence.

Nisbet, we should note, described Simmel as having the mind of the “artist-essayist”, remarking how his work had “wonderful tension between the aesthetically concrete and the philosophically general that always lies in greatness.”²⁰⁸ This longing for theory to extend itself means it is more than the way of knowing of science but a way of knowing oneself. Berger – a veteran of describing the self-understanding of the human sciences – makes light of the dilemma of the alienating limits of scientific speech by concluding: “I don’t think I would say, ‘I am a Sociologist.’”²⁰⁹

We can now see why sociologists like, Philip Selznick, for example, sought to place the human sciences within an image of humanism or art, placing the human sciences, once again, on the borderline with the “literary”, as we found in Richard

²⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 173-174.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 179.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 171.

²⁰⁸ Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition*, p. 19-20.

²⁰⁹ Berger, *Adventures of An Accidental Sociologist*, p. 258. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, are famous for the publication of *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, published in 1967.

Brown's work. In Selznick's view, social theory is an "integrative pursuit," committed to both "explanation" and the "evaluation" of social phenomena that emphasizes the "literary" mode of social thought.²¹⁰

Merton's project, his "sociology of semantics," concerns a conception of language and sociology as much as it does a concern with the language of science.²¹¹

Sociology, for Merton is a science. For example, he opposes C.W. Mills' ideas expressed in *The Sociological Imagination*. Merton remained a classical figure, holding that sociology is scientific, while interested in the relationship of the social sciences to public understanding and rhetoric. In Merton's, *The Travels and Adventures of Serendipity: A Study in Sociological Semantics and the Sociology of Science* (2004), one is struck by his view of language, which presupposes that words and concepts are semi-autonomous entities that can be examined from a "sociological viewpoint," "sociology of semantics".²¹²

²¹⁰ See, for example, Selznick, Philip. *A Humanist Science: Values and Ideas in Social Inquiry*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008. Selznick speaks of the "islands of jargon" that pervert the course of social inquiry (and social theory), saying "These islands have their own jargon, theory, own culture, their own paradigms theory own ways of thinking.(from the *Forward*)" He Indicates that the issue underlying the crisis of social theory is linguistically driven, but never looks closely at the question of language. Another example, in the social theorist is Robert A. Nisbet, who also took a communitarian direction, and also published *Sociology as an Art Form*, in 2001.

²¹¹ Merton, Harriet Zuckerman tells us, "published seventeen papers of varying length, three books, and the massive compendium *Social Science Quotations*, all, in one sense or another, bearing on sociological semantics, exemplifying its practice, or addressing the role of language plays in science and scholarship." "On Sociological Semantics as a Evolving Research Paradigm". In *Robert K. Merton: Sociology of Science and Sociology as Science*, p. 257.

²¹² "The social scientist must often use new terms to distinguish the systematic abstractions he makes from social behavior from the commonsense abstractions of the layman. Frequently, the social scientist is accused of using 'mere jargon': that is, of dressing up commonsense ideas in obscure technical language in order that they might seem deceptively impressive, and, true or false, this charge itself vindicates the sheer

Peter Simonson says Merton's *On the Shoulders of Giants* was "in basic ways a hermeneutical project." Merton's focus on the sociology of science "brought sociology to the humanistic borderlands between rhetoric and the poetic, calling attention to its own artifice in the process."²¹³ Merton's distinction of a "systematics of sociological theory" communicates that science occurs in a special use of language, one that is clearly different to ordinary language. His early work, *Social Conflict over Sociological Work*, showed how these linguistic differences were more to do with the allocation of intellectual resources among different kinds of sociological work. "...Since the battle is public, it becomes a battle for status more nearly than a search for truth."²¹⁴

Merton's work was deeply connected with rhetoric in the sciences.²¹⁵ Thus Merton had acute sensitivity to the question of sociology and prose style.²¹⁶ Merton's, *On the Shoulder's of Giants* (2000), according to Simonson, is "saturated with irony and word play," that "brought sociology to the *humanistic borderlands between rhetoric and poetics, calling attention to its own artifice in the process* [*my emphasis*]

importance to words in the social sciences. The humanist who is seeking to interpret human experience often uses new words or phrases to repress 'old truths.' Where the social scientist is accused of using jargon, the humanist is accused of precocity." From Merton, Robert K and Elinor Barber. *The Travels and Adventures of Serendipity: A Study in Sociological Semantics and the Sociology of Science*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. p. 67.

²¹³ Simonson, Peter. "Merton's Sociology of Rhetoric." In *Robert K. Merton: Sociology of Science and Sociology as Science*. Edited by Craig Calhoun, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. p. 235.

²¹⁴ Ibid. p.214.

²¹⁵ Simonson, "Merton's Sociology of Rhetoric," pp. 214-252.

²¹⁶ Ibid. p. 215. "His [Merton's] writing was famously described in a 1961 *New Yorker* profile as being crafted "too well for a sociologist," a story that also remarked on his facility with "metaphor and other literary devices" – so rarely used in sociology as to be called Mertonism's by some of his associates." (Hunt 1964:62, 44)."

that worked as a sociological counterpart to literary and philosophical approaches to language.” Simonson further suggests that Merton’s study “was a well-wrought modernist text.”²¹⁷ Merton achieved his sociological ends, contributing to the sociology of science, by remaining in close proximity to a modernist text, Simonson noting that its experimentalism was based on Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*.²¹⁸

With Merton, and others, we see a complex working around hermeneutic issues and language use in sociology. Apart from evident differences we can recognize that there exists a common problematic that is being composed around a set of interrelated themes in their work: of which the most fundamental is the question of concept formation in the human sciences, where concepts are formed imaginatively and evaluatively, and concern, simultaneously, the way we manifest ourselves as theorists.²¹⁹

Bauman has remarked that the theorist is in a “battlefield,”²²⁰ because the theorist is struggling to find an adequate way to think and write for their task. Gadamer shows us that these concerns with style and idiom for concept formation is, in fact, a matter of how we experience ourselves in language, the very root of our intellectual

²¹⁷ Ibid. p. 235.

²¹⁸ Ibid. p. 235.

²¹⁹ Such arguments share something of the pragmatist approach, found in the work of Richard Rorty, including, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, where he reads philosophy and literature in a similar way to critique epistemological and metaphysical foundationalism. See, his discussion in, Bernstein, Richard J. “Rorty’s Deep Humanism.” In *The Pragmatic Turn*. London: Polity, 2010.

²²⁰ “... we wage a struggle to find the new and adequate ways of thinking *of, about, and for* the world we live in, and our lives within it.” Bauman, Zygmunt. *Does Ethics Have Any Chance In A World of Consumers?* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008. p. 1.

²²¹ Bauman, Zygmunt. “Afterthoughts: On Writing and Writing Sociology.” In *Liquid Modernity*. London: Polity, 2000. pp. 202-203.

reflexivity, as an essential togetherness that theory presupposes as well as a moral self-understanding. Bauman, thereby asks the key question that brings him into proximity with Gadamer's reflections: What, if anything, does the poet's vocation have to do with the sociologist's calling?²²¹

Paul Taylor links C. W. Mills with Zygmunt Bauman: "What distinguishes Bauman and Mills from their less imaginative counterparts is their willingness to engage with the problems of theorizing the lived experience of "liquid modernity's" uncertain flux rather than succumb to the dominant social science tendency to hide its disciplinary insecurity behind a wall of falsely confident empirical methods. Over-emphasizing the science aspect of the term social science, the field risks aping scientific rigor and correctness at the expense of social ambiguity and truth while refusing to consider Arendt's texture of reality: "methodological inhibition stands parallel to the fetishism of the concept" (Mills 2000 [1959]: 50)."²²²

In *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*, for example, we can see Alvin Gouldner is concerned with the language of theory. Bauman speaks of the language of sociology as contributing to a loss of humanity. When the self is *theorized*, orientated outwardly, to the object, the "object" now stands over us. Significantly this is at the cost of our self-transformative self-understanding (truth); we cannot give a true account of theory (knowledge) as an act between rationality and responsibility.

²²² See, Paul Taylor's essay, "Totalitarian Bureaucracy and Bauman's Sociological Imagination," In *Bauman's Challenge: Sociological Issues for the 21st Century*. Edited by Mark Davis and Keith Tester. London: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2010. pp. 153-155.

Gadamer questions: “and we can ask, after the summary above, are we not dealing, when it comes to the human sciences, with an alienated understanding?”²²³ He speaks of our alienated understanding, or self-estrangement, linked to a suspicion of language, leading to the suppression of the dialectic of the spoken word.²²⁴ A consequence is the alienation of speech (and the alienation of truth).²²⁵ A ‘scientific’ self-representation of what theory and the theorist are establishes a discontinuity between knowledge and ethics, theorist and community; built as it were, on a dual consciousness, between a studious “objectivity” and the personal values held by a theorist.²²⁶

How do the words of sociology, their conversations, and their communicative performances communicate and connect with the lives of ordinary men and women? Our conversation about social life, Bauman noted, is a site of struggle, a site of disenfranchisement, which according to Berger, has plagued sociology with a dual problem: *methodological fetishism* and *ideological propaganda*.²²⁷ In this way, the human sciences’ loss of conversational power concerns how we make a conversation

²²³ Gadamer, “The Scope and Function of Hermeneutic Reflection,” p. 27.

²²⁴ Gadamer writes, “Modernity is characterised by a universal, critical reservation about the world picture of language and the enticing power of language.” See, Gadamer, “Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language,” p. 40.

²²⁵ See, for example, Blumenberg’s early work on the metaphors of modernity that function on this prevailing assumption. Blumenberg, Hans. *Paradigm for a Metaphorology*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010.

²²⁶ Personified in Peter Berger’s thinking on the human sciences. Berger, for example, describes such a situation as a “dual citizenship”, *The Adventures of an Accidental Sociologist, How Explain the World Without Becoming A Bore*, Prometheus Books, 2011. p. 206.

²²⁷ Ibid. p. 8.

with ourselves and with the lives of ordinary men and women. All of which is visible and known to us since sociology embodies this crisis and carries it within itself.²²⁸

Sociology and Philosophy

Philosophy's roots point to the understanding of the eternal over the contingent. Gadamer's vision of philosophy is Socratic, one that resides in the affinity of theory to our deeds. Philosophy, as with Heidegger, is also concerned with a dialogue with itself, as a beginning and a leap that continuously reassigns itself as an overcoming. It is at its core a philosophy of life. In this regard, his view of a philosophical life differs from the modern vision of the philosopher. Philosophical hermeneutics points to the Greeks and emerges out of a relationship to them. When Anthony Giddens, for example, speaks of *the proximity of theory to philosophy*²²⁹ he is not thinking of this affinity in the way that hermeneutics establishes it, but he does refer to some sort of a connection or affinity. We may also recall how Peter Winch had entitled his book on the question of how the human sciences conceived of themselves as, *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy* (1958).²³⁰

²²⁸ Earlier works, such as Gouldner's *The Coming Crisis of Sociology*, sought to find a new view of theory, insightfully, he saw that "theory work begins with an effort to make sense of experience" and that this was connected to a "dissonance between an implied reality and certain values..." p. 484. We shall discuss in greater detail how Gouldner's response raises the problem as one of the scientific self-conception of theory within the human sciences.

²²⁹ Giddens, Anthony. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Stanford: University of California Press, 1986, and, Giddens, Anthony. *The Consequences of Modernity*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990, where he speaks of the "cultural and epistemological overtones" of theory.

²³⁰ Winch went to the core of the problem of the social sciences: their faulty relation to the natural sciences and their relation to philosophy. Winch understood that we do not stand outside concepts but that concepts are part of our being in the world. Drawing on

Why is a discussion of philosophy essential to a discussion of the human sciences? Hardly disguised in this dialogue is our metaphysical legacy. Winch, is guided by analytic philosophy and the ordinary language philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, and he understood the link of philosophy and the human sciences concerning the question of language. This implicitly brings Winch and Gadamer together.²³¹

Winch speaks of “a binding proximity [of philosophy] to them [the human sciences] that separates it from the realm of the world view based strictly on subjective evidence.”²³² Winch’s own interpretation of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, as Karl-Otto Apel notes, concerns a strange antagonism between *scientific methodology* and *philosophic method* that, in Winch’s view, favored philosophic method. What this tells us is the way philosophy is seen as a counter balance against scientific methods, that scientific method cannot be the true form of sociology, because sociology is concerned

Wittgenstein, Winch was to have a large impact on the discussion of the status of theory and the nature of the human sciences, the idea of what a social science is in relation to philosophy: “I now attempt a more detailed picture of the way in which the epistemological discussion of man’s understanding of reality throws light on the nature of human society and the social relations between men.” Winch, Peter. *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy*. London: Routledge, p.24. The world is made up of concepts, and the world we live in must be understood from within these horizons.

²³¹ Ibid. p.2. Philosophy must be on guard against the “extra-scientific pretensions” of science.” Thus his book is: “a war on two fronts: first as criticism of some prevalent contemporary ideas about the nature of philosophy; second, as criticism of some prevalent contemporary ideas about the nature of social studies,” meaning, in his eyes, that the study of society is philosophical in character. p.3. Apel illuminates the connection this way: “I think Winch here approaches the concepts of “being-able-to-be-in-the-world” and “understanding-oneself-in-the-situation” (which imply a priori forms of understanding) as they were originally explicated by Heidegger in *Being and Time* and have been used as fundamental concepts of a *Philosophical Hermeneutic* by H-G Gadamer. p. 35.

²³² Ibid. p. 1.

with “social forms of life,” therefore, as Apel adds, “Winch holds that sociology as a science of the forms of life is not an empirically generalizing science, but basically identical with philosophy as epistemology, both dealing with the ‘forms of understanding’.”²³³ Winch connects the work of the human sciences to questions of philosophy but still within an epistemological framework.

In other words, formulating the question of the human sciences around how we identify the content of social description and understanding (theory), is the concern with language. In the human sciences, there are variations of the encounter between philosophy and social science. Each position, though, presupposing different conceptions of what philosophy is. For even Winch’s perception of Wittgenstein concerns, as Apel says, an interpretation “thinking with and against Wittgenstein.”²³⁴

For Gadamer, philosophy is different. Philosophy is rooted in phenomenological description of human experience [not analytic philosophy]: it concerns the path of experience. The human sciences’ linguistic and moral crisis (expressed by Berger, Nisbet, Brown, etc.) lies then in their unquestioned metaphysical presupposition about language that leads toward an alienation of speech and an alienation of our moral being wherein we enact ourselves in living experience. The human scientist is not simply “dealing with monological modes of speech of scientific sign systems, which are exhaustively determined by the research area being designated

²³³ Apel, Karl-Otto. “Philosophy of Language and the Geisteswissenschaften,” In *Karl-Otto Apel, Selected Essays. Volume one: Towards a Transcendental Semiotics*. Edited by Eduardo Mendieta. Humanities Press, 1994. p. 30.

²³⁴ Ibid, p. 29.

in any given case.”²³⁵ Rather, their knowledge claims, their “theory products and theory performances”²³⁶ concern a search to find their [the human sciences’] right understanding with the public and themselves.²³⁷ In Gadamer’s view, right understanding is found in the truth of speech and, recognizing the true nature of how the human sciences create this understanding.²³⁸

Language orients us to the whole but only, as Gadamer notes, when “real conversation occurs and that means wherever the reciprocity of two speakers who have entered into a conversation circles the subject matter...”²³⁹ The Greeks, as Gadamer says, understood philosophy as a conversation, where “thinking is a process of understanding endless understanding.”²⁴⁰ Further, they saw philosophy in a comprehensive way, whereby, “the Greeks denoted every kind of theoretic

²³⁵ Gadamer, “On the Philosophical Element in the Sciences and the Scientific Character of Philosophy,” p. 4.

²³⁶ Gouldner’s terms used in *The Coming Crisis of Sociology*.

²³⁷ The Platonic tone of Gadamer’s question, to use Seth Bernardette’s language, concerns the question of, “whether the city of knowledge and the city of opinion can be joined together. They can be joined together, Socrates says, if the philosopher supplies their bond, for only the philosopher has the knowledge to discern the true natures of the citizens despite the falsehood that class structure of the city and the political education imposed on them.” Bernardete, Seth. Preface to *The Tragedy and Comedy of Life: Plato’s Philebus*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009. xi. Bernardete reminds us, that the classical question of knowledge is tied to the role of the philosopher, to the practice of their art. This art as Gadamer says, (adopting the artistry of weaving) concerns bringing opposing faction into a unity [Statesman, 305e], and, as in the Philebus, that knowledge of the good life also comes about in the art of mixing, “which the individual in search of happiness has to realize in *concreto*.” Gadamer, “Hermeneutic as a Theoretical and Practical Task,” p. 122.

²³⁸ To put the question this way helps us see that it is not a matter of how we merely use words, not merely the art of words, but the way we are an ethics of speech, pointing us back to the Platonic dialogues and their eternal question.

²³⁹ Ibid. p. 4.

²⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 5.

knowledge.”²⁴¹ Greek theory retains its identity by encompassing the unity upon which it begins against the living culture of differences. In this way, it attaches itself to the good, the self-realization of the theorist, in this struggle.

Modern theory isolates us from the process of our “self-understanding” in concept formation.²⁴² The very strangeness of which cannot be overcome but constitutes the hermeneutic condition of theory as one of a continuous dialogue with the other. The Greeks illuminated how speech was our relation to the whole – the desire to be “able to preserve a unity within the totality of what is.”²⁴³ Theory as science is resting on a unity of knowing but the unity of knowing resists objectification in a balancing tension. Theory implicitly, then, resists the language of science that is embodied in the struggle over theory in the human sciences reflecting a tension between science and philosophizing. Gadamer explains it this way, “Understanding of our life world as deposited in our language cannot be truly resolved by means of the possibilities available to science.”²⁴⁴ The human sciences, then, comes “to know itself to be in conflict with the self-awareness of science.”²⁴⁵

Our verbal experience of the world precedes and embraces everything including theory. But theory seeks to separate itself from experience, from being in error, and so as a science, it endlessly reproduces its truth in the reproduction of its objects, which includes itself as a “science.” The event of language (where speech and thought remain unified) is a natural part of the process of concept formation. The

²⁴¹ Ibid. p. 1.

²⁴² Gadamer, “Science and Philosophy,” in *Reason and the Age of Science*, p. 19.

²⁴³ Ibid. p. 2.

²⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 11.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 7.

structure of methodological logic²⁴⁶ estranges us from truth in contrast to our experience of meaning and the conceptual thinking that “takes place in understanding” [and] wherein the “whole process is verbal.”²⁴⁷

Gadamer claims that, “language is in the process of becoming and it is not a rule-governed apprehension of words, not a co-constructing of something within convention. No, the poetic word establishes meaning.”²⁴⁸ If this is the case, all world-disclosing words arise as if poetically and creatively – it follows that the objectivism of speech is actually contrary to the process of the becoming of theory.²⁴⁹ Is this not why there are such figures in the history of sociology as Robert Merton?²⁵⁰

The Extension of the Question of Truth to the Human Sciences

Heidegger’s presence is quite clear in Part 2 of Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, “The Extension of the Question of Truth to Understanding in the Human Sciences,” where Gadamer takes up his concern with the nature of the epistemological problem of theory and its relationship to our living experience.²⁵¹ Heidegger had provided

²⁴⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 385-430.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 385.

²⁴⁸ Gadamer, “On the Truth of the Word,” p. 151.

²⁴⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 451.

²⁵⁰ Evident in his work on *sociological semantics*. “While ‘sociological semantics’ is a label that nicely channeled Merton’s scientific aspirations, ‘the sociology of rhetoric’ indexes his persistent humanistic self, and casts his work as part of a longer historical conversation.” See, Simonson, Peter. “Merton’s Sociology of Rhetoric,”. In *Robert K. Merton: Sociology of Science and Sociology as Science*. Edited by Craig Calhoun. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. p. 217.

²⁵¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 218-242. See also, “Dilthey’s Entanglement in the Aporias of Historicism”, and “From the Epistemological Problem of History to the Hermeneutic Foundation of the Human Sciences” pp. 218-242.

Gadamer with insight into the transcendental interpretation of understanding. For in Heidegger's "existential analysis of *Dasein*" Gadamer found a new way of recognizing the human sciences. Hermeneutics would show that the interpreter belongs to the *object*. Heidegger shows that, *Dasein* is understood as a *thrown projection*; our own being is understanding; *Dasein's* understanding is also true of the act of understanding in the human sciences. Any human inquiry begins in a shared understanding that transcends each subject. Language then, as we shall see, is the articulation of *Dasein's* disclosing, whereby it lets entities appear to us in the multiplicity of words and the power of the unity of the word found in dialogue.²⁵²

Gadamer knew from Heidegger that we become alive to being in the word. He knew too, that direct conversational tone, found in Ancient Greeks, links dialogue to the question of truth. A revealing description of Ancient Greek language and its power appears in *The Beginnings of Philosophy*:

Greek in itself already offers speculative and philosophical possibilities of a particular kind. Here I wish to name only two. The first is well known, as one of the most fruitful properties of the Greek language (which, by the way, it has in common with the German language), namely, the use of the neuter, which allows it to present the intentional object of thought as the subject. Moreover, there are the studies of Bruno Snell and Karl Reinhardt, those great teachers with whom I had the good fortune to be closely associated. They have made clear how the concept already announces itself in this use of the neuter. Indeed, something is indicated in the use of the neuter that is found neither here nor there and yet is common to all things. In Greek poetry, just as in German poetry, the neuter signifies something omnipresent, an atmospheric presence. It has to do with the quality of a being, but a quality of the whole space, 'being,' in which all beings appear.²⁵³

²⁵² Ibid. p. 426.

²⁵³ Gadamer, *The Beginnings of Philosophy*, p. 14.

Hermeneutics shows us how we belong to one another in language and how, like our encounter with artwork, this is also a disclosing process of Being.²⁵⁴ The encounter with the poetic word provides this awareness to us. In Part 3 of *Truth and Method*, “The Ontological Shift of Hermeneutics Guided by Language,” Gadamer tells us that, *Truth and Method* concerns the linguistic character of understanding. He writes: “When I speak of a hermeneutical conversation with tradition, with what has come down to us, this is not just a metaphorical way of speaking, but an exact description of how the understanding of the tradition takes place; it is an understanding that takes place in the medium of language. Language is not a supplement to understanding.²⁵⁵ Knowing in the human sciences cannot be correctly understood without grasping how, for us, we touch upon the continual event of language in understanding.

Now the hermeneutic experience that we are endeavoring to think from the viewpoint of language as medium is not an experience of thinking in the same sense as this dialectic of the concept [Hegel], which seeks to free itself entirely from the power of language. Nonetheless, there is something resembling dialectic in hermeneutic experience: an activity of the thing itself, and action that, unlike the methodology of modern science, is a passion, an understanding, an event that happens to me”.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 254.

²⁵⁵ Gadamer, “Hermeneutics In *Gadamer in Conversation, Reflections and Commentary*. Edited by Richard E. Palmer. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001. p. 51.

²⁵⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 460. These thoughts can be read alongside a significant essay by Gadamer on Hegel, that provides insight to how he draws upon Hegel’s insight in the Ancient Greek conception of philosophy as dialectic of the concept that exceeds any fixed conception of thinking found in the statement: Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Dialectic of the Ancient Philosophers.” In *Hegel’s Dialectic, Five Hermeneutical Studies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. Hegel moves the dialectic into the movement of thought, emphasizing the speculative dimension of our statements as valid formulations.

Heidegger's work, then, provided the foundation for Gadamer who says that: "The present work [*Truth and Method*] is devoted to this new aspect of the hermeneutical problem,"²⁵⁷ one that clearly, as we now see, was provided by Heidegger's claim that understanding is the "original form of the realization of *Dasein*, which is [our] being-in-the-world."²⁵⁸

"Understanding is *Dasein*'s mode of being" implies knowledge rests on this understanding of Being. Truth is the disclosing of the *Da* of *Dasein*, insofar as we discover that we know we are not looking for a methodological way to explain understanding. Rather Gadamer will argue that the disclosing function of truth is at the core of language and that language is the core of the hermeneutic experience.

Speech links self and object, not statements. In essence, this is the nature of language as language, where the power of words has the capacity of *self-reference* that shapes the *objects* of our concern. The truth of the word, therefore, cannot be grasped "by taking the 'natural' forms of linguistic communication as a starting point."²⁵⁹ Rather, we must look to conversation, not technical terms, to discover the nature of theory. In "The Ontological Shift Guided by Hermeneutics" in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer describes concept formation in this way: "conceptual interpretation is the realization of the hermeneutic experience itself."²⁶⁰

Speculative concepts, our speculative sentences, our speculative words, have a self-referentiality, which, typically belongs to the poetic word.²⁶¹ The poetic word

²⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 259.

²⁵⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 259.

²⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 151.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 404.

²⁶¹ Ibid. p. 154.

shows the unity of the word that occurs in speech that is not simply slotting words into a pre-established arrangement, but resides in the whole context of the verbal nature, the ontological view that our being is language.²⁶²

The power of understanding does not lie in rules but in the nature of speaking. All language falls back into speech no matter in which way we are speaking (writing). All writing involves, then, a self-alienation that one overcomes with understanding. With writing one is overcoming and finding the word that shares the sense of what one is saying.

Truth lies in the potential of the word to say something (not just anything but something of eminence and force). This is not about seeking an external viewpoint (external reflection) about truth; rather it is about the very capacity of the word (and speech) to convey truth. Art and the artworks reveal our linguistic being. Gadamer writes:

As Heidegger has shown us that the truth of the artwork is not the speaking forth of the logos, but is rather a “that it is” and a “there” at the same time, which stands in the strife between disclosure and sheltering concealment. The question that has guided us here was how this looks especially in the art work of words, where the sheltering and protecting in the “construction of the art already presupposes its being-in-language and the in-dwelling of being in language.²⁶³

Further: Truth is about something existing in itself, lifts and grants itself a claim to being [*Seinsanspruch*].²⁶⁴

²⁶² Ibid. p. 487.

²⁶³ Gadamer, “On the Truth of the Word,” p. 154.

²⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 134.

The word, always, implies a collective meaning and a social relationship, a shared saying, which we can recognize in dialogue (conversation). This is because “man is not just himself at home in language, but rather *Being [Sein] is there in the language that we speak with each other* [my emphasis].”²⁶⁵

The way the word as word speaks is its poetic capacity, dialogue flows with the art of the word; thus, theory speaks to us in turn, due to this capacity. Theory can be grasped in its true meaning only on this basis of the truth of the word. The poetic word tells us this; the poetic word is the key to Gadamer’s thesis.²⁶⁶

Being comes forth as the word comes forth; for Gadamer, Being is not language, though, but rather Being can be grasped through language (*being-as-saying*). Thus, we are there in language with another as well as all that has yet to be said when we speak. The art of the word has, as it were, been squeezed by the logic of modernity, and the tradition of western thinking, as either *rhetoric* or *poetics*; thus adding to a sense of the loss of truth – the capacity for truth saying.

We do not reproduce truth methodologically; rather it is within the realm of dialogue with others, of the eminent ways that we can say things, that makes us more than mere non-participatory observers, and losing any keen sight and awareness of the community of speech that binds us together.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 136.

²⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 143.

²⁶⁷ See, Gadamer, “Hermeneutics as a Theatrical and Practical Task,” p. 236.

Ancient Greek thinking, Gadamer says, regardless of our choice, is a “self-encounter.”²⁶⁸ The question of theory is a conversation with the Greek legacy. What is the nature of this encounter? We have given over our worldly knowing to the knowing of science, something the Greeks did not do. What we learn from the Greeks is that such thinking is thinking-with-an-other residing in our communicative commonality, a commonality that for Gadamer is language. And language, he reminds us, exists only in conversation. In this way, we shift our attention to the primordial structure of sharing and community found in conversation. In conversation, we see that there are no fixed objects to be overcome, no self-certainty to be built on us alone.²⁶⁹

Language cannot objectify itself. In other words, to put the question differently: we can never simply be an object (scientific object) to ourselves. In *The Beginning of Knowledge*, Gadamer offers a further account of how the Greeks inform us:

What was in the beginning? What does it mean to say something is? Is nothing something? The posing of these questions is the beginning of Greek philosophy, and the basic answers are: *physis* (there-being-from-out-of-itself in the ordering of the whole) and *logos*, (the insight into the insightfulness of this whole, including even the *logos* of human craftsmanship). But the way, the image of Greek philosophy in confrontation with modern science is fixed there almost like an antipode and not just as a precursor to and a discloser of the course of theoretical ability and mastery. It is the confrontation between the intelligible world and the masterable world that we become aware of the Greek thinking.

The Greek world recognized the inalienable language of non-objectifying truth. Gadamer points out the Greek did not have a word meaning language. Consequently, our unavoidable challenge, according to Gadamer, is to realign ourselves with this other

²⁶⁸ Noticeably, similar to Heidegger’s idea that the “forgetfulness of Being is always accompanied by the presence of Being.” Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Being Spirit and God.” In *Heidegger’s Ways*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994. p. 194.

²⁶⁹ See, Gadamer, “The Greeks,” In *Heidegger’s Ways*, p.147.

half of truth. *Methodos*, broadly conceived, is our major challenge; *method*, therefore, is also the key to grasping Gadamer's challenge to the self-alienation of the human sciences and the one-sided nature of modernity. The struggle over the identity of the human sciences is intertwined with the fate of modernity. Re-thinking what constitutes our ideals of knowing in modernity requires that we ask at what cost did the human realignment with technical knowledge set in place the challenge of its current alienating effects?

Plato's *Republic* is the task, set before us of the *logos* and of the social and political fragility of democracy. A unity of our philosophical lives concerns the political fulfillment of the *inner city*, the scope of our self-formation. The sociologist's alienation is the philosopher's; both face the question of their mode of their being in the world, of understanding our forms of life and our being in the world. Finding such a balance, such a unity in oneself, involves us in dialogue with the other. It is not that *philosophers* will *rule* the *state* but that as *philosophers* (Gadamer claims Plato knew this) we learn to rule ourselves within an ethical framework based on our finitude and our practical grasp of the good (*agathos*).

Here, we approach the way the social sciences create an enclosure of experience, as part of their self-understanding as a science. Hermeneutics shows us why being open to experience, never closed, requires an un-dogmatic attitude to experience, requiring a new understanding, a paradigm shift away (not a new consciousness, but a sensitivity to experience) from the purely objectivist vision of truth that encloses us as

well as the human sciences. To do this we must ask what this understanding in truth is.²⁷⁰

The human sciences struggle over the objective possibilities of truth. Gadamer is clear on this matter: “What method defines is precisely not truth.”²⁷¹ As a young man in 1923, Gadamer attended Heidegger’s lectures:

The first course I attended in the year 1923 had the title “Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity.” Like many academic titles, this too has an academic prehistory. I happen to know that Heidegger at that time had to give up the title he planned for us because an older colleague had announced something similar. Presumably Heidegger had actually helped himself by narrowing the meaning of “ontology” with the term “hermeneutics.”²⁷²

Gadamer later notes: “This is what facticity means: the concrete, factual existence of the human,”²⁷³ suggesting that it is in this conception that we find the situation of hermeneutics itself, that focuses on something that is not understandable [life].²⁷⁴ Understanding is projected toward sense (out of a sort of darkness), or self-forgetfulness that characterizes all speech.

Heidegger’s 1927 lectures anticipate aspects of Gadamer’s work. The human sciences if they correspond to the essential structure of our hermeneutic being, we all reside in a linguistic universality that exceeds us, then the human sciences have more in common with our universal conversation where the formation of the subject is open to truth. Gadamer builds his hermeneutics on Heidegger’s work by raising the concept of understanding into the existential. Gadamer’s project translates Being into language –

²⁷⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 100.

²⁷¹ Comments made during a conversation with Carsten Dutt, “Hermeneutics”, in *Gadamer in Conversation, Reflections and Commentary*, p. 55.

²⁷² Gadamer, “Hermeneutics and the Ontological Difference,” in *The Gadamer Reader, A Bouquet of Flowers*, p. 261.

²⁷³ Ibid. p.362. But this “factum” was not the factum of science.

²⁷⁴ Ibid. p.363.

as a fundamental part of *Truth and Method* – where he announces: “the Being that can be understood is language.”²⁷⁵

Reflection is our belonging together as we make ourselves visible to others, and to ourselves through others. This makes Gadamer’s vision of human ontology deeply ethical in nature, but also shows that hermeneutics takes leave of ontology. Here, is the key concern for Gadamer: the distinction between methodological alienation and truth. Specifically, this concern is with the way we think about language, because, as he says, language is one of the most compelling phenomena (alongside art) of “non-objectivity insofar as [an] essential self-forgetfulness characterizes the performative character of speech.”²⁷⁶ Being is not to be seen as language. Rather, Gadamer, treats language, as Di Cesare, notes as “a-metaphysical dimension” that is our living experience of language that occurs before any metaphysical utterance.²⁷⁷

Gadamer treats theory, we should note, in light of this view of language that he also sees as residing on a Greek foundation. Gianni Vattimo summarizes this story. He writes:

According to Gadamer, the Greek concept of the rationality of nature and the Hegelian concept of presence of reason intersect in this concept of language as the living *logos*. To which he correctly adds, *theoria* “is not primarily a formalized conceptual construct that entails an objectifying split between subject and object.”²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], xxxi.

²⁷⁶ Gadamer, “Greek Philosophy and Modern Thought,” in *The Beginnings of Knowledge*, pp. 124-125.

²⁷⁷ Di Cesare, *Utopia of Understanding*, pp. 12-13.

²⁷⁸ Gianni Vattimo’s essay, “Truth and Rhetoric in Hermeneutic Ontology,” in *The End of Modernity* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991) emphasizes how Gadamer focuses on the question of the “nexus of between language and ethos.” p. 133.

The space of *theoria* lies in our dialogic self, which is rooted in conversation. Speech surpasses the technical function of language.²⁷⁹ This idea flows into the very unity of concerns found in Gadamer's writings, revealed further by his work that explores the implications of the Pre-Socratics, Plato, and the poets.

Speaking of Plato's unwritten doctrine as a linguistic shift into the logic of discourse that does not lose sight of the poetic,²⁸⁰ he reads also Parmenides, for example, not as a contradictory text that struggles between two aspirations: between myth and truth-speech, *doxa*, and knowledge of being. Rather, Logos – Being as dialogue (Being as infinite interpretation) – is supported by Gadamer's reading of the theme of the participation of ideas (the One and the Many, of Ancient thought) as “the genuine basis of the Platonic dialectic.”²⁸¹

Gadamer writes: “what this doctrine actually describes, I contend, is the felicitous experience of the advancing insight, the euphoria which the Philebus says (*15c*) happens to the person who proceeds along the proper path to the solution of the problem of the One and the Many – the way of discourse which reveals the thing being discussed.”²⁸²

For Gadamer, the teaching of philosophy was always, as in Plato, a question and answer schema. Theory, like philosophy, is the response to a question as well as to

²⁷⁹ Gadamer writes: “Speaking remains tied to language as a whole, the hermeneutic virtuality of discourse which surpasses at any moment that which has been said. It is precisely in this respect that speaking always transcends the linguistically constituted realm within which we find ourselves.” Gadamer, “Hegel and Heidegger,” p. 115.

²⁸⁰ See, Andrew Fuyarchuk's discussion in *Gadamer's Path to Plato: A Response to Heidegger and a Rejoinder to Stanley Rosen* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2010) for a detailed assessment of Gadamer's discussion of Plato's dialectic.

²⁸¹ Gadamer, “Plato as Portraitist,” in *The Gadamer Reader*, p. 314.

²⁸² Gadamer, “Plato's Unwritten Dialectic,” in *Dialogue and Dialectic*, p. 119.

the posing of a question: what Gadamer calls the questionableness of the question. We ask questions because we understand questionableness. As Gadamer says, “To understand the questionableness of something is already to be questioning.”²⁸³ Importantly, questioning is irreducible to a *method* because “there is no method for learning how to ask questions.”²⁸⁴

In "The Hermeneutic Priority of the Question" section of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer claims, “The literary form of the [Platonic] dialogue places language and concept back within the original movement of the conversation. This protects all words from dogmatic abuse.”²⁸⁵

We are given to the openness of our questioning. In our struggle with truth and falsehood, our will to know, Gadamer says, “...and in our-being-with-one-another is the peculiarity of the human being.”²⁸⁶ Questions are fundamental to our way of life for the question is visible in its connection with the universality of the Whole. We live in a type of opposition between the infinity of being and *what is* that since the dawn of thinking motivates the *logos*, something that is beyond me but which I still reach towards.

The sociologist’s calling is not being at home in their calling, for it occurs as a form of alienation that intimidates. The art of practicing the question is what really matters. Not our methods. The logic of the question, the back and forth movement of question and answer, the dialectic of question and answer is an indeterminate condition.

²⁸³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Revised Second Edition], p. 370.

²⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 370.

²⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 369.

²⁸⁶ Gadamer, “Parmenides and the Opinions of the Mortals,” in *The Beginning of Philosophy*, p. 105.

“Discourse that is intended to reveal something requires that that thing be broken open by the question.”²⁸⁷

“We seek conversation not only in order to understand the other person better. Rather we need it because our own concepts threaten to become too rigid, and also because when we say something, we want the other person to understand what we are thinking.”²⁸⁸ Conversation is not only primary to us, but conversation also resists the methodological fixity of concepts and the monological structure of discourse. The question is coterminous with understanding. A question is genuine in its encounter, for everything, speech, text, art must be understood as an answer. In this regard, he says: “The close relationship between questioning and understanding is what gives the hermeneutic experience its true dimension.”²⁸⁹

The *priority of the question* is already the self-reflexivity of the subject within a form of life that is also form of language. It is always the openness to the question that links our not knowing and knowing together. That opens us out into what we can ponder and find in the unexplored. There is simply no method that can produce questioning, or a question. Truth concerns our way of existing in this condition of questioning. By raising the question of questioning, Gadamer asserts that we all inhabit the question, and further that, “Every true question requires this openness.”²⁹⁰ Questioning is not only our being possessed by being but our path, our openness, toward truth and freedom. It is the birth of philosophy; it is, as Carlo Sini says, how we overcome alienation with the enchantment of the question. Like Gadamer: “to insist

²⁸⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 357.

²⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 371.

²⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 367.

²⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 357.

on a question is to understand a difficult notion; that one must inhabit the question, its peculiar enchantment, without overcoming or wanting to overcome it in the answer.”²⁹¹

Gadamer, like Sini, shows that the overcoming of the alienation of theory involves an enchantment that returns us to the ideals of Ancient philosophy, with a philosophical attitude that is now lost to us. The Greeks knew that what we can say and say beyond ourselves arises in every utterance. This can be illuminated, to use the classical terms, by reference to Plato, and how dialectical speech is *one* as it is a *many*.²⁹² Speech contains both. “Speech is participation (*methexis* – being-with) thus seeing logos as expressing the being-with of one *eidos* and another *eidos*”.²⁹³ *Logos* concerns an inalienable if contradictory tension in the very movement of thought, revealed and concealed by the inner structure of speech and subject matter.

Art and Truth in Relation to the Human Sciences

Gadamer tells us that the special truth claims of art can show us the way that truth claims are made in the human sciences. Art and the human sciences is the key to his inquiry into truth and theory:

It may have come as a surprise to many readers that part 1 of my 1960 work, *Truth and Method*, does not take as its object of study the human sciences and humanities [*Geisteswissenschaften*] in the totality of their various disciplines, although the appearance of the term “hermeneutics” in the book’s subtitle might lead one to expect this – but rather art – art itself. In making art my starting point, I was, in truth, responding to the experience I had in my teaching, namely, that my real interest in the *Geisteswissenschaften* was not in their

²⁹¹ Sini, Carlo. *Ethics of Writing*. Translated by Silvia Benson. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009. p. 132.

²⁹² “Every utterance is by nature just as much a one as it is a many because reality is differentiated in itself. It itself is logos.” Gadamer, “Hegel and the Dialectic of the Ancients Philosophers,” in *Hegel’s Dialectic*, p. 26.

²⁹³ Gadamer, “Plato as Portraitist,” in *The Gadamer Reader*, p. 315.

charter as sciences [*Wissenschaften*], but rather in how they dealt with art – art in all its realms: literature, the visual art, architecture, and music. For I believe that the arts taken as a whole, quietly govern the metaphysical heritage of the western tradition. And the *Geisteswissenschaften* stand in particularly close and interactive relationship with receptivity and sensitivity to art.²⁹⁴

Art is a unique manifestation of the experience of truth. There is a dimension to art that is not about a cultural product that we can pick up and put down. Art is not simply a philosophical problem that we can work on through theory and conceptualization.²⁹⁵ Truth is not about laying everything bare but in recognizing the event like nature of the movement of truth, as something that comes forth [*Da*].²⁹⁶ Heidegger saw that art and language shared this capacity. What takes place in art and speech is truth. To capture this unique manifestation of human life – truth is itself as an event – we are challenged to reconsider the one-sided conception of science and its methodological primacy because science is also driven linguistically.

Art is only encountered, says Gadamer, in a form that resists pure conceptualization. Why? Because, at its core, art is a manifestation, an address, addressing us as a Thou, which lies outside conceptual schemes. In this way, it is like the way speech manifests itself in an address to the other. Heidegger's understanding of the ontological significance of art is a key for Gadamer. *The Origin of the Work of Art* is pivotal to Gadamer's project. Gadamer tells us that Heidegger is not using

²⁹⁴ “The Artwork in Word and Image: ‘So True, So Full of Being!’” p. 195. In, *The Gadamer Reader, A Bouquet of Later Writings*.

²⁹⁵ See, for example, Gerald Bruns commentary, “Ancients and Moderns: Gadamer's Aesthetic Theory and the Poetry of Paul Celan,” in *On the Anarchy of Poetry and Philosophy, A Guide for the Unruly*, pp. 35-41.

²⁹⁶ This conception of the metaphysical fate of the west, outlined as the challenge of Being by Heidegger, concerns how we are there as beings and how we have misconstrued the character of our being and Being, in terms of how we participate and release ourselves into the *Da*.

poeticizing phrases to embellish the barren language of concepts; rather the goal is twofold, to reveal the origins of concepts and press for breaking the logic of language contained in western thinking.

Heidegger identifies how sharing in the event of truth happens in art. The World is the referential totality of *Dasein's* projections; it is the preliminary horizon of *Dasein's* concern. Art's truth, Heidegger argues, is the living opposition between revealment and concealment; where truth resists any attempt to be made into an object (objectification) of what it stands for. Art stands forth, then, as the event of truth that can neither be seized subjectively, nor objectively. In other words, art is "the standing-in-itself of the work [that] at the same time betokens the standing-in-itself of beings in general."²⁹⁷

Art stands alone for the creator and the beholder. Gadamer describes this as a very tangible event of *Da*. We understand from this that we are not primordially master of our *Dasein* but that we are a self-interpretation set within a horizon that, like the work of art, is in the midst of revealment and concealment. We know things because we are an event of Being itself, where we are among beings in the limits of where we are. The depth of meaning presented in the artwork, in Heidegger's terms, is a conflict between world and earth, "emergence and sheltering."²⁹⁸

This opens the way, according to Gadamer, for understanding how something can be there for us (*Da*) in both art and linguistic encounters that has nothing to do with

²⁹⁷ Gadamer, "The Truth of the Work of Art," in *Heidegger's Ways*, pp. 107-108.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 107.

the object that we get to know through objective cognition.²⁹⁹ Thus, we have the priority of the poetic as an illustration of Being and language that binds us. Thought is authenticated in language. In Rilke's poems an all-calculating mode of thinking, scientific thinking for example, involves the loss of things within modernity, while things can still be brought forth as true and preserved in art.

The poem and thinking are not the same but they share something; they share the coming into common of all language. There is no intentional control over truth. Rather, we are laid open to truth. This is the precondition of *Dasein's* existence; to know is to know that truth occurs without any philosophical concept. Gadamer discusses this in his essay *The Truth of the Work of Art*. Art is the locus of public truth while not possessing any given objective meaning.

Heidegger vividly described language as the "most primordial poetry of Being."³⁰⁰ He did not say that being is language in the way Gadamer does, but he did prepare the way for this extension and development of his own thinking. This conception paved the way for Gadamer's view on art, language and truth, in terms of the speculative aspect of our speaking. Art's capacity to release us into the very Being of play, in its various forms, is also the truth of linguistic understanding.

Art is neither subjective, nor contained in fixed concepts, nor is it possible to pre-establish what our open encounter with truth will be when we experience it, yet we

²⁹⁹ Gadamer describes the revelation he sees in Heidegger's use of earth from a poetically charged word to a conceptual metaphor this way: "As a counter concept to 'world', 'earth' was not simply a referential field related solely to human beings. It was a bold stroke to claim that only in the interplay between world and earth, in the shifting relationship between the sheltering, concealing earth and the arising world, could philosophical concept of 'Da' and truth be gained." Gadamer, "Being Spirit God," in *Heidegger's Ways*, p. 190.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p. 109.

know that it is a capacity of art and truth to address it to us. Our verbal lives and our existence reside in a linguistic tension imposed by our metaphysical heritage.

Art and language involve total mediation, as the art of the word itself shows. Art shares this capacity with the experience of language. In this way, art shows the limits of consciousness in the way it brings forth truth. Second, art shows us that truth is shared and communicated beyond a purely subjective outlook.

Poetic texts are a special way language reveals itself, visible to us when they push grammar and the formal dimensions of discourse into relief (for example in Mallarme's poems). Gadamer argues that poetry, like Mallarme's, represents a limit case that shows this and that also can be interpreted as actually complementing aspects of Hegel's speculative logic, because it pushes the grammar of predication to the breaking point.³⁰¹ Both the speculative instance of speech and poetic language reveal how language can still secure reality. The poem "requires nothing beyond its own utterance to secure the reality of language."³⁰²

Language participates in the "truth of the universal"³⁰³ not because it can be objectified but because language puts to work Being itself in beings. Hermeneutics presents *Dasein* as being and becoming in the manner of understanding itself in language, as a self-movement of free play (and constant interpretation does not impair the demands of truth in the work of art, for example), therefore, it is not about how we use language to fix a *representation*, rather, like the power of language itself, art both

³⁰¹ J.M. Baker argues this point in "Lyric as Paradigm: Hegel and the Speculative Instance in Gadamer's Hermeneutics." In *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, Edited by Robert J. Dostal. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

³⁰² Gadamer, "On the Contribution of Poetry to the Search for Truth," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, p. 106.

³⁰³ Ibid. p. 120.

presents and is a *presentation* (a self-showing) at the same time. In this way, we can see that the search for truth is dialogical and becomes manifest in the dialogue that constitutes Being with beings.

Poetics gives a philosophical priority to the concept of speech. Poetry, the strange other to our mono-logical culture (confounding truth and its logical image), is a stranger to us, yet it still presses upon us to see the unpoetic aspect of this world. Furthermore, we should note that neither Apel, nor Habermas see poetry this way. Poetry remains, for them, a danger to rationality (since they are resisting what they see as the dangerous history, and interconnection of Heidegger with the spirit of nationalism), not ameliorative of linguistic understanding.

In Celan's poetry, for example, the poem addresses us as something that is always being understood, while remaining obscure and at the limit of speaking the ethical word. The poetic word, exemplary of all speech, has the capacity to show or make present to us, to make recognizable, something in the world. As Gadamer says, the poem can, without predication, participate in the "truth of the universal."³⁰⁴

In his 1987 lecture *Thinking and Poetizing in Heidegger and in Holderlin's "Andenken"* Gadamer says that "the path of the West, which is also the path leading to science, has forced upon us a separation and a never completely achievable unity of poetizing and thinking." The poet aims for the truth of what is said that involves "the unconcealment of what is and which comes to stand in speaking."³⁰⁵ Poetics and thinking share a linguistic need to make things (verbally) present. As Gadamer says:

³⁰⁴ Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, p. 120.

³⁰⁵ Gadamer, "Thinking and Poetizing in Heidegger and in Holderlin's *Andenken*," p.149.

“Not only the poetic word but also the word of thinking can have a quite other ‘presence’ than words in ordinary situations have.”³⁰⁶

Speculative speech concerns overcoming the self-alienation of modern abstract language, specifically, however, it concerns the alienation of metaphysical speech (*methodological alienation*) as it comes to be embodied in the speech patterns of the human sciences. Consequently, if we approach this question in terms of how we experience language, we can better grasp our own capacity for critical consciousness as theory. Gadamer is not a sociologist, and no one will succeed in making him into one. At heart Gadamer is a philosopher. His concern is with how we experience language and, consequently, as I have pointed out, how our linguistic affiliation actually shapes our theoretical understanding, especially in our scientific world of the past century.

Our linguistic need to bring things before one another (objects of understanding), resides in the movement of thought (in the expressive and speculative dimension of our disclosing). This motion bears witness to the way we construct truth (and ourselves) in speech. Motion holds us in being; where motion occurs we are a question in our being (the *Da* of *Dasein*). This kind of motion occurs when we want to say something, which is the space of breath where our life process itself allows new perceptions to occur.

The speaking subject sets in motion the act of enunciation, in the *for-having of interpretation* (we already are happening in language), that contrasts to a doing that requires a certification of thought, one that seeks to cancel what seems to be a distraction created in the for-having of language. It does so by assuming a complete

³⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 155.

subject and knowledge in its methodological practices. Hermeneutic experience, by contrast, puts the subject, oneself, in question. We are beings that belong only through hermeneutic experience. We break down “resistance in our selves” in the expressivity of our speech to better understand. When we struggle to make someone understand what we are thinking, we are reaching toward a better understanding of ourselves because at this time we bring something to presence in the openness of the question.

Gadamer says: “To be sure his pedagogical poem was written in Homeric hexameter, and it was not without a certain poetic power, as the preserved poem proves. [In this poem we discover there still are no ‘concepts’.] Nevertheless, something like the creation of a concept is encountered for the first time in these verses.”³⁰⁷ The intimacy between theory and speech is revealed in the early pre-Socratic texts that also informed Plato and Greek thought, and especially informs Gadamer’s work. This discussion informs a further argument on the question of language and ritual that he develops in this particular later work.

In *Who are You, Who am I?* speaking is, poetically, a matter of *who speaks?* Speaking makes a claim to question, to state the mystery of the question. We speak in a special way; we speak without attempting to find a definitive answer to our questions. We are suspended in questions; this is what matters. As noted, Socrates’ task was to teach thinkers how to embrace questions, in other words, how to embody thinking as an ethical participation in the world of living language. It was also his concern to address the authenticity of speech in contrast to a simulation of speaking as found among the

³⁰⁷ Gadamer, “Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language,” in *Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics*, p. 42.

sophists; yet it also involved the matter of trusting writing, even painting, that remains silent regarding its specific voice.

The human sciences appear to misunderstand their theoretical nature, the nature of what constitutes that of *giving-of-an-account*. Giving an account – especially *theoretical* account – is not an objectifying reflection that makes understanding capable of being mastered by means of methodology.³⁰⁸ Gadamer says: “word is the highest form in which mankind can shape its world and its fate,”³⁰⁹ meaning that everything that makes us human, resides in the first place, in the practical movement of speaking *word and truth* in our conversation and dialogue.

The objectivist naturalization of all the forms of *logos* must be answered by merging an ontological hermeneutics with Platonic dialectical criticism.

These *logics of utterance* rest upon our pre-comprehension that conversation is always a process of reaching a shared understanding of something, of bringing that something forward between participating speakers, even when we err or fail. Because, in a necessary manner, this is the very living part of all speech, resting on the ongoing untranslatable nature of the word that in no way impairs truth but in fact releases it into our hands.

Dialogue, then, is not only the way we self-locate in the world (being at home), that has no necessary stable relationship to our world, but in our ability to self-question and constitute ourselves in a non-transparent and dynamic relationship to our

³⁰⁸ Ibid. pp. 333-334.

³⁰⁹ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Culture and Word.” In *Praise of Theory: Speeches and Essays*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. p. 11.

speech and the good. What is dynamic is that we are not indifferent to our dialogue, our self-interpreting and re-interpreting of our saying.

Truth is not *veritas*, (as Heidegger pointed out) but something that is practiced in speech; we retain an ethical distinction in all genuine dialogue that remains incumbent on us. Gadamer wants to make it clear that what separates the human sciences from technical understanding (*methodos*), is that they expressly ask one key question: the question of the good.³¹⁰

Theory, then, as a mode of conversation, a dialogue, an argument or poem; is never purely a formalization of speech, rather, it is a space of freedom where we make things visible to others in a non-dogmatic dialectical practice that remains for us, a continual battle (with ourselves) to avoid empty and alienated speech. To avoid, as it were, sophistry. At this point we see the opening to ethics that is always involved in speech (speaking with others) where the linearization of our voice, found in our time, demands an ethical solution as we seek to dialogue with others, as we seek to avoid the estranged self that is reproduced in formalized speech.

Gadamer says it is in “precisely the forgetfulness of language” (in speech) that we can discover the forgetting of the formal elements of discourse.³¹¹ He writes, “precisely the forgetfulness of language is a forgetting of the formal elements in which the discourse or text is enclosed”³¹² We are always, in speech, exceeding, like the poet, “the codified meaning-context of what is said.”³¹³

³¹⁰ Gadamer, “Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy,” in *Reason in the Age of Science*, p. 93.

³¹¹ Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, p. 32.

³¹² *Ibid.* p. 170.

³¹³ *Ibid.* p. 171.

We have seen that (1) the truth of the word, for Gadamer, makes a special claim for the poet. Further, that (2) this claim involves recognizing its importance in confronting an *unpoetic* world. Finally, that (3) the truth of the word is discovered in our speaking. Encountering truth necessarily involves encountering speaking. Speech then is the essence of our being in truth. As a counter response to the alienation of the world, the poet makes a statement about the unpoetic aspect of our world.³¹⁴

Poetic words, by weaving writing and tradition (as in mythic and poetic speech), display to us this authentic power of truth “only in being said,”³¹⁵ something that is carried out and performed by our words.

The Greeks, beginning with the work Parmenides (*Parmenides of Elena*) as well as the Pre-Socratics, released thinking into philosophy as a critical struggle with the fluctuation of the universal sameness of words. No matter what we see, and are aware of, seeing and awareness is given to expression in the very paradox of language that comes down to us as the legacy of the Greek birth of the *logos*.

Words mirror the problem of the One and Many in Ancient debate. Understanding, Gadamer says, is “the very dialectic of the One and the Many which establishes the finite limits of human discourses and insight – and our fruitful situation halfway between single and multiple meaning, clarity and ambiguity.”³¹⁶ Verbal interpretation is the form, says Gadamer, of all interpretation.³¹⁷ To be fundamentally penetrated by words, then, means we are always hermeneutical beings that bring forth

³¹⁴ *Literature and Philosophy in Dialogue, Essays in German Literary Theory*, translated and introduced by Robert H. Paslick, SUNY, Albany, 1994. p. 170.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 13.

³¹⁶ Gadamer, “Dialectic and Sophism in Plato’s Seventh Letter,” in *Dialogue and Dialectic*, pp. 119-120.

³¹⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 398.

the capacity for us to be theorists (theoretical beings). Gerald Bruns notes that Gadamer approaches a combination of themes, and specifically the poem, to emphasize the rhetorical nature of speech.³¹⁸

Having lost trust in speech and truth, we have turned to *veritas* (as Heidegger claims) thus seeking pure objects of certainty. We are unable to return to ourselves in the dialectic of speaking (the art of speaking for Plato). Truth is a shared experience in language because: (1) we do not control history, (2) nor do we control consciousness in a transparent way. Rather, these two “limits” reveal to us that we do not know ourselves fully, nor could we, since the very movement of our understanding is a consequence of our non-conceptual existences, our education in the self, and our ways of speaking and thinking that rest on our pre-understanding of being. In summary, truth is not a matter of methodological understanding.

Gadamer shifts attention away from epistemological participation to ontological participation in language; *theory* actually manifests the tension of these two dimensions and therefore cannot be, strictly speaking, a form of analytic work. Truth does not reside in validity but in the authentic performance of genuine speech. The human sciences uneasily occupy the scientific landscape, but, Gadamer reminds us that: “What the tool of method does not achieve must – and really can – be achieved by a discipline of questioning and inquiring, a discipline that guarantees truth.”³¹⁹

³¹⁸ From Bruns’ introduction to Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Gadamer on Celan: Who Am I and Who are You? and Other Essays*. Translated by Richard Heinemann and Bruce Krajewski. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997. p. 3.

³¹⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 491. See Bernstein, Richard J. “Appendix A Letter by Professor Hans-Georg Gadamer, June 1st, 1982.” In *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983.

Learning is to do something for oneself, to avoid self-alienation. *Paideia* is a practice in which we apprehend ourselves. Plato's literary sophistication in the *Republic* (and all his dialogues) implies a claim that the word, epitomized by the life of Socrates as a true dialectician, addresses how we are located in our modes of utterances as we ask of ourselves not only who we are but also recognize ourselves in what we say.

“All forgetfulness of self in imitation fulfils itself, therefore, in alienation.”³²⁰ Therefore, the speaker forgets, or in losing his own dialogue with the soul cannot guard against sophist. Gadamer says that the word speaks to us, that it brings something to be there (the truth of the word) that can say something; it also allows us to be friends to ourselves understood here as the “good in its self” that Plato spoke of.

The estrangement truth, then, is that moment when we mistake who we are (self-forgetfulness of self), since we have chosen as our self-encounter (a speech) that has already commenced with a structure that wants to avoid the actual productive ambiguity of speech (in *methodos* – the *logos* of objectivity). Consequently, the theorist feels that he loses his ability to question deeply, entering a condition of self-sophistic alienation within formalized speech (as we know, Gadamer describes this as *methodological alienation*).

If, however, we see ourselves in the play of ideas, not in separating them in a purification of thought, but in questioning the dialectics of Socratic speech, we can remain beings who are always interpreting speech as *logos*.

³²⁰ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Plato and the Poets.” In *Dialogue and the Dialectic, Eight Hermeneutical Studies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976. p. 64.

Hermeneutics concerns the fundamental self-understanding of the logic of speech; it offers a metaphysical solution to the problem of the human sciences insofar as they are caught in the paradox of their own legacy. “When we speak to one another,” says Gadamer, “we do so not so much transmit well-defined facts, as place our own aspirations and knowledge into a broader and richer horizon through dialogue with the other.”³²¹ We expose ourselves, precisely as moral beings, to the truth of being that lies in the very responsibility of the words we put in our mouths. Such a context is what we all presuppose: the natural working of language that affords us access to truth.

Truth and Method concludes: “Scientific methods do not guarantee truth. This is especially so of the human sciences, but this does not mean a diminution of their scientific quality, but, on the contrary, the justification of the claim to a special humane significance that they have always made.”³²²

My intention in this chapter has been to show the significance of theory and truth with a specific reference to the human sciences and sociology. Focusing on the question of “validity” when it comes to what we say when we make theory, I explored the question of “factual validity” in the discussion of Karl-Otto Apel’s work. Following Gadamer, I argue that the metaphysical notion of “facts” should be supplanted with the conception of “hermeneutic facts” where meaning, the way we can confirm theory utterances, requires the shared dialogue and the truth making event of speech. Truth is not an external definition of our utterances that makes them simply a matter of being either true or false. Metaphysical conceptions, as such, merely forestalls discussion and

³²¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “On the Contribution of Poetry to the Search for Truth,” in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays* p. 106.

³²² Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 443.

truth. Truth places these utterances in the sphere of dialogue of coming to an understanding. We have established the importance of truth for the human sciences. The power of speech as truth-giving further shows why the paradox of social theory was understood as alienating to the theorist and conflicting with the ethical demands of his task.

Chapter 3.

Poetics and Truth

There is no first word as there is no last word.³²³

The reception and interpretation of poetry seems to imply a dialogical relationship of a unique kind.³²⁴

My claim in this chapter is that poetry, described by Gadamer as “the poetic word”, fulfills speech. I argue that it is the poetic word, alongside the Platonic conception of *theoria* as speech (conversation) that implies a realization of the way conceptual logic exists outside procedural rules. Poetry is exemplary in the way the music of words involve us in being at home in the world. Our being at home is linked to the power the right word to say what we want to convey. Poesies concern this truth. Plato portrays Socrates, and his own writing, as both prose and poetry.

In this chapter we address the nature of the poetic word. As we know the truth of the word is a central theme of Gadamer’s understanding of understanding that is seen as the event of truth. Gadamer’s discussion on Paul Celan, in his famous essay “Who Am I and Who Are You” [1973] and his early discussion of Plato, in “Plato and the Poets” [1934] are focal points in this chapter. Both essays discuss figures that are, as we will see, concerned with the question of escaping the suspicion of the word

³²³ Gadamer, “Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language,” in *Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics*, p. 25.

³²⁴ Gadamer, “On the Origins of Philosophical Hermeneutics,” in *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Philosophical Apprenticeships*, p. 192.

(*aesthetic seductiveness*) and a degrading of the word (*sophistry*), yet seek to find a way to speak with seriousness and beauty (*dialogue*).

Susan Howe, the poet, once said that every word was once a poem. She speaks to the infinity of the word. Understanding involves the “inner infinity of answering words which are all – and therefore none – ‘suitable’ [*angemessen*, appropriate, adequate].³²⁵ The poetic word stands, as it were, without context, yet remains intelligible [it speaks]; like *Dasein*, it emerges – a becoming [being there]. With Heidegger, we are shown that the authentic word is “determined from the direction of Being as the word in which truth happens.”³²⁶ How can the poetic word stand for itself and also invite dialogue? Celan, as Gadamer shows, is the poet of the seemingly mute dialogue. How is it that the poetic word invites community and shared knowing, since for Gadamer the poem presents us with the purity of language as a fundamental dialogic encounter. Veronique M. Foti comments that poetic-diction, in contrast to the language of objectification, “reinstates the possibility of human dwelling and community through an articulation of the temporality and topology of the Other.”³²⁷

A poem is not simply to be understood as simply a dialogue, it is a unique encounter with the word that prompts the creation of an intelligible dialogue. What the poetic word does is it stands still; we take the poem at its word. Gerald Bruns, attempting to characterize this quality of the poem, says: “The poem does not address

³²⁵Gadamer, “On the Truth of the Word,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p. 137.

³²⁶ Ibid. pp. 136-137.

³²⁷ Foti, Veronique M. “Paul Celan’s Challenges to Heidegger’s Poetics.” In *Festival of Interpretation: Essays on Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Work*. Edited by Kathleen Wright. Albany: State University of New York, 1999. p. 200.

us as cognitive subjects seeking conceptual clarification and control – on the contrary, it seems to be in the nature of the poetry to take us out of the relation of knowing.”³²⁸

What defines this hermeneutic space of dialogue and word? Di Cesare has formulated it concisely when she writes: “For philosophical hermeneutics there is already a place where one can live with the other and the other of the other. That place is poetry. But how could dialogue harmonize with the singularity of the poem? In his encounter with Celan, perhaps the most important poet on his path of thinking, Gadamer came to the idea of the dialogue of the poem.”³²⁹

The poem is a universal witnessing. The poetic word stands for itself; in contrast to the way the word stands as a concept. Our concern is to show why the poetic word can shed a light on our relation to language and to conceptual thinking (theory), a theme that we know has deeply concerned Heidegger in his writings. Modern poetry, for Gadamer, is very important, because it takes up the corresponding modernist claim in art: “What is it?”³³⁰ What does a poem say? What does art say? Gadamer is at home with the radical thesis of the modern poem, with what he calls our “lyric modernity” (as Bruns states it), the idea that the poem is made of words, not merely of images and

³²⁸ From Bruns’ introduction to *Gadamer on Celan: Who Am I and Who are You? and Other Essays*, p. 36.

³²⁹ Di Cesare, *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait*, p. 167.

³³⁰ Gerald Bruns, reflection on Gadamer’s relationship to modernism, “Ancients and Moderns: Gadamer’s Aesthetic Theory and the Poetry of Paul Celan,” points out that, “for Gadamer the claim of the modernist work has an ethical as well as an aesthetic dimension, that is, a dimension of responsibility in which I take up the work as a task in relation to my time and place (and, indeed, to those around me). As I said earlier, the work is not simply a cultural product available for our consumption in the market place of the art world and which we can pick up or not as we chose. Nor is it (pace Danto) simply a philosophical problem of aesthetics that one can work out through conceptualization and theory.” In *On the Anarchy of Poetry and Philosophy, A Guide for the Unruly*, p. 41.

meanings.³³¹ With a poem or artwork, we do not simply enter the realm of a disengaged contemplation, rather, its truth only happens in our encounter with it appearing. In a sense, it could be argued that the poetic word is always heard anew, while the poetic word can pass into the said (become intelligible). Yet, with the concept we try to control the poetic aspect of our encounter with the word as it emerges from natural speech.

Richard Palmer notes that the truth of the word in poetry is a central theme in Gadamer's hermeneutics,³³² while Dieter Misgeld describes Gadamer's attachment to the poet as showing the importance to seeing truth in an intellectual disposition "that gives the last word to the poet and poetry, especially a poet who never was on the side of power" – namely Paul Celan.³³³ Here we have two themes, Gadamer's reflection on the power of the poetic word, and Gadamer's specific interest in the work of the poet Paul Celan.

Gadamer on Paul Celan: "Who Am I and Who Are You?"

Gadamer's familiarity with poets is widely recognized, and, as we have seen his dialogue with poetry continues an important part of his thinking. He has written on Holderlin, Mandelstam, and Celan, among others. Yet, in Celan we find a special reading of the question of hermeneutics. Celan helps us to understand the complex

³³¹ From Bruns' Introduction to *Gadamer on Celan*, p. 2. "The lyric for Gadamer is the paradigm of the modern work of art precisely because it is 'hermetic;' its intelligibility is no longer self-evident but is constituted by the interlocution of sense and sound."

³³² Palmer, Richard E., "Introduction to the Truth of the Word," in *The Gadamer Reader, A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p. 132.

³³³ "Poetry, Dialogue, and Negotiation", Dieter Misgeld, in *Festival of Interpretation, Essays on Hans-Georg Gadamer's Work*, Editor, Kathleen Wright, SUNY, Albany, 1999. p. 201.

relation of philosophy to poetry; we only have to recall that Celan had a complex relationship with the writings of Heidegger. Gadamer says that his interest in Celan is because of how the linguistically unfamiliar (the poetic word) strikes us as significant; “that is why I have written about Celan, one of the most inaccessible poets of the world literature.”³³⁴

For Gadamer, poetry is a special utterance that demonstrates how meaning is conveyed in words by being passed entirely into what is said (in words) that is embodied purely in that saying (in the poem). Poetry, then, “name[s] language itself” and draws our attention to the way there is a priority given to truth in what the poem says. The poet’s voice becomes “one of the fundamental metaphors of the modern age the poet’s activity as a paradigm of human existence itself.”³³⁵

Who Speaks? The poet keeps the question open to the intimacy where *You* and *I* find a genuine language for the distance and intimacy that resides between us.³³⁶ What is lost in alienation can be recovered where there is no subject but a sharing. Badiou describes the twentieth century was witness to the “profound mutation of the question of the *We*. What holds us together without, as he says, going astray into the domination of false communities?³³⁷ What indeed did speak?

Poetic speaking is both a self-forgetful activity and a question. The question, we recall, is a key to dialogue. Poetic speaking asks questions while forgetting itself. The subject dissolves into the word. The poems of Celan seemingly speak to this

³³⁴ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Writing and the Living Voice.” In *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*. Edited by Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson. Albany: State University of New York, 1992. p. 70.

³³⁵ Gadamer, “Who Am I and Who Are You? *Gadamer and Celan*, p.86.

³³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 88.

³³⁷ Baidou, Alain. “Anabasis.” In *The Century*. London: Polity, 2007. p. 96.

power, breaking away from any sense of context. They are understood but do not yield to interpretation; they are a coming to conversation, they are neither given by a “subject” nor received by a “subject”, but is there any context in which they are readable? For Gadamer we must listen, for in them we face the unspeakable (as well as the limits of intelligibility); they are a concrete struggle with the very (im)possibility of conversation that can address us. Gadamer says where there is speech there is a unity of sense too. Even in the most ‘fragmentary’ text, such as Celan’s poems, something holds open the possibility of speaking (and of hearing). The poetic word fulfills itself – we can hear it. The poem prompts us to the possibility of dialogue and interpretation. And it does so because it asks the question: Who am I and Who are You?

With Celan’s poems, Gadamer says, all scholarly research, and theoretical procedures, that “appeal to authorial intention give way to what Gadamer calls, “listening” – attentiveness to each word of the poem and a search for ways in which the words may be said to come together or interact as a unity despite their fragmentary arrangements.”³³⁸

Herein lies the strange relationship between the philosophic and the poetic word. The poet cannot account, know or justify himself in an epistemological way (in this way poetry is a “not-knowing,” “not metaphysical”), but as Heidegger says, it is always a saying where we receive awareness of what it is that comes from the word, because both philosopher and poet are in the word. Truth telling, the poet’s saying, is

³³⁸ Bruns, *On the Anarchy of Poetry and Philosophy*, pp. 45-46.

an unprotected saying. There is a complex rhetorical and ethical undertaking occurring even in their seeming philosophical indifference to the word.³³⁹

The poet, as Plato understood, raises the question of what language is common to everyone. A form of speech that is true for one another lies at the heart of Plato's contestation with the poet. This concerns Plato's own discourse, a striving to balance the poet and the intellectual in his own work. In a manner of speaking it concerns the management of poetic ecstasy. The poet forgets himself in his flights of fantasy, the philosopher does not want to absorb the reader this way, but nonetheless, he too will seek a speech that may be described as a *dialogical poetry*. What the poet signifies remains open to indeterminacy, not simply of the interpretation, but the understanding itself.

Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger's dialogue, as we know, is one important dialogue between poet and philosopher in the twentieth century.³⁴⁰ Gadamer's own writings on the poet, opened up by Heidegger's writings, are focused on Celan. For Gadamer, the poem is language and community, it implies living with others, as well as living with oneself, and that natural language concerns the ambiguity and questioning of life. Therefore, the poem is a model of the way language resists instrumental and linguistic alienation. Gadamer, like Heidegger, treats poetic thinking as a point of resistance to "the subjection of common language to metaphysics and technology."³⁴¹

³³⁹ Bruns, Gerald L. "Truth and Power in Socrates." In *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992. pp. 26-27.

³⁴⁰ See, for example, Lyon, James K. *Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger: An Unresolved Conversation, 1951-1970*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.

³⁴¹ See, Vattimo's insightful essay, "Truth and Rhetoric in Hermeneutic Ontology," in *The End of Modernity*, p. 143.

Gadamer, therefore, says that we all have the same linguistic experience that the poet has in a most exemplary way.³⁴²

The poet's power of the word, *poetic saying*, cannot be the subjectivity of the poet nor simply the poet's own word. Gadamer says that Plato's objection to the poet's speech concerned "the contemporary morality and education (the pedagogical claims of the poet) which had established itself upon the basis of a poetic formulation of the older morality and which, in adhering to aging moral forms, found itself defenseless against arbitrary perversions of those forms brought on by the spirit of sophism."³⁴³

Poetry, Gadamer observes, "dissolves all prior factors of linguistic formation and construction,"³⁴⁴ and thus, announces the founding power of the truth of the word.³⁴⁵ The word is not simply to be understood as a semantic particle; rather, the word is a subtle conversation, a living conversation that resists absolute appropriation and fixation. Gadamer said, "a word only becomes a word when it breaks into communicative usage."³⁴⁶ For: "In words we are at home. In words there is a kind of guarantee for what they say. These things are especially clear in the poetic use of language."³⁴⁷

The human sciences build up interrelated statements, to constitute the ideal of theory, one that aims "to produce accurate generalizations" and in doing so to avoid

³⁴² Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second Revised Edition], p. 353.

³⁴³ Gadamer, "Plato and the Poets," in *Dialogue and Dialectic*, p. 61,

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 352.

³⁴⁵ Gadamer, "On the Contribution of Poetry to the Search for Truth," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, p. 105.

³⁴⁶ Gadamer, "Language and Understanding," in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p. 105.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 107.

prejudice.³⁴⁸ The problem of the alienation of language, that is an alienation that takes shape in the language of the human sciences, resides in how we see our relation to speaking.³⁴⁹

Poetry and the Truth of the Word

“It seems to me,” Gadamer wrote, “that poetic language (the poetic word) enjoys a particular and unique relationship to truth.”³⁵⁰ The implication is that the truth of our words will happen the closer we are to the lyric form of the sentence, and is lessened by any adoption of words in technical statements arranged as the form of theory, as scientific speaking. It turns upon the logic of abstraction and its place in the realm of the human sciences. Gadamer points out how this resides in the work of Aristotle especially, with the syllogism, for example, and concerns how we understand this achievement of abstraction against the application to the world of scientific utterances. What is significant is that these statements “refer to assertion that is theoretical in the sense that it abstracts itself from everything that is not expressly

³⁴⁸ Jonas, Hans and Wolfgang Knobl. *Social Theory: Twenty Introductory Lectures*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009. p. 5.

³⁴⁹ Michael Davis, explaining the nature of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, argues that the work is not simply about what poetry is; put simply, but about the human use of *mimesis*, further, and, “that poetry, action and reason are so profoundly connected that a discussion of one necessarily involves the others.” From the Introduction to Davis, Michael. *The Poetry of Philosophy: On Aristotle’s Poetics*. South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 1992. xiv.

³⁵⁰ In, *On the Contribution of Poetry to the Search for Truth*, Gadamer writes: “First this is shown by the fact that poetic language is not equally appropriate at all times to any content whatsoever, and second, by the fact that when such content is given poetic form in language, it thereby acquires a certain legitimation. It is *the art of language that not only decides upon the success or failure of poetry, but also its claim to truth.*” p. 105. My emphasis.

said.”³⁵¹ The statement is not the only way to speak, speaking as theory, implies that there is more to theory than what encloses itself in the idea: “Only that which the statement itself reveals through it being said constitutes the object of analysis and the foundation of logical consequentiality.”³⁵²

The poetic word, alongside the lyric word, avails itself of a specific autonomy, the finitude of the word, as does speech, which excludes predication. In this regard, language is not objectifiable, and the poets show this to us. This takes place in a historical context; J. M. Baker characterizes it in this way: “it is not just that the discourse of science, or *Wissenschaft*, comes into its own with modernity, but that the language of art, for which lyric poetry is paradigmatic, also comes into its own for the first time.”³⁵³ Baker sees Gadamer’s view as a post-Hegelian shift in the meaning of art, a shift from “reflective art to the art of reflection,” especially witnessed in the lyric poem in modernity.³⁵⁴

Gadamer asks, in his *Philosophy and Poetry*, “How do the words of the poet and the language of the concept relate to one another?”³⁵⁵ We may also recall Heidegger’s remark: “The commencement of Western Thinking in the Greeks was prepared by poetry.” and his argument introduces a symmetry between the Greeks and today by saying that poetizing is “now necessary as a *sign* of the completion of Western

³⁵¹ Gadamer, “Language and Understanding,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p. 102.

³⁵² Ibid. p. 102.

³⁵³ Baker, J.M. “Lyric as Paradigm: Hegel and the Speculative Instance of poetry in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*. Edited by Robert J. Dostal. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002. p. 154.

³⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 154.

³⁵⁵ Gadamer asks this question, frequently epitomized by Plato in “Philosophy and Poetry” in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, p. 132.

metaphysics.”³⁵⁶ The lyric prose of the modern era supplies a picture of the power of the poetic word and an indication of the way language [linguisticity] lays a claim to a validity that is self-standing and does not rest on the proposition. This is why, as Gadamer says, Plato by leaving “behind his artistic, dialogical poems instead of just some pedagogical writings or lectures, means something.”³⁵⁷ Because spoken language, as Gadamer affirms, says something more than a mere fixed conceptuality.

Richard Baker, who has devoted a text to Gadamer’s relation to the lyric word, notes regarding the new autonomous place of the poetic word, (as in modernist poetics). He quotes Reiner Wiehl’s thesis which says, “that the common speculative thread in poetry and dialectical thought is the concept of action: ‘The lyric is the presentation of the Poet’s speech act, not the presentation of an action in the form of a speech act’ [TM 575].”³⁵⁸

Accordingly, Baker says we are drawn back to the problems of classical metaphysics.³⁵⁹ Quoting Gadamer, Baker says, “that a real person utters or has said to him (or her) is not that grammatical element in the linguistic analysis of a sentence, for one can demonstrate in concrete phenomena involved in learning a language how secondary the word is compared to the linguistic melody of a sentence.”³⁶⁰

In speech something goes beyond the logic of our propositions. Gadamer says, there can be no proposition “that is purely and simply true.” The validity of our statements, especially, those we describe as theoretical utterances, also concern

³⁵⁶ Heidegger, *Introduction to Philosophy – Thinking and Poetizing*, p. 13.

³⁵⁷ Gadamer, “Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language,” in *Language and Linguisticity in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics*, p. 39.

³⁵⁸ Baker, “Lyric as Paradigm,” In *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, p. 154.

³⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 456.

³⁶⁰ Ibid. pp. 104-105.

more.³⁶¹ The poet helps us understand how we become participants in the meaning of a theoretical utterance, since the poem is, in Gadamer's view, a preeminent instance of the word's capacity for completeness.³⁶² Baker says, the question of how we verbally experience the world is prior to everything; it is addressed to recognizing something as existing.³⁶³

Vattimo says that hermeneutics, in the context of twentieth century art, asks how we occupy art (understand it) by entering into a dialogue with it.³⁶⁴ Vattimo speaks of how art's proximity to the word has always existed, but has taken on a new significance during the twentieth century – the “century of poetics” – describing this time as one in which there is a “new relationship between the various arts [...] and the word.”³⁶⁵

Gadamer on Plato's Philosophic Poetry

Plato's *literary* way – his *philosophic poetry* – is seen in his dialogues; they exemplify what Plato understands by the exercise of doing philosophy. Gadamer describes this seeming paradox. While rejecting poetry from the realm of Ideas and the Good, Plato “at the same time adopted poetry himself as a story teller of mythical tales who knew how to combine in an inimitable fashion the festive with the ironical, the

³⁶¹ Gadamer, “What is Truth?” in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, p. 41.

³⁶² See, Baker, “Lyric as Paradigm,” In *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, p.148.

³⁶³ Ibid. P. 147.

³⁶⁴ Vattimo, Gianni. *Art's Claim to Truth*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. p. 53.

³⁶⁵ Ibid, see “The Ontological Vocation of Twentieth Century Poetics,” p. 35.

remoteness of legend with the clarity of thought.³⁶⁶ Plato, in Gadamer's view, does not simply suppress rhetoric, but presents the ethical challenge of knowledge in terms of the nature of living dialogue, along with Socrates (the man who speaks to truth telling) as lying at the very center of the dialogues.

The modern concept of truth replaces this instability of truth with methodic refinement. What Gadamer shows us is that Plato's discussion of the poet, for example, is positioned in a history of developing poetic forms, and how these forms matter, even in light of his critique of the sophistic poet. Plato's literary dialogues stand by example in contesting the poet, by seeking a "truly philosophic poetry" that allows its own mimetic patterns, to avoid the alienating character (self-estrangement and alienation), which is a consequence of a specific forgetting of oneself and truth as the word.

Gadamer says that Plato secures the mimetic aspect of his dialogues with the "levity of a jocular play."³⁶⁷ Plato's philosophy finds its meaning beyond what is expressly stated, since it allows meanings to take effect for the reader in the form of dialogue. The commonality we find is the making things "that [are] present for me and for you", or, to put it another way, to show us what is truly there.³⁶⁸ In this way, there is a distinct connection between Gadamer's early ideas and later discussion of how the truth of the poetic word speaks to us. Speaking, making things present, expanding our understanding, and conversation, all rest on this commonality; in fact, they make commonality possible.

³⁶⁶ Gadamer, "Philosophy and Poetry," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, p. 132.

³⁶⁷ Gadamer, "Plato and the Poets," in *Dialogue and Dialectic*, p. 70.

³⁶⁸ Gadamer, "Dialectic and Sophism in Plato's Seventh Letter," in *Dialogue and Dialectic*, p. 113.

Gadamer shows, in his dialogue with Plato, why *Truth* and *Idea* are displayed as compelling to us. In our political being we are always seeking to be harmonious, and this harmony lies in the very the risk of our speech, as the risk of not living up to itself. Drawing on Hegel, Gadamer argues that the concept and the poetic word involve an infinite divisibility, which is not merely arbitrary, but resides in the power of the word (concept) to resist mere “externalization” and stand as true in it.³⁶⁹

The human sciences are born as the paradox of their practices, because if man is only an *object* of sociology, something on the way to a better future, then sociology is founded on the critical exclusion of man’s truth. Sociology sets forth our hope in the intelligibility of the world, produced through social knowledge, a task for the future of man, but what takes place is an estranging of man from truth.

Gadamer on Plato and the Poets

Controversy swirls around Gadamer’s essay “Plato and the Poets,” specifically because of his “relationship” to National Socialism, with some defending him and some accusing him of complicity. Plato is important to Gadamer. Jean Grondin states: “Given Gadamer’s predilection for poetry, Plato’s banishment of the poets (in the Republic) must have presented a real challenge.”³⁷⁰ Gadamer says that the true poetry is to be found in the dialogues themselves; which we know provides an image of the critical [dialogue] and the beautiful.³⁷¹

³⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 138.

³⁷⁰ Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography*, p. 166.

³⁷¹ Grondin further discusses the controversy quoting Gadamer: “About thirty years ago the present problem became known in a distorted form when the National Socialists, for political purposes of their own, tried to criticize the formalism of a purely aesthetic

Plato's critique of the poet, in short, is a critique of the existing Greek *paideia* where the sophists and the poets, who call upon Homer, speak to a forgetfulness of self, a verbal universe of self-estrangement, brought on by the spirit of sophism. Gadamer states: "Although Plato does not specifically say so, this critique of the art of poetry implies a break with the entire tradition of education which had always presented the moral truths of any given time using models taken from the heroes of Homer's world."³⁷²

Plato treats moral awareness as "the city of words," an inner harmony of the soul that falls into a self-forgetfulness. Here a false self-appropriation can occur, a mere "imitation," of the soul's work, where one gives oneself an alien character [identity]. Gadamer shows that Plato's concern was that the sophist and poet would merge and lead one to forget oneself in self-forgetfulness (of the good).

It is at this point that we begin to understand fully Gadamer's philosophical engagement with the human sciences in its full significance.

Inauthentic speech [alien speech] prevails when it generates a self-alienation in all other forms of speaking. This is especially visible in speech that addresses the poetic truth of the world. Gadamer insists, as a deeply Platonic thinker, that we challenge the sophistic perversion of truth. He writes that:

culture by talking about an art tied to the people, a way of speaking which, despite all the misuse of which it is capable, still undeniably points to something real. Inquisitors might take pleasure in this: in 1966 Gadamer acknowledges that the Nazi critique points 'to something real' and concurs with one motif in his critique of aesthetic consciousness. In 1966 he could do this, however, because he was inwardly certain of the distance between the Nazi *Weltanschauung* and his own philosophical project." p. 169.

³⁷² Gadamer, "Plato and the Poets," *Dialogue and Dialectic*, p. 61.

The real object of Plato's criticism is not degenerate forms of contemporary art and the perception of the older order, classical poetry which contemporary taste in art had defined. Rather it is the contemporary morality and moral education which had established itself upon the bases of the poetic formulations of the older morality and which, in adhering to aging moral forms, found itself defenseless against the arbitrary perversions of those forms brought on by the spirit of sophism.³⁷³

In *Plato and the Poets*, Gadamer discusses why the Platonic accusation against the poets (art and poetry), is a political struggle in relation to Homer, whom Plato felt would restrict the possibility of achieving rational political discourse in a political community if it was dominated by a poetry that Plato thought to be inauthentic (e.g. Homer). Gadamer therefore ties Plato's critique of the poets to Plato's critique of the Sophists.

"Homer's poetry turns out to be the mere pretence of knowledge which dazzles us."³⁷⁴ Again, we find Gadamer's attachments to Heidegger in his concern with the question of the genuine form of speech, and the genuine poet.

Plato's argument against the poet "is made in opposition to the entire political and intellectual culture of his time. And made in the conviction that philosophy alone has the capacity to save the state."³⁷⁵ The rivalry between poet and philosopher described in Plato's *Republic* has to be seen in light of the fact that it is made by a thinker who "cast[s] a poetic spell that has enthralled mankind for thousands of years."³⁷⁶

Andrew Fuyarchuk explains:

³⁷³ Ibid. p. 61.

³⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 60

³⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 47.

³⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 46.

³⁷⁷ Fuyarchuk, "Incongruity of Speech and Deed," in *Gadamer's Path to Plato*, p. 115.

By emphasizing the dialectical structure of Being in Plato's philosophy and the literary aspects of the dialogues, Gadamer seeks to undermine the *Altertumswissenschaft* tradition assuming Plato to an objective science. Given the structure of dialogue, no definitive doctrine can be established: it is simply contrary to the give and take of a conversation, animated by a question, to put forward a definitive idea about what something is. Every answer is another question. The literary form of Plato's work dovetails with Gadamer's reading of Plato's open-ended dialectic in that any pretence toward objective doctrine is an abstraction from the poetry in which the meaning of a particular being is embedded.³⁷⁷

Plato was ambivalent about Homer as a mythologist, but not as a poet. Plato had a deep reverence and love for such poetry. The Greeks understood that the poetic word was the space of speech in which thinking is born in a form that will assert its authority over the poetic.

When the poet used inauthentic speech in political life and education, he contributed to an empty speech and the decline of ideas. Gadamer shows that Plato is not precisely condemning the poet's word in the *Republic*, but is asserting what can happen to the word that is, as in the jargon language of objective pretense, organized falsely and in an inauthentic way. The poet's word still carries the capacity, from within itself, to shape or speak from a given ethos.³⁷⁸ Gadamer's attention is on how the poet is treated as sophist in Plato, and in his careful reading of the way poetic discourse is simultaneously recovered through, what appears at many times, to be a malevolent treatment of Homer.³⁷⁹

Socrates' language contrasts with the Homeric world of morality and education, where in the world of Plato, "old age legend being supposedly rescued from oblivion is not a resurrected ancient myth at all but a Socratic truth which rises up

³⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 53.

³⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 69.

before us before it recedes again.” In other words, the poetic world of the Platonic is a struggle to overcome the self-forgetfulness of the poetic word, but Plato’s practices, his dialogues, are close to the tradition of poetry.³⁸⁰ Plato’s myths are not an interpretation of the world of myth, says Gadamer, but interpretations that reside in the logos of his work, Plato’s dialogical poetry.³⁸¹

For Gadamer, the lyric is the paradigm of modernity, because the poem remains a “remembrance of language.” Poetic thinking, in contrast to what it had been for the Greeks, has in fact, become distant to us.³⁸² Bruns notes that the power of the poetic word happens in a culture that forgets the poem.³⁸³ Bruns notes: “Poetry is the original critique of the subject, one might say the original critique of reason. Plato knew as much.”³⁸⁴

We must ask: what does Plato have to tell us today? This question conveys nuances about Gadamer’s overall vision of modernity, concerning how we listen to the past and ourselves through language. When we listen carefully to Plato’s concerns we may hear our own concerns, especially since we are the heirs of the Greek tradition. For Plato, the Attic tradition of Homer and the great tragedians, are grounded political life;

³⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 67. Plato’s critique of poetry, a critique which culminates in his rejection of aesthetic consciousness, is intended to support the claim which he makes for his own dialogues. “Further, Plato does not simply put a new incantation into the field against aesthetic self-forgetfulness of the self and the old magic of poetry: rather he advances an antidote of philosophical questioning.” p. 67.

³⁸¹ Ibid. p. 67.

³⁸² See, Badiou, Alain. “Language, Thought, Poetry.” In *Alain Badiou: Theoretical Writings*. New York: Continuum, 2004. p. 233.

³⁸³ Gerald Bruns, mentions that *Lyrik als paradigm der Moderne* is the title of part one of *Zu Poetic und Hermeneutik*, in his “Introduction to Gadamer’s Poetics,” in *Gadamer on Celan*, p. 37.

³⁸⁴ Bruns, “Introduction to Gadamer’s Poetics,” in *Gadamer and Celan*, p. 10.

thus poetry overwhelmed, in this sense, political thinking, challenging the emergence of philosophy because of the “dangerous ambiguity” of its language.

Gadamer draws our attention to the peculiar political power of the modern poet and the poet’s word, to the paradigm of our lyric modernism, where the poem “grows more and more distant,” if we resist its “self-event intelligibility,” or, as Badiou’s has said, where poetry does not “easily suffer the demand for clarity, the passive audience, or the simple message.”³⁸⁵ Nonetheless, according to Gadamer, even under this pressure the poetic artwork shifts our attention to the power of language, which is still, in light of this resistance, as powerful today, since the poetic word shows us the “self-standing” and “conceptually inexhaustible”³⁸⁶ quality of the truth and the word.

Gadamer asked what justified the severity and hostility of Plato’s attitude to Homer, and poetry per se. Plato’s critique of poetry or a critique of myth (narrative) aspects of the Greek language³⁸⁷ might be expected from an “unmusical rationalist but not from a man whose work itself is nourished from poetic sources and who casts a spell which has enthralled making for thousands of years.”³⁸⁸ Indeed, this seeming tension is critical because it tells us something about the “extraordinary strangeness of Plato’s criticism,” something that remains, in fact, seemingly contradictory.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁵ Badiou, “Language, Thought, Poetry,” in *Alain Badiou: Theoretical Writings*, p. 233.

³⁸⁶ Bruns, “An Introduction to Gadamer’s Poetics,” in *Gadamer on Celan*, p. 37.

³⁸⁷ Gadamer, “Plato and the Poets,” in *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Essays on Plato*, pp. 45-46.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p. 46.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 47.

Since the poet cannot justify his utterances the poet cannot give valid answers, but, Gadamer says that “their works might contain a valid answer” nonetheless. In saying this, he reminds us that Socrates’ philosophy wanted to circumvent poetry, but it cannot, and as much as the poets might try to circumvent Socratic philosophy, they cannot either. So something remains of the poet’s “rhapsodic existence,” even after the harsh verdict of philosophy. Gadamer identifies in Plato the struggle concerning our political being and speech; he sees it in terms of the need to assert the good by reconciling ourselves into unity through our love of knowledge. In other words, the *paideia* incorporated both poet and thinker, how each may or may not bring about a reconciliation one builds not on skill but out of the just word; both poet and thinker must not deceive or be deceived: “the true poetic singing of human life must always proclaim the truth that the just man alone is happy.”³⁹⁰ Thus, “Plato’s *paideia* is meant [...] as a counterweight to the centrifugal pull of those forces of the sophist enlightenment being exerted upon the state.

Alain Badiou, for example, breaks with hermeneutic ontology, but remains, a “Platonist” (“Plato says that there is something other than bodies and language. There are truths...”³⁹¹), so is Gadamer (“Are we not all Platonists?”). Both are considering how truth stands in the *Idea* [the relationship of the word to the concept], but Badiou rejects that the poetic word can to be linked to this. He rejects the legacy of Heidegger, the poem as sign of our times. Nevertheless, what Gadamer and Badiou do share is a primary belief in the capacity of philosophy in its original sense, that Badiou describes

³⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 58.

³⁹¹ In Bosteels, Bruno. "Dialogue with Alain Badiou," (Appendix Two: “Beyond Formalization”). In *Badiou and Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. p. 341.

as his “Platonic gesture” to connect, “being, the subject, and truth;” to reaffirm the connection and offer an alternative to the poet’s claim on the word.

Gadamer says it is a mistake to “presuppose Plato as the metaphysician of the doctrine of ideas and then demonstrate that his critique flows logically from his basic ontological assumptions.”³⁹² Plato must be put into context to reveal the choice that he makes, and why his arguments against the poets exist in the way they do in the *Republic*. For Gadamer, Plato’s critique is not a fragmentary picture, one contextless argument set against another, but an understanding that his overall concern was to shift Greek culture away from “attic education” and the “political and intellectual culture of the time.”³⁹³

Gadamer writes: “Plato’s purification of traditional poetry can be understood only in relationship to the purpose of the whole of this pragmatic constitution of the *Republic*.” The point is not to take his argument literally as proposing something, which is actually immodest and unrealistic. What needs to be seen, says Gadamer, is the specific pedagogical effect of the poet, the efficacy of the poet, that, in the poem “something is expressed which reflects the ethical spirit prevailing in the community.”³⁹⁴ Plato’s critique, Gadamer adds, “betrays a moralistic bias of an intellectual purist.”³⁹⁵

In *The Shattering of the Poetic Word* Vattimo notes, because of Heidegger’s work, Gadamer takes an original step, being:

the first to call attention to the status of ‘la poésie pure’ as an example

³⁹² Ibid. p. 47.

³⁹³ Ibid. p. 48.

³⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 49.

³⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 49.

or model for understanding the essence of poetic works, insofar as language in pure poetry (from Symbolism to various hermetic experiments of the twentieth century avant garde artistic movements) attains an essential condition, thus recovering the originary function of naming which is precisely the essence of poetry.³⁹⁶

Gadamer recovers the birth of the word and philosophy in the Pre-Socratics and Plato.

Poetry, reminds us of a unity that can speak to us, between poet and listener, artwork and spectator, that is neither simply a speaking *ego* nor simply an *abstraction* of ourselves. One cannot possess a poem, like a work of art, but a poem *appropriates us* into itself; we do not reduce the poem to something else. What it says is there in its presence.

Gadamer's book, *Who am I and Who Are You?* (included in the English version of, *Gadamer on Celan*) takes up this theme. Paul Celan, is exemplary of the power of the word, of the *unsaid* that speaks within the possibilities that language itself offers.³⁹⁷ A conversation – the virtuality of speech – involves the forms we bring to speech as we bring forth the “correct word,” recognizing that we never absolutely attain such a goal. Our conceptual building work (such as theory, as another form building) lives in the tension of our encounter with the unfamiliar (alienation and distance) between ourselves, and what we aspire to achieve, that will have a true effect and not be merely self-alienating and sophistic.

³⁹⁶ “The Shattering of the Poetic Word,” in *The End of Modernity*, p. 72.

³⁹⁷ Gadamer, “The Boundaries of Language,” in *Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*. pp. 12-13.

Bruns writes: “The importance of Paul Celan to Gadamer’s thinking is that Celan’s writings situate the radical thesis explicitly within the context of the main question of philosophical hermeneutics: What is it to be addressed?”³⁹⁸

Bruns reminds us that, “Poetry is, again, the unforgetting of language, in which we are reminded, first of all, that language is not a formal system; it is what philosophers call natural language – but perhaps one should use the older philological expression, living language: language whose mode of existence is the event, a language of *Erfahrung* [the experience of something] that lives through or undergoes the experiences of all those who speak it and hear it, and which is therefore never self-identical but always *on the way* [*unterwegs*] –

what is it called, your country
behind the mountain, behind the year?
I know what it is called.
Like the winter’s tale, it’s called the summer tale,
your mother’s threeyearland,
that’s what it was,
what is it,
It wanders everywhere, like
language.³⁹⁹

Our starting point, Gadamer writes, “is that the verbally constituted experience of the world expresses not what is present-at-hand, that which is calculated or measured, but what exists that man recognizes as existent and significant.”⁴⁰⁰

Language is the medium where the question of our being as original belonging

³⁹⁸ See Bruns, “An Introduction to Gadamer’s Poetics”, *Gadamer on Celan, “Who Am I and Who Are You? And Other Essays*, p. 15.

³⁹⁹ Ibid. pp. 16-17.

⁴⁰⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. p. 452.

recognizes itself and meets the world. In the poems of Celan the power of the poetic faces its own estrangement.

Talk, Poetry, Word

First, claims and Definitions:

To put it simply, as we have shown, our discussion is about *talk*. Our grasp of *theoria*, I argue, is born in *talk*. Plato's dialogues, as multifaceted as they are, remain an exploration of the power of speech. The dialogues are abundant with speech [speeches and conversations]; the action of each dialogue, then, is *talk*. They convert conversations into dialogues. The dialogues carry, for the most part, proper names.

Traditionally, the Greeks saw *dialogue* as a priority that was equal to or greater than *seeing*. Our verbal communication, in its generosity and its ethical possibility, is necessary to the knowing of the world. This rests on recognizing how truth resides in the way we speak. We cannot neutralize this *scene of speech* in theory production in any way. Gadamer argues that the objectification of theory creates, as it were, a false scene of speech and consequently of theory.

How is theory a part of our living discussion? We are always responding to historical events and to art, and we have to see that this always involves us in dialogue "a *Gesprach*, hence it is a matter of listening and responding, and, above all, of interpreting or mediating the world or of the event with one's own world."⁴⁰¹ Plato's *Seventh Letter* shows us how philosophy emerges from dialogue, how, in living together we share in conversation and the speaking of thing as we nourish the soul into

⁴⁰¹ Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, pp. 147-148.

a harmony of art of the whole, not through objective expression but through living expression.

We do not stand outside our experience of the world (and the word) nor do we stand outside ourselves as a speaker. To put it simply, we seek to nourish our lives in speech, as we see in the figure of Socrates, where knowing oneself frees us of false knowledge. In Gadamer's Platonic outlook, we take place in our speech insofar as: (1) the world is a conversation in which we all participate, (2) all understanding is interpretation, (3) all verbal exchange is a hermeneutic phenomena, and (4) hermeneutic phenomena is a special instance of the relationship between thinking and speaking. Ultimately, we speak, converse, and dialogue through the dialectics of speech, to nourish our selves.

We can recognize that we are not outside of truth as communicative theoretical beings (our being-in-the-world preexists the operation of speech); but we can conceal, nevertheless, what Gadamer describes as the "other half of truth" inscribed in the historically shaped and binding power of metaphysics.

Such a paradox of the "other half of truth" opens onto the ethical space of speech, captured by Gadamer's expression: *dialectical ethics* [genuine dialogue, conceptual thinking, etc. as revealed in Plato's dialogues] which illustrates to the modern mind a loss that has accompanied, by contrast, what he calls "the rational construction of an artificial language." Artificial language, thereby, transforms truth and belonging as well as the genuine identity of theory in shared conversation.

Our relationship to truth, concerns the recovery of the truth claim of art. We learn: (1) art carries its meaning over to the reader because it asks of us a question (it

does not explicate a concept), further, (2) we do not see through art to a hidden intended meaning (with selected conceptual tools that could make it transparent to us), rather, (3) art *appropriates* us into the matter itself; we enter truth as an event (*Ereignis*) involving us in the tensions of knowing, being, distance and intimacy.

Art's power to stand alone, its self-presentation, is not the result of some mystical objectivity but a dialogue; art is an activity in which one must participate in order to interpret it, a relationship that is prompted by the way one encounters art's communicability.

Truth lies in the putting of something into words not in constructing methods; truth and method then is not to be understood as a gap to be healed, rather it shows us that we cannot address truth in the human sciences by believing we can step outside of what Gadamer calls the binding force of tradition. We belong to what we say in the living quality of the word (the happening event of word and truth); we tend to conceal this metaphysical root to thinking as we adopt an intellectualist view of method, in other words, we withdraw from our very mediation of truth in speech.

Thinking is first a universal phenomenon that is verbal in nature. Gadamer claims, "Verbal form and traditionary content cannot be separated in the hermeneutic experience." Consequently we belong to what we say [*being saying*]); this provides a basis for Gadamer's project to meditate on the conceptual limits and possibilities of the human sciences.

Gadamer says that everything that constitutes everyday speech can recur in the poetic word.⁴⁰² The poetic word then is especially important to showing the

⁴⁰² Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 470.

“speculative totality” of the word. Poetics is the most compelling phenomenon of the non-objectivity of language “insofar as an essential self-forgetfulness characterizes the performative character of speech,” but it “also proves to be a special case of meaning that has dissolved into and been embodied in the utterance”⁴⁰³ that underlies the dynamic movement of concepts. The poem reminds us of the power of linguistic mediation, how our encounter with others in words illuminates the logic of the concept. The concept unfolds, therefore in our shared dialogues (as we theorize).

We own and do not own speech; in this paradox our lives are shaped. It is where the world and I always meet, where our original belonging together and the common path lies in truth and falsehood. Truth is the speculative encounter we have with language, which becomes a fundamental self-encounter. *Self-attestation* is inherent to our utterances about *what is*; conversation as theory is, therefore, always a matter of self-attestation (contrary to pure linguistic constructions) for it positions the truth of words in the vocalization of our own life-project – as the unity of expression and truth. Critics who fail to grasp this aspect of Gadamer’s poetics (and how it would impact the human sciences) do not understand the ethical paradox that is presented here. Gadamer says we need to “establish a new relationship to the concepts used,” specifically, when addressing truth in the human sciences. We note: (1) there is a *gap* between membership in society and the sovereignty of investigation (embodied, for example, in the methodological approach in the human sciences), and (2), this gap can only be bridged, in theory that does its work for the social sciences as thematized and

⁴⁰³ Gadamer, *The Beginning of Knowledge*, pp. 124-125.

mediated by speech. A new relationship to the concept is called upon in the human sciences.

Speech is the productive ambiguity of our metaphysical heritage (that in some ways we can see within *Parmenides* poetic and philosophic text) and, as we shall see, is at the heart of philosophy and has subsequently transferred itself into the heart of the human sciences. The human sciences, therefore, represent this paradox. Speech is passing into the space where we intend to say something, and it, at the same time, moves us into a space where we understand ourselves; but this movement is also one where we give up something of our self. Poetic saying (as well as poetic texts) allows us to recognize: it is from language as a medium that our whole experience of the world, and especially hermeneutic experience, unfolds. In summary: hermeneutics retrieves poetics in response to our modernity; consequently, hermeneutics retrieves theory from alienation.

Vattimo puts this succinctly by saying “if there were no commonality between [...] two interlocutors, or between the observer and the artwork (and in general between reader and any kind of text), dialogue would not even begin.” Vattimo argues the artwork and the word always anticipate each other, for “a work is “understood” when it has de facto penetrated into our consciousness, when we are able to talk about it at least with ourselves, and when we assign to it (or recognize in it) a meaning.”⁴⁰⁴

What can the relationship of poetics to the human sciences be? Poetics, the relationship between spoken and written word and the “languages of various arts”, as Vattimo puts it. Understanding and communication are no longer accidental

⁴⁰⁴ Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, p. 37.

occurrences, he further notes, but have become more important: art is in need of the word.⁴⁰⁵ We return to Gadamer's question: *What makes a poet?* Poets do not simply speak better, rather the poet translates the word into the *yet to be said* of conversation, in a communal partnership with language and the way the world opens up to us in the word. The question of the truth of speech is bound up with the poet's saying. The paradox of truth happens in this alignment and tension between the claims of art (poetry) and the claims of theory. In each instance, therefore we have to take into account how they both appropriate us, how we exist in a proximity to the word.

In *The Beginnings of Knowledge* Gadamer reminds us:

[...] the concepts of objectivity and object are so alien to the immediate understanding in which human beings seek to make themselves at home in a world that, characteristically the Greek did not have terms for them. They did not speak of a "thing". The Greek word that they were in the habit of using in this whole area is the word *pragma*, which, as foreign words go, is not entirely foreign to us and which refers to that within which we are entangled in the praxis of living; thus it refers not to that which stands over against us or opposed to us as something to be overcome, but rather to that within which we move and that with which we have to do. This is an orientation that is marginalized by the modern global mastery that is structured by science and technology that grounds.⁴⁰⁶

The poet's voice enlightens us to this truth that rests on a fixed proposition, while showing that the poem is equivalent to an ethical encounter. Heidegger said a poem is not metaphysics, meaning poetic words resist metaphysical thinking. Poetry, therefore, is an injunction to conceptual speech, a response to the ossification of the

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid. p.36.

⁴⁰⁶ Gadamer, "Greek Philosophy and Modern Thought," in *The Beginning of Knowledge*, p. 122.

word. Poetic truth, then, challenges our understanding of what we might call *scientific commonality*.

First, it shows that our relation to each other is the result of how we occupy language as speakers. Second, it shows that our conceptual speech known as theory is indiscernible from what we learn from the poet's experience of language. Theory, however, is not poetry. Sociology and poetry seemingly move in opposite directions. What Gadamer shows is that theory shares the communicative potential of poetry that places a limit on the tendency of modern theory toward self-objectification and the dehumanizing consequences of this. Words are a type of *eidōs*. We enter the word because it brings forth meaning without an explicit interpretation. It brings us forth, but we cannot do this in un-moveable speech. Gadamer writes: "the unity of the word that explicates itself in the multiplicity of words manifests something that is not covered by the structure of logic and that brings out the character of language as event: the process of concept formation."

Gerald Bruns tells us that it is poetry that changes our relationship to language as a whole. He further notes: "Poetry is an event – Gadamer calls it a 'speculative event' – in which language interrupts our attempts to reduce it conceptually and instrumentally; it takes itself out of our hands."⁴⁰⁷ In this juxtaposition of question lies the difficulty of the language of science and the human sciences but also a key to modernity. For the destiny of language converges and merges with the destiny of modernity in what Lacoue-Labarthe describes how the destiny of modernity imposes an "unknowing imperative" that requires being able to confront "what it is necessary to

⁴⁰⁷ Bruns, "An Introduction to Gadamer's Poetics," in *Gadamer and Celan*, p. 7.

say, of which, strictly speaking, we know nothing”.⁴⁰⁸ This unknowing imperative is recognizing how we stand inside and outside western metaphysics just as the human sciences do. “We ourselves are the ones (thanks to the lasting effects of Plato’s artful dialogical compositions) who find ourselves addressed and who are called upon to account for what we are saying.”⁴⁰⁹ To put it in a simple formula, life is poetic, and the poem bears witness to this that we live in truth before we live in ‘science’.

Baker reminds us, “When two people understand each other, this does not mean that one person ‘understands’ the other,” but means openness to others that invite us to a type of self-recognition.” A poetic of recognition. Further: “I must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so.” This saying is not a methodological saying. Poetic saying alerts us to the nature of the way we present something in speech as life. “What poetry presents [*das Dargestellte*] and its presentation [*die Darstellung*] are the same.”⁴¹⁰ Speaking is both a listening to and a saying that occurs in language. This cannot be thought of as an external or a controlled way. Our speculative achievement in the spoken word brings forth something because we intend it in our saying.

The expressive beauty of the Greek language (and is not Gadamer’s work guided by an assumption about the priority of the beautiful utterance?) concerns sharing with one another in conversation. Poetics and rhetoric are partners that hold open “the

⁴⁰⁸ Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe. *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*. Translated by Jeff Fort. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007. Translators Introduction, p. xvi.

⁴⁰⁹ Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*.

⁴¹⁰ Baker, “Lyric as Paradigm,” In *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, p. 152.

possibility for developing philosophical concepts (recall *Parmenides of Elea*).”⁴¹¹

Language is always intending concepts, but this is not a consequence of the language of modern science. *Sprachlichkeit* [linguisticity], Gadamer describes as: “The way the voice is articulated as a speaking voice - perhaps even when one reads without making any sound – suggests that writtenness [*Schriftlichkeit*], even that of the alphabet, is an articulation with a high level of complexity. The voice that the writer or reader “hears” as he or she writes or reads clearly attains a far higher level of articulation that could any possible writtenness.”⁴¹²

Hermeneutics, in effect, offers us an understanding for the de-objectification of theory, or at least, recognizing the tension between abstraction and the spoken word. We are present to others and ourselves in our speech – in the very way we speak. Language is speech as self-understanding as well as a reflection on language itself. In this unity lies the hermeneutic act of accounting for what is spoken by us to others. Inherent in the very *telos* of human speech is reaching toward understanding. This is neither the result of an objectification of speech, nor the transparency of the subject. “How so?” we ask.

Our words, like the poet’s, resonate the whole of language and in so doing speak to a completeness of saying that is possible; where everything can be called forth as a movement between our finitude and infinity of the word. Furthermore, “what comes out of the word that *speaks* to us is not so much a single element of meaning in the world, but rather it is the presence of the whole, built and shared, through

⁴¹¹ Gadamer, “Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language,” in *Language and Linguisticity in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics*, p. 21.

⁴¹² Gadamer, “Hermeneutics Tracking the Trace [On Derrida],” *The Gadamer Reader, A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p. 389.

language.” Language binds and separates us, but interpreting is our belonging to one another.

Celan and Hermeneutics

Celan stirs up the struggle that lies at the very center of hermeneutics; this struggle is to care for the achievement and understanding we communicate with the word.⁴¹³ The truth of the word, as it were, is a caring for the other and caring for the word. One allows the right word to come forth; the other is for an ethics of communication. As Gadamer says, this care cannot be rule governed. We cannot fully account for language if we see it as an instrument. Gadamer in his exploration of the nature of theory is not simply a post-metaphysical quest, but an unearthing of the limits of the metaphysical desire for a foundation to our conceptuality.

Every poem, like art, calls to us for a responsible answer – a dialogue. Just as in friendship we dialogue with someone. Celan described his poems as dialogues in his *Bremen Speech*, dialogues that, nonetheless, reside in their difficulty or obscurity where the reader must face the question of reading and understanding (of their reinvented affiliation to the person or text). In *The Meridian Speech* he speaks of a distance or strangeness that constitutes all poetic communication, a communication that resides in the dialogue to encounter someone.

⁴¹³ Derrida remarks on the double struggle with language that the poems of Celan evoke, speaking of the death of language, specifically of the German language under Nazism, and another death that cannot not happen. The poet then acts as a witness who constitutes a kind of resurrection of the word: “the poet is someone who is permanently involved with a language that is dying and which he resurrects” to living experience. Derrida, Jacques. “Paul Celan and Language.” In *Paul Celan: Selections*. Edited by Pierre Joris. Stanford: University of California Press, 2005. p. 203.

Celan's poems provide "the scene of reading [...] what the poem itself gives to be read,"⁴¹⁴ Involving an address to oneself that calls for us to listen to what it has to say. This *self-address* may or may not reach any addressee, let alone oneself, but a poem's withdrawal of address, nevertheless, still remains an address of the word – the said and unsaid of the word. In this scene of reading, identified by Derrida as a key to Gadamer's encounter with the poet, especially his encounter with Celan, the significance of the poetic is shown by Derrida as simultaneously access to oneself and access to the other. Something prevails over what I am before I distance it, "Before being me, I carry the other. [...] I must keep myself in your reach, but I must also be in your grasp."⁴¹⁵

In Celan's "muted words" are a metaphysical questioning, something that is reached without appropriating the idea. That is to say, a poem is an event that marks the ideality of the word of language. Celan's poems reflect upon the word what makes them possible as they proceed. The poem is an instance of what it wants to say.

Theory, insofar as it implies both a self-address, (a conversation with ourselves) includes that part of the speculative ideality (Plato) that invites each of us into a sharing of the word (of truth) in us and before us, that is carried forward as an interminable conversation, whose space is an interior dialogue with the other.⁴¹⁶

Thinking in concepts, therefore, is not alien to the ordinary use of language, especially not to the poet. But our encounters are with and through language, especially

⁴¹⁴ Derrida, Jacques. "Rams." In *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2004. p. 162.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid. p. 162.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid. p. 163.

in the poem, “the experience of the ownness and the foreignness of language.”⁴¹⁷

Concepts are not just pure invention but are part of our living encounter with the words of our living language. Theory, seen from this point of view, is an activity that addresses and embodies its own articulation too. Theory is then neither reducible nor verifiable, for its truth is expressed in the words given to us by the theorist as they are set forth for us.

The performative side of theory is the rhetorical creation of our space for dialogue. All conceptual means must first stand the test of art.⁴¹⁸ What light does this claim about art shed on our verbal lives and verbal agency? By the test of art Gadamer refers to the truth of art as a model. Dialogue is not simply a theatrical setting (the spontaneity of conversation) as revealed in the Platonic dialogues; but rather, as with poet and philosopher, it is the habitat of living speech as a speculative word – that has an affinity to truth. Failure to see this leads only to the “hubris of concepts,” as Gadamer notes:

In everyday language as well as in the so-called *Geisteswissenschaften* (“human sciences”), everything that increases speech’s rich variety of reference and extends its capacity for knowledge can turn into confusion when everything depends on univocal denotation. The metaphorical nature of language makes definition necessary and justifies the use of artificial terminology. This cannot be introduced by means that wholly determinate language allows, but only through natural speech. The comparative particularity of scientific languages as they disassociate themselves within the overall phenomenon of language always stand in tension with the totality that binds us all together into a human society, our ability to speak, to seek and find words to communicate.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁷ Ibid. p. 138.

⁴¹⁸ Gadamer, “The Greeks, Our Teachers,” in *Heidegger’s Ways*, p. 100.

⁴¹⁹ Gadamer, “The Expressive Force of Language: On the Function of Rhetoric in Gaining Knowledge,” in *Praise of Theory Speeches and Essays*, pp. 133-134

The theorist's identity reveals a paradox in our one-sided modernity, shows how the self-alienating effects of modern theory, making things said fall into safe statements, make us adverse to the risks of speaking,⁴²⁰ thus we are led into alienated forms of linguistic execution; while, on the other hand, the poetic word tells us how making things said concerns our being: our being "open to being said."⁴²¹

Poetry reveals the power of the truth of the word as an ethics of speech occurring without alienation. Speech involves producing the right understanding with the right words. Jacques Lacan describes this as the ethics of "well saying," echoing the Greeks and their sense of the beautiful. Poetry clarifies the question of truth's paradox, and that as finite beings, searching continuously for the genuine rhetorical mode of our being, not only as poet, but as a theorist too.⁴²²

I have shown, with reference to several key texts by Gadamer, including "On the Truth of the Word", "Word and Poetry", "Plato and the Poets", "On the Contribution of Poetry to the Search for Truth", "What is Truth", "Philosophy and Poetry", "The Expressive Force of Language", and "On the Function of Rhetoric in Gaining Knowledge", how poetry unveils the truth of the word. We are thus provided with a conception of how the speculative concept holds us, such that we are not only attentive to what is being said but we can hear what the word wants to say. We describe

⁴²⁰ "Language is such that whatever particular meaning a word may possess, words do not have a single unchanging meaning; rather, they possess a fluctuating range of meanings, and precisely this fluctuation constitutes the peculiar risk of speaking." See, Gadamer, "Language and Understanding," in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p. 106.

⁴²¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 376.

⁴²² Quoted by Alain Badiou in "Language, Thought, Poetry," in *Badiou: Theoretical Writings*, p. 235.

this as the performative validity of the utterance, the truth event of the word that exists without external justification.

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Chapter 4

The Dialogue Between Ancient and Modern Theory

“[The] difference between Greek *theoria* and modern science is based, in my opinion, on different orientations to the verbal experience of the world.”⁴²³

“...the living voice in the field of language retains the first and the last word. It is the word found in speaking that must be found again in reading texts, if the text is to speak.”⁴²⁴

In this chapter I focus on Gadamer’s account of Ancient *theoria*. The Greek concept of *theoria* challenges the traditional ideal of theory as scientific. The scientific norm of knowing requires a point of view about knowledge that lays claim to a social world of “objects” that theory then recognizes and grasps. I argue in this chapter that *theoria*, as understood by Plato, is rooted in living language in the dialectical play of the word (conversation), we perform in our saying. Gadamer is a Platonist insofar as he believes conceptual work lies in speech. Again, by looking at Gadamer’s relation to Plato (via Hegel and Heidegger), we illuminate the enactment of how the making of theoretical utterances is an intelligibility that occurs from natural language. Not found in rules, it is where we understand that the speculative side of language concerns how we are at home by not placing ourselves into a self-exile of alienating speech where we no longer belong with one another (*miteinander*). A key text in this regard is Gadamer’s

⁴²³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 451.

⁴²⁴ Gadamer, “Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language,” in *Language and Lingusticality in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics*, p. 34.

concluding essay from *The Beginning of Knowledge*, “Greek Philosophy and Modern Thought”. In this essay, he emphasizes that the essential self-forgetfulness of speech that characterizes our ways of speaking, and that makes these things visible to us by bringing them into articulation. The key to this argument is that the instrumentalization of speech (the thematizing of language as if it were a tool) was already a distortion. The Greeks understood that the conflict between our world and our ideas was not an external struggle but a struggle within speech, a struggle against alien speech and an avoidance of discourse that would be alien to their souls. Speech regulates itself not by external rules but through the inner logic of showing. This is the truth that modernity hides, the necessity of the way we participate in speech (we cannot translate anything into language without speech, i.e. *logos*). This power has an essential “non objectivity”, but sociology could not escape the implications of this energy that speaks to us from the inception of philosophy, for this is the difference between alienation and non-alienation.

As Gadamer shows us, the Greeks remain relevant to understanding the question of theory. First I introduce a section on Gadamer and Donald Davidson, since Davidson's approach to the question of truth of our assertions offers a strong parallel with Gadamer's arguments. They also share a similar interest in Plato's *Phaedrus*. I also focus on Alan Blum use of Ancient *theoria* to directly illuminate the human sciences.

Gadamer's early *Plato's Dialectical Ethics* (1931) has deeply shaped his later thinking on hermeneutics with his claim: it is Plato who offers a clear account of why the dialectical openness of the dialogue is the root of theory. Second, that by

understanding Greek *theoria* we have access to understanding the problem of the self-alienating effects of modern theory. By focusing of the shared nature of dialogue in Plato and the ethical function of the dialectic is reposting the problem of sophistry and linguistic abuse, Plato imparts to elements important to Gadamer's own recovery of the concept of *theoria*. In *Praise of Theory*, Gadamer tells us that modern theory has come to assume an instrumental form of language, and, unlike the Greeks, we detach ourselves from the living experience of theory as language. Showing that the task of theory, as Plato establishes, is defined by the good and coming to live life. Blum, speaking of the figure of Socrates, in his study *Socrates*, puts it this way “Socrates brings life and theory together by urging us to remember that our examination and inquiry is our own way of amplifying a life.”⁴²⁵

Gadamer says, “thinking more Greek like is not so much thinking differently as it is thinking-with-an-other – a way of thinking which withdraws from our own thinking because our thinking is completely fixated on objectification, on overcoming the resistant character of the object in a percipient certainty of ourselves.”⁴²⁶

Modern theory presents the paradox of the human sciences, and from a hermeneutic viewpoint, discovers that we are alienated from our speech. Theory then is alienating, insofar, as has become a mode of self-alienation whereby language naturalizes us rather than opens us to truth. What Plato could be said to have predicted, or saw as the key to preventing the affirmation of the struggle to say things with the force of the good and the beautiful in view, had become instead a condition where “academic theory” inhibits truth saying and access to things in their truth. In contrast,

⁴²⁵ Blum, Alan, *Socrates, The Origin and Its Image*, p. 2.

⁴²⁶ Gadamer, “The Greeks,” in *Heidegger’s Ways*, p. 147.

then, to modern theory, with its abstractive and objectifying ways of thinking, theory should, as Gadamer says, be recognized as a communicative participation in the world, as an action (not to be confused with a pragmatist sense of usefulness), as we live in the practice of *theoria* which concerns the way we, simultaneously, share ourselves with others.⁴²⁷

When Gadamer asks us to take seriously his title, *Truth and Method*, because “... what method defines is precisely not truth,”⁴²⁸ he is asking that we consider the question of theory and truth. When he further asks: “Is there perhaps more to theory than what the modern institution of science represents for us?”⁴²⁹ He means that the human sciences, having encoded themselves in the region of method and an instrumental conception of theory, have alienated themselves from the way language conveys truth. In having adopted a modernist prejudice toward language,⁴³⁰ they misunderstand their own truth claims that underlie the creation of social knowledge, and that inform all their practices.

⁴²⁷ A model here would be “friendship,” a topic Gadamer has discussed in his writings. He has written that, “The Greek concept of the friend articulated the complete life of society.” “Europe and the Humanities,” in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, p. 218. Although the theme is not discussed in our work, Gadamer writes extensively on friendship and theory, see for example, “Friendship and Self-Knowledge: Reflections on the Role of Friendship in Greek Ethics”, while, we find Alan Blum discussing this connection in his study, *Socrates*, where he wrote, “Friendliness to Socrates is then personified in the desire to keep life and theory together, whereas enmity is reflected in their segregation.” *Socrates The Origin and Its Image*, p. 8.

⁴²⁸ Gadamer, *Gadamer in Conversation, Reflections and Commentary*, p. 55.

⁴²⁹ Gadamer, “Praise of Theory,” in *Praise of Theory, Speeches & Essays*, p. 24. See also, Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Philosophy or Theory of Science?” In *Reason in the Age of Science*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001.

⁴³⁰ The definition of sociology comes to be understood as a *methodological debate* concerned with the question of contrasting “academic” methods.

That is why he states: “In my book *Truth and Method*, I began my considerations first of all with art, and not with the human sciences. Even within the “human sciences” it is an *art* that brings the basic questions of human beings to our attention in such a unique way...”⁴³¹ He insists that the human sciences lie close to the rhetorical aspects of language and reveal to us what the poem significantly tells us about the way we use language. In summary, the compelling truth of theory lies closer to art than to science.

Gadamer and Davidson on the Proposition

Genuine sharing and being present is where, in dialogue, truth is to be found, as Gadamer says, that is not contingent on a *proposition*.⁴³² Conceptual thought concerns how intelligibility is mediated linguistically. In Gadamer’s view, then, the world is perpetually mediated through concepts but this does not mean that the world is created by concepts. Put another way, we experience the world through our natural conceptuality (the fundamental linguisticity of understanding) that found all our claims to know the world. This does not mean, as David Vessey for example, has said, contrasting Gadamer and Davidson, that we still do experience things for which we have no words.⁴³³ How does theory make the world visible in its compositional structure?

⁴³¹ Gadamer, “From Word to Concept,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p. 115.

⁴³² Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science*, pp. 17-18.

⁴³³ Versey argues that an important difference arises in the respective work of Gadamer and Davidson on the question of language and incommensurability of conceptual schemes. While they share a similar viewpoint, there is, notes Versey, “a deeper disagreement about the relation of thought and the world. For Davidson, the

Davidson states clearly “That no theory of metaphorical meaning can help explain how metaphor works. Metaphor runs on the same tracks that the plainest sentences do...”⁴³⁴ Language for both Davidson and Gadamer is not a tool nor does it determine our experiences but allows us to articulate them, that is how we articulate “facts” to for all that we say are facts are articulated as hermeneutic facts. Gadamer also makes the claim that linguisticity guides all understanding but this “cannot mean that all experiencing of the world can only take place as and in language...Who would deny that there are real factors conditioning human life, such as hunger, love, labor, and domination, which are not themselves language or speaking, but which for their part furnish the space within which our speaking to each other and listening to each other can take place. This fact cannot be disputed.”⁴³⁵

Vessey further explains, countering any sense of linguistic idealism that might appear to attach itself to Gadamer’s views, that “our experiences are not determined by language, but simply call for articulation in language,” noting that, “perception is both conceptual all the way down and yet provides the friction with the world needed to confirm, revise, or reject belief.”⁴³⁶ And, for Gadamer: “in truth [...] the illusion that things precede their manifestation in language conceals the fundamentally linguistic

relationship is casual, and this thesis is a key element in the argument against incommensurability. For Gadamer, the relationship is linguistic, and this forms a key element in his argument against incommensurability.” See, Vessey, David. “Davidson, Gadamer, Incommensurability, and the Third Dogma of Empiricism.” In *Dialogues with Davidson: Acting, Interpreting, Understanding*. Edited by Jeff Malpas. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2011. p. 255.

⁴³⁴ Quoted in Bruns, Gerald L. “Donald Davidson Among the Outcasts.” In *Tragic Thoughts at the End of Philosophy*, p. 43.

⁴³⁵ Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Library of Living Philosophers*, p.43.

⁴³⁶ See, Vessey, “Davidson, Gadamer, Incommensurability, and the Third Dogma of Empiricism,” in *Dialogues with Davidson: Acting, Interpreting, Understanding*, p. 253.

character of our experience of the world.”⁴³⁷ In other words, our experience of the world is not determined by language but happens in language. Western metaphysics encodes how we see language and dominates our experience of the world, thus, we are already constructing our relationship to world and others in a mono-logical form that misrepresents the true nature of the relationship of thought to the world. By placing perception apart from our linguistic experience of the world, the human sciences seemingly contradict the linguistic nature of experience, creating a false image of our relationship to theory. Vessey puts it this way, “language [for Gadamer] does not supplement the non-conceptual elements, it introduces a whole new way of responding to experience, of taking up experience propositionally, in short, of making experiences intelligible to us and others through language.”⁴³⁸

Our verbal orientation to theoretical communication is built on rhetoric of distance and the facts of evidence, as fundamental to the transcendental grounding of science [i.e. knowledge is a scientific task, which is itself a self-justifying idea]. By giving ontological priority however to speech, truth is the participation of speakers in conversation, in contrast to a monological communication. We have culturally assimilated a technique that conceals our speaking, as if, in some way, our scientific speaking masters or resolves the rhetorical.⁴³⁹ A paradox haunts the discourse of social sciences because, in fact, the human sciences challenge “science” and this challenge is their truth. Theoretical statements become restricted if they are estranged from the

⁴³⁷ Gadamer, “The Nature of Language and the nature of Things,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 77.

⁴³⁸ Vessey, “Davidson, Gadamer, Incommensurability, and the Third Dogma”, in *Dialogues with Davidson: Acting, Interpreting, Understanding*, p. 252.

⁴³⁹ Outlined by many theorist and writers as they struggled with this question, first summarized when Richard Brown published his work, *A Poetic For Sociology*, in 1977.

hermeneutic dimension of truth,⁴⁴⁰ a consequence of the rise of the empirical sciences and the way in which they have come to subordinate the long tradition of rhetoric.

How we theorize in this modern institutional viewpoint of science (where the knowing subject struggles in opposition to their own ethics of speech) requires us to recognize that language exists apart from science, while still seeing how our mediation in linguistic sharing enables us to also share objects of discussion in a potentially intelligible world, where again, we can shape new concepts to see this world in other ways.

We need to see, as Gadamer says, the universal linguistic social partnership of the hermeneutic dimension of language.⁴⁴¹ Systems of methodological approximations of truth, and their “naïve objectivism” [nominalism of scientific speech, the world is there as an objective realm before their gaze] creates a paradox for us: how is the world intelligible and how do we make it intelligible without binding ourselves to treating concepts as schematic and secondary to life?

How might the human sciences come to know themselves in a hermeneutic reconstruction? As we try to understand their knowledge claims. For Gadamer, this is a

⁴⁴⁰ “The Ideal of a completed Enlightenment refutes itself precisely within the human sciences. Their particular task is to remain always mindful of their own finitude and historical conditioning in scholarly work and to resist the self-apotheosis of the Enlightenment. They cannot release themselves from the responsibility which stems from the fact that they have an effect.” Gadamer, “Truth in the Human Sciences,” in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, p. 31.

⁴⁴¹ Gadamer, “Philosophy or Theory of Science?” in *Reason in the Age of Science*, pp. 166-167. When we examine our social life it is that it “offer[s] less an objective field for the scientific mastery of a subject matter or the extension of our domination by knowledge of the unknown than a mediation of ourselves with our real possibilities engulfing us – with what can be and what is capable of happening to and becoming of us.” p. 167.

matter of how we experience the truth of speech and share it with others.⁴⁴² Our scientific speaking ultimately, then, presses the hermeneutic truth of the human sciences upon us as a concern for a relationship to theorizing that is neither alienating to us or to the public. Witnessed, for example, in various historical attempts to speak of the human sciences as somehow akin to art or humanism or as having a more complex linguistic relationship to logic or theorizing.⁴⁴³ The question of theory is, as it were, a repeated effort to reframe what the social theorist is doing, a story that is repeated.

We use the term *theory* broadly to describe a specific way of producing speech, mostly following Gadamer, in terms of both a Greek and a modern conception, e.g. as in “Praise of Theory” [*Theoria*]. We also note the peculiar way theory is described in sociology, just as sociology is sometimes described with difficulty. For example, when describing sociology in *Thinking Sociologically* by Zygmunt Bauman and Tim May, where we find generalizations that describe what it is [social theory, or what a sociologist does] that read like a parody of Plato, or a generalized version of Plato’s construction of the theoretical utterance: of *theory*. The momentary confusion is understandable, because inadvertently they describe sociology in terms of concerns

⁴⁴² See, the Introduction to Zygmunt Bauman and Tim May’s *Thinking Sociologically*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2001, which amplifies the tension between ethics and modern metaphysics.

⁴⁴³ We see this, for example, in the unfolding of Robert K. Merton’s career (who yet remains very much within the horizon of traditional sociology), with his turn to the linguistic performance of the theorist in the human sciences. Merton’s interest in the “unintended consequences of social action,” his “methodological” interest in “the logic of theorizing,” his work in the “history and sociology of science,” and his “enduring engagement with neologisms that are needed to describe newly discovered phenomena and newly emerging ideas.” Merton, Robert K. *The Travels and Adventures of Serendipity: A Study in Sociological Semantics and the Sociology of Science*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. p. 235.

common to the aims of the Platonic dialogues. So perhaps it will come as no surprise that the term *theory* is used to mean, modern theory and social theory.

Living in the Questionableness of Speech

Truth, for the human sciences is not simply to do with the heritage of its scientific way of speaking, with its objectivism, for example, but in seeing the very conditionedness of all knowing, [our “historically effected consciousness”] – how truth occurs in this very condition, which Gadamer describes as the “questionableness of all speech.”⁴⁴⁴ Every human being, as the Greeks recognized, stood in this condition of speech, outside of which there is no self-transparency that can be had. But, as we know, it is this very questionableness of speech that is seen as an obstacle to scientific practice, conceived in terms of the neutralization of the activity of speech that is thought to be needed to “overcome” with unitary models of knowledge.⁴⁴⁵

Science’s public truth is the absence of contradiction. By looking at the dialectic of the word [the play of the word] as dialogue, any conversion of the nature of critical speech into a neutral place from which to speak: as in the “language” of “science,” requires an alienation. The way we make speeches, the very art of making knowledge (talking something through with ourselves and others), concerns how we enter into discourse while in our understanding something will always remain unspoken, lying in the background to what we can say and understand. The true, in

⁴⁴⁴ Gadamer, “Truth in the Human Sciences,” in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, p. 27.

⁴⁴⁵ Otherwise we are always constructing synthetic models that attempt to overcome the initial alienation imposed on speech is yet another codification of scientific thinking. For example, we see this in *Interpretation and Social Knowledge*, where the struggle to find an acceptable conception of social knowledge becomes a reconciliation of alienated modes of thinking.

hermeneutics, then, concerns the way our rhetorical forms [speech] bring us to knowledge. Rather than being built on a hermeneutic conception of speech, the birth of sociology is built on a conception of science that embodies a (hidden) crisis. Thus, they cannot, in reality, conceal the tension between scientific knowing and belonging. Our being with ourselves, our being on speaking terms with ourselves becomes reified into a practice of estranged knowing (speaking) that estranges us from truth in itself.

This paradox is familiar to the human sciences, especially, to the sociologist, since the “tension between life world and system has long been a master theme in sociology”.⁴⁴⁶ We build our communal bonds through speech, we note the problem (of our experience with language) in the way we are learning and sharing our learning, for we remain “active participants in the commonality of our [hermeneutic] experience of the world,”⁴⁴⁷ even when we attempt to locate our speaking in a methodological understanding that restricts self-understanding.⁴⁴⁸

Gadamer and the Greek Conception of Theory

The Greeks understood this since they understood both the paradox of learning and the paradox of speech. For the Greeks truth is not simply about *things* [detached objects] but about *us*, about belonging. Truth was a belonging that was already known

⁴⁴⁶ Selznick, Philip. *The Moral Commonwealth, Social Theory and the Promise of Community*. Stanford: University of California Press, 1992. p. 256.

⁴⁴⁷ Gadamer, “Hermeneutics a Theoretical Task and a Practical Task,” in *Reason in the Age of Science*, p. 110.

⁴⁴⁸ Gadamer, “On the Natural Inclination Toward Philosophy,” in *Reason in the Age of Science*, p.146.

to the Greeks, not known as a methodic experience, as we moderns interpret it.⁴⁴⁹

Gadamer does not resist science and its advances, rather he questions the way truth has become truth as scientific practice by, as Vattimo says, “putting forward an idea of truth as belonging that was already known to the Greeks and which can still be traced as a minor theme in modernity.”⁴⁵⁰

Knowledge and truth are exposed in this relationship to the Greeks. Modern science avoids finality and history. In this way, Gadamer, by drawing upon the Greeks, exposes why truth is the key problem of the human sciences, thus why the dialogue between Gadamer, Apel and Habermas captures the essential divide between two views of truth and argumentation.⁴⁵¹ The human sciences, no matter how they define their knowledge, are already pointing back to their unquestioned metaphysical basis: the origins of the theoretical utterance. Gadamer asks, how could the wholeness, or oneness, of our theoretical utterances be a consequence of statements or method [scientific logic], since we shape words through the natural conceptuality of our speech?⁴⁵² Consequently, does not social theory point back to this founding aspect of theory-speech to speech,⁴⁵³ to something the Greeks understood?

⁴⁴⁹ Vattimo, Gianni. “Ethics of Communication or Interpretation?” In *The Transparent Society*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992. p. 115.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 115.

⁴⁵¹ Vattimo discusses the interconnection between Apel and Gadamer, one in which he claims they strive for something similar in terms of their seeking to provide an ethics of rational argumentation. By “separating hermeneutics, claims Vattimo, in its canonical Gadamerian form from the ethics of communication of writers such as Apel and Habermas,” we understand these positions “are not really far apart.” He goes on, “To be precise Apel and Habermas make explicit a transcendental attitude that Gadamer rejects, but which remains as an almost unavoidable risk for philosophy...” Vattimo, “Ethics of Communication or Interpretation?” p. 109.

⁴⁵² Gadamer discusses at length Plato and the question of appearances and ideas, in Gadamer, “The Question at Issue,” in *The Idea of the Good in Plato and Aristotelian*

To see this is to recognize something that comes down from the Greeks: the difference between the Greek view of science and the modern view of science, not only with regard to the concept of *physis* and their relationship to the physical world, but more importantly, concerning the way we experience the word. Thus, as Gadamer will show, this impacts our conception of theory.

Language, Gadamer asserts:

Is one of the phenomena most pervasive in showing its non-objectifiability, in that an essential self-forgetfulness resides in the character of speaking as something that is carried out or performed. When the modern description of language tries to picture language as an instrument or means of speaking, this always already technology-based distortion in which words and word combinations are imagined to be held in readiness in a kind of stockpile, and are simply applied to something one encounters. The superiority of the contrasting Greek view of language is overwhelmingly evident here. The Greeks had no word at all for language. They only had a word for the tongue, which brought forth the sounds of language – *gotta* – and they had a word for the thing that is communicated through language: *logos*. Precisely in the word “*logos*” something is brought into view, which is essentially related to the inner self-forgetfulness of speaking, which is evoked through the speaking, and which is raised into presence in speaking. One moves into a world that is created by the availability and communicative sharing that happens in speaking.”⁴⁵⁴

This description captures many features of Gadamer’s view of language and the reasons for our alienation from speech. First, a misleading understanding of language has been assimilated into the world of scientific thinking that remains

Philosophy. Here he remarks: “Did Plato really underestimate the problem of participation of the appearances in the ideas? [...] Or, do both postulations belong together: the ideas being for themselves, the so-called *chorismos* (separation), and the difficulty, to which one is thereby exposed, concerning participation, or *methexis*, as it is called? Could it be that *chorismos* and *methexis* go together from the start? pp. 9-10.

⁴⁵³ Gadamer, “Truth in the Human Sciences,” in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, p. 32.

Meaning, to put it simply, that the speech of the human sciences determines their truth, or their conception of theory determines truth.

⁴⁵⁴ Gadamer, “Greek Philosophy and Modern Thinking,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p. 273.

unaccountable; second, a taken-for-granted view of science and language now dominates the discussion of what theory is, and finally, theory is restricted to a conception that cannot describe what really happens in the human sciences.

For Gadamer, that which is *masterable* against is set against that which is *intelligible*. Language is the same, as we see in the above quote: therefore the misconception of language that Gadamer speaks of, results in a misconception of theory. Gadamer points to his own view of theory in the distinction between the masterable and the intelligible. Theoretical curiosity, the very basis of theory, is to be found in this early Greek view, but not simply the self-evident presupposition that we can know as objects, rather it is a concern with a different matter, which is, how we are making ourselves at home as we master a technique, say as in doing “science”? This twofold movement concerns the double movement of technical alienation and worldly alienation.

With Gadamer we look back to the Greeks avoiding a modernist prejudice that is the mark of the hermeneutic relationship. A relationship, nonetheless, that goes back to a conflict in readings of Plato and Aristotle.

Alan Blum on the Ancients

Alan Blum’s work *Theorizing*, in part, influenced by ethnomethodology, takes guidance from the Greeks, as did Gouldner. Blum outlines a distinction between Plato and Aristotle, to provide him with his conception of theory as: the togetherness of speech and logos. But Blum’s goal is to show why sociology specifically reproduces itself in its speech in a circular self-justifying motion. Here is his characterization of

what happens: “talk about ‘solving problems’ then permits the sociologist to speak as if he has an independent criterion for deciding the adequacy of sociology because it sounds as if the problem is external to sociologizing itself rather than a producer of its creation. Sociology uses this criterion as grounds of its authority and as a test of its claims and it can only do so by treating the problem (the other) as external to its language.”⁴⁵⁵

Blum states that, “Aristotle’s theorizing ends where Plato’s begins, for it is the communal rationality which Plato accepts as his point of departure,” something Gouldner does not see. “In Aristotle, Dialectic come to be paradigmatically personified as the conflict between the individual and society (between the individual as ‘perspectival experience’ and society as the standard of warranting speech which is independent of such contingencies); whereas Dialectic for Plato is exemplified in a conflict within the should between the goal to which thought aspires and the restrictions under which it labors.”⁴⁵⁶ Without commenting on Blum’s language, we note a key point he makes about the reception of Plato that is made in light of the question of how we perceive theory. Blum says a difference lies in the way they take up speech. The important point is that “Plato shows thinking – which is a conversation with the soul – through the *icon* of the external social encounter as that encounter dramatically gathers the togetherness of speech and logos.”⁴⁵⁷ Blum understands that traditional sociology is built on the model of science that ironically somehow impedes the impulse to theorize.

⁴⁵⁵ Blum, Alan. *Theorizing*. London: Heinemann, 1974. p. 238.

⁴⁵⁶ See, Blum, “Aristotle’s Problem,” in *Theorizing*, p. 14.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 17.

Blum says we have lost sight of what the Greeks had shown us about speech. In other words, the social sciences had adopted a view of language that is already a production of an understanding of what speech is, that, to put it simply, acquires a metaphorical stability. Modern theory however creates a type of disunity within its own normative and metaphorical expressions. So not only are we concerned with the manipulation of objects but also with the technical manipulation of language (sophistry).⁴⁵⁸ A manipulation that conceals the reality of theorizing in the way the theorist, to quote Alan Blum, “shows what he shares with all men by exemplifying what he writes about in his very writing.”⁴⁵⁹

He writes: “In this thinking (Greek), humanity’s ‘being there at home’ in the world signifies the inner correspondence between ‘coming to be at home’ and ‘making oneself at home’ that characterised the craftsman, the expert, the creator of new shapes and forms, the *technites*, the man who masters a technique and at the same time finds his proper place.” This leads to the characterization of the theorist’s self-relation in this way: “this is why it [theory] requires the discovery of a free space of creative production that will be available to him in the middle of a pre-given nature, a wholeness of the world that orders itself in shapes and forms. Thus, philosophy in the

⁴⁵⁸ Blum in his study of the Ancient Greeks, *Theorizing*, recognizes that the question of speech, language as communal, ultimately informs theory: “Theorizing does not create community, but affirms it; theorizing is not guided by the desire to establish a community of speakers and hearers, but the Desire to expose its self same commitment to a conception of that which makes speaking and hearing intelligible as the speaking that *is* hearing. Theorizing does not bring speakers and hearers together but affirms their togetherness in its very act of speaking. Theorizing does not seek to bring speaker and hearer together because theorizing *is* a speaking that is a hearing.” p.182. Blum adds by writing: “Theorizing justifies itself on the grounds of its claim to re-produce (a record) that which it records (growth and sharing) as the same kind of thing (as an instance of sharing).” p. 132.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 131.

Greek awakening is the thoughtful becoming aware of the enormous exposure of human beings within the “there”, within this tiny field of free space that the ordered whole of the course of nature allows for human will and human ability.”⁴⁶⁰

For Gadamer, the Greek view of *physis*, is different for the moderns, the difference is that in excluding one aspect of the path to knowledge it leaves a legacy that turns what is understandable into what is masterable – science, as master, authority, force, and power. He writes that in opposition to this “constructivism“ of modern sciences, which only accepts as known and understood what it can reproduce, the Greek conception of sciences was characterized by *physis*, that is, by the horizon of the existence of the order of the thing that shows itself out of itself and regulates itself,” In this way, we can begin to see why modern theory repeats a story, with a type of silence toward language, that excludes the fuller dimension of their own truth, and, in turn, restricts the human sciences view of theory. So the Greek heritage has to be considered if we are to have a full grasp of the question of what theory in the human sciences really includes. The question, underlying theory, and theory construction, is the question “to what extent the ancient heritage offers a truth that remains concealed from us under the peculiar conditions of modernity.”⁴⁶¹

Once again, Gadamer builds on Heidegger’s thinking as well as the Greeks (especially Plato) to illuminate the nature of concept creation and thus theory. Brice R. Wachterhauser makes clear that a lot of misunderstanding of Gadamer’s work resides

⁴⁶⁰ Gadamer, “Greek Philosophy and Modern Thought,” in *The Beginnings of Knowledge*, p. 120.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 123.

in failing to understand his deep ties to Plato.⁴⁶² Gadamer's work is an encounter with Western philosophy that consists in finding a path back to the original Greek experience of language,⁴⁶³ something that is indebted to Heidegger and which becomes a founding point for his discussion of theory, and consequently, his critique of objectification and the human sciences. Gadamer seeks to show how theory retains something of the primacy of our encounter and belonging that happens in speaking. In this way, Gadamer sets forth, in some measure, to give an answer to his own question about the nature of theory in the human sciences.

The Ancients and the Objectification of Theory

Ancient Greek thinking already anticipates and reveals the limits of the objectification of speech that arises out of scientific speaking. Our understanding of truth is concealed under the objectification of speech. According to Gadamer, "If we keep this in mind, we will no longer confuse the factualness (*Sachlichkeit*) of language with the objectivity (*Objektivitat*) of science." Language is not imposed in some rationalized fashion upon an indifferent world. Brice Wachterhauser, paraphrasing Gadamer, says, "Language 'participates' in intelligibility and the intelligibility of reality 'participates' in the intelligibility of language."⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶² Ibid. p. 8.

⁴⁶³ Gadamer, "Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language," in *Language and Lingusticality in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, p. 41.

⁴⁶⁴ Wachterhauser, Brice R. *Beyond Being, Gadamer's Post-Platonic Hermeneutic Ontology*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999. p. 9.

The human sciences resistance to seeing speech as the “grounds” of theory brings them into a fundamental misunderstanding for “everything they do increases speech’s rich variety of reference and extends its capacity for containing knowledge [but this] can turn into confusion when everything depends on univocal denotation.”⁴⁶⁵ As Gadamer says “The comparative particularity of scientific languages as they dissociate themselves from the overall phenomenon of language always stands in tension with the totality that binds us all together into a humane society, our ability to speak, to seek and find words to communicate.”⁴⁶⁶

Consequently, “in the logic of the social sciences as a field of study,” says Gadamer, “the hermeneutic problem acquires new importance. One must recognize the fact that the hermeneutical dimension plays a basic role in all experience of the world and therefore also plays a role even in the work of the Natural sciences, as Thomas Kuhn has shown. But this holds ever more strongly in the human sciences. For insofar as society is always a linguistically understood existence,”⁴⁶⁷ so, as with all philosophical labor with concepts, all theory too, is based on a hermeneutical dimension of intelligibility, as it mutually appears in words and things.⁴⁶⁸

To overcome nominalistic speech, we must assert the power that comes from humans speaking to one another, which is not about “statements,” in the sense of logical judgments, “whose univocity and meaning is confirmable and repeatable,”

⁴⁶⁵ Gadamer, Hans-Georg “The Expressive Force of Language”, *On the Function of Rhetoric in Gaining Knowledge, in Praise of Theory, Speeches and Essays*, translated by Chris Dawson, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1998. pp. 133-134.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 134.

⁴⁶⁷ Gadamer, “Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics,” *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p. 67.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 66.

rather recognizing that “they have their occasional side.”⁴⁶⁹ In other words, they reside in the very possibility of speech. A recovery can happen in this moment when the linguistically mediated content of our utterances is accepted as key to theory making.

What theory, then, shares with truth (*aletheia*), beauty (*kalon*) and the idea of the good, is that they are not ends in themselves. Beauty, for example, is essential to Gadamer’s thinking insofar as it shows that the power of each concerns their manner of self-presentation. The force of truth is at play in theory, and theory itself, as the power of reason, cannot simply be a disposition toward the abstract. Rather it is better understood as the way we self-critically occupy ourselves with, in our linguistic belonging and disclosure, theory making.

The difference, here, is what theory *is* and what science represents theory to be. Gadamer treats theory as an emergent part of our eternal shared conversation – rooted in the natural conceptuality of language – with others. How are we to understand theory: is it the distance involved in methods we apply, or, is it in fact, part of what is brought together by the lyrical structure of speech? For the Greeks *theoria* is “to have been given away to something that in virtue of its overwhelming presence is accessible and common to all.”⁴⁷⁰

Science, to put it simply, retains this truth. Mathematics reveals to us a model of discursive thought that isolates its assertions, that builds a storehouse of ideas, falls short and remains insufficient, because it assumes an “objectifying split” between

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 63.

⁴⁷⁰ Vattimo is quoting one of Gadamer’s essays from *Die Vernunft im Zeiter der Wissenschaft*.

subject and object.⁴⁷¹ Mathematics, then, illuminates this discontinuity in a specifically productive way (for mathematical reason), but as Badiou would say, it remains a truth that “fails to achieve the form of wisdom.”⁴⁷² So when Gadamer contends that the human sciences, the *Geisteswissenschaften*, are a hermeneutical problem not a scientific one, he is alluding to the limits of scientific assertions as a vocabulary that would illuminate the human sciences. Therefore, the fate of truth, in the legacy of western rationality and science, has hidden the wisdom of theory as the continuity between truth and knowledge.⁴⁷³

What was radically important to the Greeks, as we shall see, was to bring forth our being at home within our being – the whole, as well as truth, that had become hidden to us. The speculative nature of the being of language is crucial to theory. In Gadamer’s vision, language and theory have an ontological significance for us; theory is a hermeneutic problem not a technical problem (as it was in classical sociology). The recovery of theory then, in this regard, becomes a recovery of speech, the living culture of speech that always precedes the man-made order of method.

Consequently, truth is displaced into a self-certification in speech. Such orthodoxy rests on the idea that, “The primacy of self-consciousness is the primacy of

⁴⁷¹ Ibid. p. 133.

⁴⁷² Badiou, Alain. “Philosophy and Mathematics.” In *Conditions*. London: Continuum, 2008. p. 104.

⁴⁷³ Badiou describes at length the specific way truth in mathematics create a intermediary position, beyond opinion and everyday communication, and, as Badiou says, this means that: “Mathematics is animated by an obscure violence, it is because the only thing that makes it superior to opinion is its discontinuity.” Badiou, Alain. “Mathematics and Philosophy: The Grand Style and the Little Style.” In *Alain Badiou: Theoretical Writings*. New York: Continuum, 2004. p. 32.

method.”⁴⁷⁴ The grammar of method is assumed, not questioned. Habermas describes this thinking in these terms: “Hermeneutics defines its task in contrast to linguistic descriptions of different grammars,”⁴⁷⁵ adding that Gadamer’s critique of “false objectivity of understanding,” cannot, however, lead to the suspension of the methodological distancing of the object that distinguishes a reflective understanding from every communicative experience.”⁴⁷⁶

The very unreliability of our daily expressions and utterances, the words we struggle with, the risks we take, allows us to bring forth understanding and the claim to truth in our words.⁴⁷⁷ Language, then, is where beings reveal themselves and their concepts. Eloquent speech, then, concerns the unity of life and theory (wisdom) where the word as concept is not put in the mouths of the audience impel a certain response and disposition. Truth *cannot* be encompassed or “approached by objectivization and treated as methodological objects.”⁴⁷⁸ The truth of the word, then, the way the meaning is shaped, words that assume the abstraction of scientific thinking have already created a disposition in the listener.

Habermas claims that Gadamer inserts an “abstract opposition” between truth and method. But is this so? Habermas does not want to accept a conception of truth as disclosive. As we seek to be perfected beings of our scientific understanding, however we remain the uneasy participants of modernity. Our constant need for scientific

⁴⁷⁴ Gadamer, *Praise of Theory: Speeches & Essays*, p. 29.

⁴⁷⁵ Habermas, Jurgen. *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT. p. 144.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 167.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 16.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 29.

reassurance breeds new insecurities.⁴⁷⁹ The human sciences, therefore, contain a self-obscuring horizon, resulting in a self-alienation in being-with-oneself, since truth and falsehood take place only within a framework that does not match our aspirations regarding our possibility for life and theory. What is meant by eloquence, here, remains centrally important to Gadamer's sense of how theory and the good combine in our living eloquence.

Habermas speaks of the "complementary oscillation between proximity and distance" that permits subjects who are "transparent to themselves and others in what they actually do and believe and, if necessary, can translate their non-verbal expressions into linguistic utterances."⁴⁸⁰ Upon these thoughts Habermas builds his conception of the ideal speech situation. For, as he writes, "to this reciprocity of unimpaired self-representations there corresponds a complementary reciprocity of expectations about behavior..."⁴⁸¹ But the ideal speech model cannot correspond to the living way theory happens, since it is not an ideal that is occurring, but an escape from objectification and self-objectification. Since, with this conception, speaking is the ground of our openness, and not a vision of the domination of speech that stems from logos, "which was conceived as the foundation which penetrates the existing things in its 'what' and 'how' and 'whereby'."⁴⁸²

By taking up the theme of intimacy, sharedness, and community, Gadamer can address the question of alienation in the life of the theorist. Intimacy, for Gadamer,

⁴⁷⁹ Many sociologists have discussed this theme, and, as we discuss, Giddens has chosen the theme of "disembedding" as one of the hallmarks of modernity. See his *Consequences of Modernity*, for example.

⁴⁸⁰ Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, p. 99.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid. p. 99-103.

⁴⁸² Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 375.

concerns our belonging to speech, in the words we use, also our saying “something that only language knows.”⁴⁸³ Gadamer is seeking, as it were, a listening to speech, a power to hear and make words heard among speakers.⁴⁸⁴ The validity of what is said cannot simply be the realm of propositions and verification of statements. When we think of language as a controlling force, one that can produce clarity, we miss the true nature of understanding and speech. For here, as Gadamer writes: “Self-presentation and being understood belong together not only in that the one passes into the other, and the work of art is one with the history of its effects, and traditional is one with the present of its being understood; speculative language, distinguishing itself from itself, presenting itself, language that expresses meaning is not only art and history but everything insofar as it can be understood. The speculative character of being that is the ground of hermeneutics has the same universality as do reason and language.”⁴⁸⁵

Being-for-itself, may lead us to think we are dealing with something closed, what Gadamer describes as an ultimate closedness, or a “final refusal to an inaccessible otherness,”⁴⁸⁶ for which we may seek an ideal corrective. In contrast, Gadamer says of this assumption, that we experience the very opposite. Because, as he affirms, “It is precisely in interpersonal relations that people open themselves to a kind of intimacy that does not allow one to experience the other as another, as a limit to being with

⁴⁸³ P. 173.

⁴⁸⁴ “Our speaking is also always a listening to the language spoken by us.” Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second Revised Edition], p.376.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 472.

⁴⁸⁶ Gadamer, *Praise of Theory*, p. 29.

myself, but rather an intensification, extension, and restoration of my own particular being...⁴⁸⁷

“*Theoria*,” Gadamer writes, “is genuine participation, not accomplished by an external deportment, not a doing, but a being acted upon (pathos), namely, a being torn away and absorbed by the look of something.”⁴⁸⁸ William McNeill has described this:

The classical Greek “theatrical” and tragic view of the world was precisely such that it could not be reduced to a merely pictured or represented totality of meaning. Ancient *theoria* entailed, on the contrary, an involved participation in the disclosure of other beings, a seeing oneself as addressed, invited, called upon to disclose oneself in response, if only in the matter of reticence or awe.⁴⁸⁹

Gathering one’s being into the world is not setting ourselves apart from the world; we are speaking participants in the world. Theory requires a way of “being at home” – at home in speech.⁴⁹⁰ In this way, Gadamer sees theory as the hermeneutic experience of our linguistic performance and as an event of being.

If we ask: whence does theory come? We must first uncover the hidden costs of what happens when we subjugate truth to “science”: First, our conceptions of theory

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 29.

⁴⁸⁸ Gadamer, *Praise of Theory*, p. 31.

⁴⁸⁹ McNeill, William. *The Glance of the Eye: Heidegger, Aristotle, and the Ends of Theory*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999. p. 255.

⁴⁹⁰ McNeill views the tension between Greek *theoria* and modern theory in these terms: (1) *Eudaimonia* must be an activity in accordance with the highest virtue in us, that which governs (*arhein*) us “by nature”, and this is *nous*, whose proper virtue or excellence is *theorien*. (2) *Theorein*, as activity of *nous* in us, apprehends the highest of those things that are knowable, the things that “always” are. (3) As such, *theorein* is the most continuous form of activity, “for we can contemplate more continuously that we can carry on any form of action.” (4) Such activity, furthermore, as activity in accordance with *Sophia*, is generally acknowledged as the most pleasurable activity. (5) *Theorein* is that activity which is most self-sufficient (*autakeia*). (6) *Theorein* is genuine only whenever it extends over to a complete lifespan.

are narrowed down and restricted in the way theory is thought of as a mode of address; consequently such narrowing-down concerns our relation to ourselves and others, and, finally, theory is made into a self-alienating objectification of the world.

Gadamer's concern is to move theory out of the restricted horizon of the modern concept of science into the universal realm of speech, especially, by drawing on Heidegger's thinking on the Greeks and the Greek sense of presence.⁴⁹¹ Presence, in Gadamer's view, is participation; it concerns wholeness, understood by the Platonic term *Oneness*. In the Greek view, theory will share with beauty (*kalon*) the idea of the good, meaning that they are not simply ends in themselves.⁴⁹² We participate in them; they stand present to us. Theory, if considered in light of this ontological attribute, is not merely being busy with constructs, with the mechanisms of thought, with the priority of method, which treats theory as an abstraction, [organizing of interrelated propositions], since this invites self-estrangement and self-alienation, but involves participation and that "every *logos* has this formal structure."⁴⁹³

Gadamer treats the *Geisteswissenschaften* as a hermeneutical problem - not a scientific one where the fate of truth has been obscured, hidden or complicated for us,

⁴⁹¹ Gadamer describes how: "Heidegger encourages us to work ourselves into the original experience of the world that resides in the language and conceptual development of the Greeks." Gadamer, "Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language," in *Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 2000. p. 41.

⁴⁹² See Vattimo's discussion of how theory is part of the constitutive nexus of the good in "Truth and Rhetoric in Hermeneutic Ontology," in *The End of Modernity*.

⁴⁹³ Gadamer's "Plato's Unwritten Dialectic," quoted by Brice R. Wachterhauser in his *Beyond Being*, p. 80.

but is recovered by the original wisdom of theory in the continuity of truth and knowledge.⁴⁹⁴

We belong to theory; we appropriate theory, but neither as our master nor we its master. We face the imperative of true speech and true being in all learning. Plato, Gadamer argues, understood this as in *Protagoras*' dialogue on the role of deception and non-deception in learning; for if speech is the basis of the human sciences, so too is the imperative to strive for good speech, speech that brings forth new understanding and thoughtful reflection. Authenticity, inauthenticity, concealment and unconcealment, happen in speaking voices. The human sciences exemplify the paradox of speech. Specifically in the way we participate in ideas and wholeness in the words we speak. Our ability to release ourselves into our responsibility to truth is not by blanketing language with methodological orientations, but by seeing that every word is a question, an agreement, as well as a disagreement.⁴⁹⁵

Gadamer and the Figure of Socrates

In "The Figure of Socrates in Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics", Francis Ambrosio points out how Gadamer "reenacts this Socratic discipline of dialogue in the development of his hermeneutic philosophy, and it is this identification with the care of

⁴⁹⁴ Badiou describes at length the specific way truth in mathematics create a intermediary position, beyond opinion and everyday communication, and, as Badiou says, this means that: "Mathematics is animated by an obscure violence, it is because the only thing that makes it superior to opinion is its discontinuity". Badiou, "Mathematics and Philosophy," in *Alain Badiou: Theoretical Writings*, p. 32.

⁴⁹⁵ Gadamer, "Truth in the Human Sciences," in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, p. 31. And, Gadamer, "Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language," in *Language and Lingusticality in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, p. 32.

the soul in mind that is carried out in and through philosophical conversation that gives Gadamer's thought as a whole its own proper character and identity."⁴⁹⁶

Socrates, of course, evokes the *topos* of public speech and truth. If we wish to know what speaking as truth is, we look to the way Socrates establishes truth-saying, a speaking that contrasts with mere technique, speaking cleverly and skillfully. Socrates poses or stages, then, the problems and the tensions of community and self-creation in terms of theory and speech. In the dialogues we witness the birth and rebirth, of a model of theory as living speech.

Socrates is an odyssey on the good and, as Blum notes, the trial should not be seen as a test of Socrates' reputation, but of a choice that a theorist makes in their work, that is, like Socrates, our understanding of what is good.⁴⁹⁷ Speaking is the public display of conversation, a testimony to unity in difference. Socrates and theory go hand in hand. Socrates, Blum remarks, opens the Apology by distinguishing between beauty and the good, between method and truth. We know, here, that we are dealing with how our words stand as true. Gadamer's work takes up this question. Blum and Gadamer share the Platonic a conception of theorizing as conversation.⁴⁹⁸ How we reformulate conversation, speaking as concept formation, becomes the key to understanding the nature of theory, which was laid out by the Greeks, especially Plato, to shape speech as both beautiful and true.

⁴⁹⁶ Ambrosio, Francis J. "The Figure of Socrates in Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics." In *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, The Library of Living Philosophers Vol. XXIV*. Chicago: Open Court, 1997 p. 259.

⁴⁹⁷ See Blum, Alan. *Socrates: The Original and Its Image*. London: Routledge, 1978.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 167.

In *The Apology* Socrates says: “I admit I am not a speaker on their level (Meletus and his accusers). They said almost nothing that was true, whereas I, men of Athens, shall tell the whole truth – not in a language like theirs, decorated with words and phrases skillfully arranged, but in haphazard language with everyday words that will, I believe, be just.”⁴⁹⁹

Nussbaum writes: “But by placing the Socratic criticisms of writing inside his own writing, Plato invites us to ask ourselves, as we read, to what extent his own literary innovations have managed to circumnavigate the criticisms”.⁵⁰⁰ Thus, philosophy is a kind of theatre in which we are compelled to ask the truth of writing (presentation). Theory comes to be something that we share with both ethical life and beauty. Theory is not stultifying, abstract, or analytic, but part of the way we are living language.

Plato observes this in his *Apology*: to correct sophistry we stand as witnesses and participant to the Socratic dialogue, guided by the ethical and poetic work in terms of the primacy of the ethical and poetic constructions of what we read, so that we may identify and engage with them. Martha C. Nussbaum describes it this way: “Like the spectator of a tragedy the dialogue reader is asked by the interaction to *work through everything actively*...”⁵⁰¹ Theory is, then, a cooperative activity where we are invited to participate, just as we are in art, not abstractly excluded by meta-language, but moved by the natural determination of the language we speak. One can sense this immediately

⁴⁹⁹ Plato. *The Apology and Crito of Plato and The Apology and Symposium of Xenophon*. Translated by Raymond Larson. Coronado Press, 1980. p. 63.

⁵⁰⁰ Blum, Alan. *Socrates: The Original and Its Image*, p. 126.

⁵⁰¹ Nussbaum, Martha. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995. p. 127.

in the writings of Bauman; we are not required to enter some meta-language, some analytic disposition, to theorize in the first place, but we are really already in the realm of the natural concept formation of language itself that the theorist builds upon.

The *Apology* places the performance of truth at the center of ethical life. Gadamer's quest, like the Socratic quest, recognizes that thinking rests on speech, an open performance of truth not pitted against an accuser (as we find in *The Apology*). Socrates' accuser (Meletus) does not see theory as exemplifying a life, rather his speech performance treats life only as that which is instrumental, whereas, for Plato, speaking is more than method. Thus, Gadamer writes, "I particularly love those scenes in which Socrates gets into a dispute with the Sophist virtuoso and drives them to despair by his questions. Eventually they can endure his questions no longer and claim for themselves the apparently preferable role of the questioner. And what happens? They can think of nothing at all to ask. Nothing at all occurs to them that is worthwhile going into and trying to answer."⁵⁰²

Truth and knowledge oscillates in the verbal structure of speech. Theory is some thing we undergo, like art, but without succumbing to subjectivism. Our estrangement from truth shows we lose our being-together, a being together in community and wisdom, and lose sight of the character of theory making. Theory, the Greeks understood, concerns finding unity through our intimacy with our theoretical posture. What was radically important to the Greeks, as we shall see, was to bring forth the universality of our being, to be at home within our being. The whole, as well as truth, that now has become hidden to us.

⁵⁰² Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutic Problem," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, pp. 3-17.

Speaking speculatively expresses our whole relation to being. The speculative mode of the being of language is crucial, then, to how we might understand theory. In Gadamer's vision, theory is a hermeneutic problem, specifically that is, that the living culture of speech always precedes the man-made order of method.

Recovering theory becomes a recovery of its origins in speech. We live in the universal linguistic horizon, and the complex happening of truth. What has crystallized modern theory for Gadamer, however, concerns a disregarding of this dimension of truth, and its communicability. In his view, truth does not conform to modern science or in the perfecting of its terminology and methods. Scientific truth has, in other words, become the default orthodoxy of truth. Modernity, in contrast to the Ancient Greek thought, sees truth in the form of a perfected speech, and in a self-certification in speech. Such orthodoxy rests on the idea that: The primacy of self-consciousness is the primacy of method.⁵⁰³

The Eloquence of Theory

Speech, like art, is where beings become visible to one another, in our founding eloquence we display our existence, so, the very unreliability of our expressions and utterances, the words we struggle with, allows us to bring forth understanding and to claim to truth in our words.⁵⁰⁴ Language, then, is where beings first reveal themselves. Eloquent speech, then, concerns the unity of life and theory (wisdom). Speech captures those areas of valuable truth in life that *cannot* be

⁵⁰³ Gadamer, *Praise of Theory: Speeches & Essays*, p. 29.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 16.

encompassed or “approached by objectivization and treated as methodological objects.”⁵⁰⁵

What is meant by eloquence, here, remains centrally important to Gadamer’s sense of how theory and the good combine in our living eloquence? In other words, by simply treating the world as methodological object we conceal important aspects of our relationship to theory, life and being. Gadamer shows how our being in language is being. When we do this, as a consequence of method, we ourselves become a language of perfected concepts; a house in which we are not home, that excludes us. As we seek to be perfected beings of our scientific understanding, we remain the uneasy participants of modernity. Our constant need for scientific reassurance breeds new insecurities.⁵⁰⁶ The human sciences, therefore, contain a self-obscuring horizon, resulting in a self-alienation in being-with-oneself, since truth and falsehood take place only within a framework that does not match our aspirations regarding our possibility for life and theory.

We may think of the other as the ultimate closedness, or as the “final refusal to an inaccessible otherness.”⁵⁰⁷ Gadamer tells us that what we experience is the very opposite. He says, “It is precisely in interpersonal relations that people open themselves to a kind of intimacy that does not allow one to experience the other as another, as a limit to being with myself, but rather an intensification, extension, and restoration of

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 29.

⁵⁰⁶ Many sociologists have discussed this theme, and, as we discuss, Giddens has chosen the theme of “disembedding” as one of the hallmarks of modernity. See, his *Consequences of Modernity*, for example.

⁵⁰⁷ Gadamer, *Praise of Theory*, p. 29.

my own particular being...”⁵⁰⁸ In a summary way, we could legitimately argue that this is Gadamer’s theme and variation throughout his work.

Here, thoughtful statements contrast to “empty speech” where truth has contracted into simply the correctness of assertions.⁵⁰⁹ Gadamer does not hesitate to note that the genuine path of theory, as it was for the Greeks, involves discovering a divine sense of being present to the world.⁵¹⁰

In *Praise of Theory*, Gadamer notes that the Greeks, attached to “the whole genre of eloquence that [which] was considered an undisputed good.”⁵¹¹ In this regard, Gadamer, like the Greeks, wants us to consider the way theory appears in *protreptic* speeches or writings that celebrate theory as a good. Theory is also thinking gathered in, “philosophy, the love of *sophon*, of true knowledge, [and] and the ‘theoretical’ ideal of life.”⁵¹²

All life is captured by the wonder and anticipation of living that we discover within ourselves through theory and speculation. Still, further, that this disposition, as epitomized in the Platonic/Socratic realm meant that one “challenged the norms of his home city, Athens, and its society.”⁵¹³ Theory, then, is a search to find words to speak, to speak of social life, driven by the good. Theory, was in fact, praised for the discovery in life of true knowledge. In Gadamer’s view, theory is the struggle between

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 29.

⁵⁰⁹ Heidegger, *Parmenides*, p. 69.

⁵¹⁰ In *Praise of Theory* Gadamer notes that *theoria* for the Greeks was an intensification of being present to life, not disregarding it; therefore he writes that everyone can encounter what is, and that our behavior at these times is one of the cultivated distance embraced by what he might say was “divine” consciousness. p. 35.

⁵¹¹ Ibid. p. 35.

⁵¹² Ibid. p. 16.

⁵¹³ Ibid. p. 16.

“the construction of social practice” and “being given to pure knowledge, seeing and thinking.”⁵¹⁴ Our tendency has been, in modernity, to transform our theoretical life into knowledge as research, data, or information.⁵¹⁵

Theoria for Gadamer, like the Greeks, concerns cultivating oneself and not seeking a mode of speech that appears to posture as it has disregarded oneself for some higher principle of purity and objectivity. Rather, theory, specifically in the human sciences, concerns our complex relations to the other and ourselves. Our ability to theorize rests in, and needs, to be a part of our “humanly cultivated consciousness that has learned to think along with the viewpoint of the other and try to come to an understanding about what is meant and what is held in common.”⁵¹⁶ Theory is here a dialogue that moves between the practical perceptions of the theorist and his ability to speak, by finding words to share, for challenging listeners, in a space that illuminates the present and points to the future.

Without theory and truth, we will remain incomprehensible, stuck in a schema of mechanisms of modern theory, in an alienation concealed from us under the peculiar conditions of modernity. *Logos* becomes a tale that is characterized by a view that humans are expounding their power by way of knowledge.

Hermeneutic experience, being in language, that is: speech – the power of verbal event – shows us that “language [...] is one of the most compelling phenomena of non-objectivity.” With the Ancient Greek conception of theory, the illuminating power and priority of the dialectic of dialogue, we engage in communicative

⁵¹⁴ Ibid. p. 21.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid. p. 23.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid. p. 35.

participation with others in conversation.⁵¹⁷ Our mediation in speech is the universality of language that, for Gadamer, creates all conceptual meaning and value. Theory, is not, as Gadamer says, an individual or momentary event of the individual, nor especially something that appears as a scientific compartment, but rather it is “a position, a condition.”⁵¹⁸ Simply seeking conceptual mastery draws us away from this power of theory and away from our finding how “to be at home” and in actually “making oneself at home.”⁵¹⁹ Theory is not a self-exile, but is a coming to be, a being present.

Theory as Participation

The Greeks understood why theory was participation: they were guided by the ideal of finding our proper place in community and life. Theory is the path we take as we live and participate with others in dialogue; it is what happens in conversation, it includes “participating equally with others and possible others.”⁵²⁰ To be (with oneself), to participate (being-together), to see (seeing what is), in other words, is to recognize that what is *real* is something we reach when we encounter ourselves in the movement of participation with others and learning with others in dialogue. Dialogue is the common horizon within which the disruption of understanding is always at play. The *real* cannot be understood here with what we call the “fact” as somehow

⁵¹⁷ Gadamer, “Greek Philosophy and Modern Thought,” in *The Beginning of Knowledge*, p. 125. In *Truth and Method*, the province of truth is always the act of understanding and speaking that has a claim to universality.

⁵¹⁸ Gadamer, *Praise of Theory*, p. 31.

⁵¹⁹ Gadamer, “Greek Philosophy and Modern Thought,” in *The Beginnings of Knowledge*, p. 120.

⁵²⁰ Gadamer, *Praise of Theory*, p. 31.

transparent to us. To offset the monopoly of this scientific conception of the self-evident, of a “fact,” the hermeneutic conception of the fact “always refers back to a context of supposition and expectation, to a complicated context of inquiring understanding.”⁵²¹

The original Greek sense of *theoria* means: “observing (the constellations, for example), being an onlooker (at a play, for instance), or a delegate participating in a festival.”⁵²² We stand before something, that opens us to what is both common and what is different; what is common in language as such, against which all dialogues begin, is the very distinct communicability that happens in speech, art, and theory, that happens because we belong to the world as a linguistic horizon.

Participation, being there, seeing together, concerns how we are engrossed in the ideal and possibility of thinking with others, and this in one way that we can discern how: the restoration of one self in the act of theory concerns sharing or participating with others in the conversation we call theory. It is not about how I “self-certify myself” in this speech by a specifically chosen diction that asserts the primacy of the objective “facts” of the real. Truth, as Gadamer and Heidegger agree, is neither about correctness nor the externalization and comportment of an isolated subject of utterances, but rather of the sharing in the ideal of a theoretical life, through the eloquent speech, that is already a demand of the dialogue.

The early Greek abstraction of thinking provides the framework that informs modern science, but the Greeks also had another concern: that the nature of all thinking

⁵²¹ Ibid. p. 31.

⁵²² Ibid. p. 31.

and theory-making that laid in our utterances that first served our intelligibility and self-understanding.

Our assurance about modern individuality happens in the presence of loss and insecurity. Because our grasp modern life cannot be explained institutionally, as, for example, in Anthony Giddens verbal machinery of a “reflexive modernity” but, rather, requires our reconnecting to the roots of language as a creative space of discovery, self-discovery and theory-making. The Greeks were the precursor to our view of theoretical ability and mastery.⁵²³ Yet, Greek thinking focused on the intelligibility of the whole world and not simply the institutional mastery of aspects of the world.

Hermeneutic experience is a verbal conception that is distinctly different from the prism of logical mathematical ideals, as in scientific inquiry and modern theory, since theoretical value resides in the presence of our original being and in our linguistic mediation with one another. That is why Gadamer is quite aware that truth has historically been mediated within different traditions, specifically, the theological or Christian ones, as well as the early Greeks. Suspicion of speech and truth, then, went hand in hand in the early Enlightenment tradition, but at the cost of losing insight into truth and speech, and losing insight into a vision of theory that prevented us from becoming an object to ourselves, and to a sense of social reality in which we seek ourselves through artificial institutions of solidarity.⁵²⁴

Theory is a question of the *theoretical life*. As Gadamer reminds us this was fundamental to the Ancient Greeks.⁵²⁵ The Greek approach to theory differs in this

⁵²³ Ibid. p. 120.

⁵²⁴ Ibid. p. 123.

⁵²⁵ Gadamer, “Praise of Theory,” in *In Praise of Theory*, p. 19.

regard from the modern topology of theory. Theory always relates to the question of the fulfillment of the speaker, in two seemingly divergent paths: to master existence as well as to fulfill our own nature to achieve happiness, between logic and the good. Theory, however, as in the Ancient Greeks, especially Plato, stressed our knowing reality not as a matter of methodological rigor, but as a seeing *what is*, which is more than a fundamental process of eliminating prejudices, but is a comportment toward universality and the desire to fulfill our own lives outside of material necessity. In other words, theory involves a complex union with the theorist that includes happiness, as a key goal, guided by the freedom to choose the good and recognize the beautiful.

Theory (*theoria*), involves participation; it is participation where we really see the world, not with a method [technique, or tools] of knowing reality, but with an ideal of being with others that furnishes the “theorist” with a sense of understanding of what is meant and what we hold in common with others. What is Greek *theoria*? “The word means observing (the constellations, for example), being an onlooker (at a play, for instance), or a delegate participating at a festival.”⁵²⁶ Theory cannot, in this regard, be a mere *seeing*. Rather it involves levels of complexity and intimacy, looking at things and experiencing them, as part of our desire for knowledge of reality.

Theory, in this way, involves an “intimacy” (Gadamer uses the analogy of our relationship to our bodies). He notes: “If it is the case that language is a conversation and can be what it is only in that way, and if the true conversation includes a with-one-another, then we must order language under the basic concept of partnership. This proposed word reminds one of the Greek concept of *methexis*. The expression

⁵²⁶ Ibid. p. 31.

partnership indicates that the with-one-another does not consist of the separateness of the partners, but in the communality of participation and concern.”⁵²⁷

One may now consider, for example, the way the word has been discussed in previous pages in terms of *untranslatability*, specifically the “untranslatability of the poetic word. Language happens in our relationship with the other, where I am compelled to open myself, breaking away from any self-willed obstinacy, to ultimately find and recognize what is real.⁵²⁸ Being-for-itself, Gadamer points out, is our ultimate closeness, one that no systematic observation can break open; we are encapsulated in Being; which he calls the “final refusal and an inaccessible otherness” that surrounds us.

Theory is not a technical abstraction, nor is it an act of a “subject,” rather it is the opposite; theory is a seeing-what-is a seeing of hermeneutic facts (not things present-to-hand – “a ‘fact’ is rather a hermeneutic concept” that is shared and participated in), which are “referred back to a context of supposition and expectation, to a complicated context of inquiring understanding.”⁵²⁹ The place from where we speak is already an event of the experience of truth that allows us to discover what is and what might be.

“*Theoria* is not so much an individual momentary act as a way of comporting oneself, a position and condition.”⁵³⁰ It is not simply about the distribution of goods, but a good of another kind, where there is no gain, where we belong to nobody, but

⁵²⁷ Gadamer, “Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language in *Language and Lingusticality in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics*, p. 46.

⁵²⁸ Ibid. p. 29.

⁵²⁹ Ibid. p. 31.

⁵³⁰ Ibid. p. 31.

where we are part of the reciprocal enrichment that understands theory itself as a belonging with others. To write theory, to speak in conversation with one another is to speak and express reality, which also celebrates the love of “theoretical life itself.”

“Are theory and practice correctly distinguished when they are seen only in opposition?”⁵³¹ In the following pages we will return to this question; but it should be clear that I am exploring Gadamer’s conception of theory in relation to his thesis of methodological alienation; so two competing conceptions of theory, Ancient and Modern, and their rapprochement, motivate all of Gadamer’s writings. How we perceive verbal experience is how we perceive theory. The so-called loss of understanding of theory has simultaneously resulted in a transformation of our verbal orientation to reality as well as our selves. When we become rigorously subjectivized, our capacity to prioritize our theoretical lives is inhibited. Modern theory, seen as a tool of production, involves a particular way of taking up our verbal performance (*logos*), our comportment, thus ourselves, as we construct theory. In other words, as Gadamer says, we are guided to gather experience, if possible, to dominate it.

Speaking is contingent on expanding our notion of theory into, simultaneously, the underlying intelligibility of the world as key to all rational argument. By restoring theory, we restore the genuine ethical subject and rediscover our original enchantment with thinking. We question our own existence because we exist in our questioning (in the intensification of living that the Greeks called *theoria*), which implies our ethical task – a practical task rooted in understanding the intelligible world that the Greeks, for

⁵³¹ Ibid. p. 24.

example, always started with.⁵³² By contrast, we always begin with the world as “object” – famously captured in Heidegger’s phrases *world-picture* and *en-framing*

Pointing Back to Parmenides

Words that rest upon being as much as being-true; it is this fundamental dynamic that points back to Parmenides. Parmenides [*Parmenides of Elea*, the known fragments of his work], founds “every scientific and historiographic practice of ours”,⁵³³ which is similar to Gadamer’s point that in Parmenides we find something like the very first creation of the concept.⁵³⁴ Carlo Sini explains it this way: “one should think of it as an example of the use of myth in Parmenides and Plato. Parmenides assumes myth into his logos, and this is not without consequences for the way in which Plato employs myth in turn. We (that is, our way of thinking and interpreting depend on those gestures) are already comprehended or pre-comprehended in them, and there is no hope that we can look at them from the outside. We can only re-interpret them finally asking ourselves about their meaning, without hiding from us their aporeticity.”⁵³⁵

What slides away from absolute capture is the true, says Sini, attempting to show the significance of Parmenides, he writes, “The foundation of onto-logy and thus science, both ancient and modern, is the Parmenidian knot of being, thinking and truth.”⁵³⁶ Our existence in truth and falsehood is wedded to our being-with-one-

⁵³² Ibid. p. 35.

⁵³³ Sini, *Ethics of Writing*, p. 130.

⁵³⁴ Gadamer, “Toward a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language,” in *Language and Linguisticity in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics*, p. 42.

⁵³⁵ Ibid, p. 130.

⁵³⁶ Sini, Carlo. *Images of Truth: From Sign to Symbol*. Translated by Massimo Verdicchio. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1993. p. 13.

another and this is a peculiarity of being human, found in the word that speaks, a word that makes a claim upon us, as the word tries to say something that draws upon us to think about its resonance beyond us [as in Socrates dialectical speech that gives birth to philosophy]. Words are not solely about objects, but about a potential in which truth takes place, in the logos, where we can find the genuine word as well as our way of accepting a new way of being in language.

This is not about truth and correctness, nor about an interior subject externalizing his private interior through utterances, but about participation, a sharing, with the other half of truth as Gadamer says.⁵³⁷ Concept formation, likewise, requires a speaking forth that happens in our (modern) understanding of language; for this reason, any reconstruction of theory in the human sciences consequently involves a transformation of our embeddedness in metaphysical thinking. Communication is a relationship where we freely attend to the other as someone with us, someone who shares human existence. But it is a sharing that we do with language. Sini gives summary to the way we encounter truth: “in the last instance to the question, what is

⁵³⁷ Heidegger’s long and rich analysis of Parmenides’ Poem, from his lectures of 1942-1943 is revealing in ways that lay out a parallel to Gadamer’s thinking about language and truth. Heidegger says that utterance exceeds any single proposition or enunciations to grasp the truth of something; in Parmenides, therefore, the figure of goodness personifies truth. Truth that is addressed in the very movement of the *didactic poem* as Heidegger calls it; when thoughtful utterances also remain poetic. We sense, in reading Heidegger, an awareness that the very tension of the early Pre-Socratic poem conveys a lesson in understanding the truth of the word in the hands of the thinker, a story about Parmenides that raises the question of the consequences of the modern and the deeply rooted sense of alienation of speech and its domination. Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 1989.

true? We must answer: it is true that one runs up against the untruth of one's own truth."⁵³⁸

Parmenides *Proem* poses this question: what is truth and how do we speak of it? We have trouble speaking about truth without making it into a truth practice that tends, especially in the modern period, to conceive of itself as *truth-in-itself*, that is, as a methodological approximation. Parmenides haunts us. The Parmenidian “knot”, as Sini describes it, is exactly that, the playful paradox of the speech that seeks truth. Speech is personified in the Parmenidian struggle of knowing and not knowing. Speaking the truth is not simply technical. Truth underlies the logical leap from narrative speech to the logical speech of theory. But as Sini implies, this leap (found in Plato specifically) implies a continuity for when philosophical speech [*theory*] emerges, when we stand at a distance, we do so on the basis of truth, which in this transition it suppresses.⁵³⁹

Speaking, says Gadamer, dwelling on *Parmenides' Proem*, expresses multiplicity and that this is not something to be eliminated, a burdensome ambiguity, rather it is the way spoken words express the interrelated aspects of meaning “which

⁵³⁸ Sini, *Images of Truth, From Sign to Symbol*, translated by Massimo Verdicchio, Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, p. 143.

⁵³⁹ Sini, *Ethics of Writing*, p. 15. Sini's larger argument about the emergence of writing and its relationship to the origins of thinking, the formal character of enunciation, provides a powerful discussion to follow, but here I am electing form the broader argument points of contact with the question of truth. He remarks: “in truth, Socrates dialoging (which is put in writing by his disciples) and dialectical research are something antipodal to the rhymic poetry of orality, and are distinct also form the ‘long speeches’ of sophistic rhetoric, in which the pathos of argumentation does not yet achieve the purity of concept.” p. 18. But how we have elect to see these distinctions, already presupposes “a scientific eye”.

articulate a field of knowledge.’’⁵⁴⁰ In other words, speech is the source of all *aporia* and the *euporia* of all speech.

Productive ambiguity, then, is the very thing that makes speech possible. The event of truth that happens can never be known in any absolute fashion, yet the desire to acquire truth remains. Productive ambiguity leads us to the dialectic as the positive side of the nature of speech. Speaking requires, in the dialogical form, an identification of the thing itself (as an affinity for the thing itself) – therefore it is not babble – and, finally it becomes reaching understanding in terms of “the Just, the Beautiful, and the Good.’’⁵⁴¹

Parmenides and the Birth of the Concept

Noting that Heidegger continually sought a conversation with Parmenides, Gadamer wrote: “To be sure his [Parmenides] pedagogical poem was written in Homeric hexameter, and it was not without a certain poetic power, as the preserved poem proves. For this poem there were still no concepts. Nevertheless, something like the creation of the concept is encountered for the first time in these verses...’’⁵⁴²

Heidegger, as Gadamer points out, sought concepts, through a rethinking of Pre-Socratic and Socratic texts. Parmenides’ connection of thought and being ties into his speaking voice, the poet’s voice, as the locus for the play of the word and its power.

⁵⁴⁰ Gadamer, “Dialectic and Sophism in Plato Dialectic,” in *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, p. 111.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid. p. 117.

⁵⁴² Gadamer, “Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language,” in *Language and Lingusticality in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics*, p. 42.

Both Parmenides and Plato's *Seventh Letter* provide Gadamer, therefore, with key elements of his view of dialogue as multiplicity and the singular – clarity and ambiguity, but also a reminder of the moment of concept formation as poetic in the way it is to be found in the Greeks. The rhapsodic form lies at the heart of the communication of ideas. Truth lies halfway in the movement between speech and dialogue (dialectic), in the process and movement of opposition that originally builds understanding, as well as in the openness of a flash of insight that can appear when there is genuine discourse among speakers. The creation of the concept, the construction of concepts, never departs fully the struggle to be free and expressive but faces the secondary struggle with a linguistic inheritance that has turned concept creation over to scientific speaking and the objectification of the world.

Parmenides' poem demonstrates our debt to the Greeks (Pre-Socratics), as well as the metaphysical origins of our differing views of language and thinking. The metaphysical paradox is in how we understand distance and intimacy as the knot of being. Thinking and being bound together in speech; speech, seen here, is a “being in common” and is already a place of truth.

In *Parmenides*, saying and thoughtful perceiving of what is; what is for us, cannot be “disentangled from the consequences of what is being expressed and perceived; the presentness of being is precisely its perception. But there is one further point of continuity that matters to our discussion of theory. Parmenides poem is not to be thought of as a work that exists in two distinct sections, one on thinking and one on doxa (nor, perhaps, conceptual and poetic thought). Parmenides does not separate the topics in a Platonic way. Here, theory as a style of expression is rooted in living

conversation because cultivating communal judgment is always in the fluid movement of discourse and concepts, which always remain open in a balancing of conceptual and poetic thought. Untruth is seen to inhere in all knowledge. There is not one way that steps outside”. In fact, speaking of the *Proem*’s thesis, Gadamer says, “since human beings are exposed to a multitude of influences and distractions, it turns out that untruth inheres in the concept of knowledge itself, that it is an inseparable, even constitutive element of knowledge.”⁵⁴³

We are forgetting of “one half of truth” that is the half that lies in the living conversation: “in speaking things are there; it is in speech and speaking with one another that the world and the experiential world of human beings constructs itself and not in the a objectification that (vis-à-vis the communicative transmission of the insights of one person to the insights of another) bases itself on objectivity and purports to be knowledge for everyone.

Parmenides *Proem* is not simply a polemic directed at another thinker. Rather it is composed as a conversation with the many, a consequence of the Homeric poetic form of the work and reveals an original relation concerning the birth of theory out of poetry. The *Proem* is a conversation with the many, or, at least not just simply a polemic with Heraclites.⁵⁴⁴ Gadamer suggests the contrasting of the two is less revealing than what they connect. Theory belongs to logos (speech) and *logos* is the conversation of being with others. Objectification, as we have seen, cancels or conceals the metaphysical tendency of modern theory, distorting the dialectic of distance and

⁵⁴³ Gadamer, “Parmenides and Being,” in *The Beginnings of Philosophy*, p. 108.

⁵⁴⁴ Gadamer, “Parmenides and the Opinions of the Mortals,” in *The Beginnings of Philosophy*, p. 95.

intimacy that is posed by speech. Greek thinking, therefore, holds for Gadamer a message for modern theory and how we arrive at truth. In Gadamer's view, Parmenides addresses what he calls the "inseparability of the speculative problem of the truth of logical thought from experience and its plausibility, that is, states of affairs having to do with human nature, even lending it a certain superiority when it knowingly makes [use of] divine help."⁵⁴⁵

Firstly, Greek *theoria* is rooted in this aspect of the *logos* (speech); second, speech lifts the world into view, not simply as an array of objects, therefore, the essential move by Gadamer, regarding theory, is to: re-define rationality, in relation to poetics in terms of the Ancients communicative participation in the world, and of the unity that holds fast and changes in itself. Truth in art and truth in the human sciences have more in common with the Ancients than they do with our understanding of truth in scientific self-understanding.

Theory, then, is no longer simply a *logic* of communication (*more geometrico*), nor, we can say, a logic of investigation, rather, as Gadamer reminds us, it is the living play of concepts. Sometimes, our play requires that we take back what we say – our *dialegesthai* therefore implies a multiplicity of possible reactions where we make possible the living sign of the phenomenon of language. So our co-belonging in conversation is an ethical praxis. Theory is a relationship to others as well as to our selves; it is a task, a task that for Gadamer is our belonging to one another, "with one another" *Miteinander*) in speech.

Gadamer makes this claim:

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 99.

I think the Greeks had it right when they placed the idea of being shaped by society, ethos, along side the fact of reason. Ethos is the term that Aristotle coined for this. The possibility of conscious choice and free decision is always accompanied by something that we always already are - and *we are not an object to ourselves*.⁵⁴⁶

Second, commonality (belonging together) resists any objectification of the other in relation to my social reality or myself. Interestingly, and this is the key point, he asks that we consider friendship – *Philia* – by arguing that:

It seems to me that one of the great legacies of Greek thought for our own thinking that, on the basis of actual lived life, Greek ethics allowed ample space for a phenomena that, in modernity, is hardly ever given as a theme of philosophical reflection – I mean the theme of friendship, *Philia*.⁵⁴⁷

Theoria is a way of being held by something – just as we are held by a truth that can happen through our aesthetic participation. Aesthetic experience and the fusion of horizons share this way of participating with theory. As we know play (*paidia*), in turn, is close in Greek to *paideia* (pedagogy), and this quality captures for Gadamer all theoretical activity.

Heidegger opens us to the Greeks, to the power of language, in his early writings. And it is this extra methodological sense of truth that Gadamer wants to make us aware of. He writes: “We are carried away not only by the storytelling art. We are not just readers of the great novelists. The fine arts accompany everything, so that a whole world arises before us. Recalling the fine arts is necessary. One cannot overlook that they testify to the temporality of our *Dasein* in the building of a structure that we

⁵⁴⁶ Gadamer, “Greek Philosophy and Modern Thought,” in *The Beginning of Knowledge*, p. 25.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 123.

call a work of art. Even if it concerns only a sculpture or an overwhelming impression from a building that ‘comes forth’, it is also to be found in the linguistic arts.”⁵⁴⁸

Truth in the human sciences is hermeneutic. Art invites us to question it, to enter a dialogue, not in an explanatory way, since art is about a truth that is about to be given. Truth in art occurs in the duration of the work’s power to speak directly to us that is also fundamentally unlimited.”⁵⁴⁹ Art demands an answer not an explanation. Vattimo argues, “the truth of art is not to represent truth of the world but, rather, to take a stance in the name of a project of transformation.”⁵⁵⁰ Listening and responding to art closely links with our response to listening to each other’s speech. In Gadamer’s view the question of the “truth of art is identical with the way we experience truth in the *Geisteswissenschaften*, that is to say, as the hermeneutical problem.

Art is always the key to this challenge. Gadamer is saying that if we want to “know what truth is in the human sciences,” then we must look at our encounter with the work of art. How are we to understand this challenge?

Art, emerging in critical relation to certain features of the Enlightenment’s worldview, holds that the highest achievements of the human spirit are the creative productions of the unique individual. We can clearly see the interconnection of Gadamer’s arguments on the hermeneutical nature of experience in the light of these points. Gadamer overcomes the aesthetics of genius with a renewed discussion of *mimesis* and the way it brings reality to light. Gadamer writes on Kant’s impact on the

⁵⁴⁸ Gadamer, “Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language,” in *Language and Lingusticality in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics*, p. 38.

⁵⁴⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 290.

⁵⁵⁰ Vattimo, *Art’s Claim to Truth*, p. 162.

matter this way, “We must say that this giving aesthetic a transcendental philosophical basis had a major consequence and constituted a turning point.” He argues:

In his critique of aesthetic judgment what Kant sought to and did legitimize was the subjective universality of aesthetic taste in which there is no longer any knowledge of the object, and in the area of ‘fine arts’ the superiority of genius to any aesthetics based on rules. Thus romantic hermeneutics and history found a point of contact for their self-understanding only in the concept of genius, validated by Kant’s aesthetics. That was the other side of Kant’s influence. The transcendental justification of aesthetic judgment was the basis of the autonomy of aesthetic consciousness, and on the same historical basis historical consciousness was legitimated as well. The radical subjectivising involved in Kant’s new way of grounding aesthetics was truly epoch making. In discrediting any kind of theoretical knowledge except that of natural science, it compelled the human sciences to rely on the methodology of the natural sciences in conceptualizing themselves.⁵⁵¹

Our tendency to neutralize the truth claim of art is in turn embedded in the social sciences. Kants’ *subjectivization of aesthetic truth* therefore also, in an odd way, now further neutralizes truth with regard to the human sciences. Gadamer writes:

If we want to justify art as a way of truth in its own right, then we must fully realize what truth means here. It is in the human sciences as a whole that an answer to this question must be found. For they seek to surpass but understand the variety of experience – whether aesthetic, historical, religious, or political – but that means they expect to find truth in them.⁵⁵²

A work of art, while standing as a work, requires no biographic relationship to a subject. Kant’s transcendental analysis made it possible to acknowledge the truth claim of traditional material, to the cultivation and study of which they devoted themselves. But this meant that the methodological uniqueness of the human sciences lost its legitimacy. Art as knowing is not a subsidiary to science, a limited partner in the

⁵⁵¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 41.

⁵⁵² See, Gadamer, “Retrieving the Question of Artistic Truth,” in *Truth and Method*, [Second, Revised Edition], p. 70-157.

search for knowledge. Truth is not conceptual, as ascribed by scientific consciousness, nor is it to be excluded in the work of social theory.

Truth is encountered in art. This guides Gadamer's approach to the human sciences:

If we are to know what the truth is in the field of the human sciences, we need to ask a philosophical question of the whole procedure of the human sciences in the same way that Heidegger asked it of metaphysics and we have to ask it of aesthetic consciousness.⁵⁵³

Gadamer uses the Greek term *theoria* when speaking of theory. Theory is to be celebrated as a part of culture:

When he showed that the concept of presence at hand is a deficient mode of being and viewed it as the background to classical metaphysics and its continuance in the modern concept of subjectivity, he was pursuing an ontologically correct connection between Greek *theoria* and modern science. Within the horizon of his temporal interpretation of being, classical metaphysics as a whole is an ontology of the present at hand, and modern science is, unbeknownst to itself, its heir. But the Greek *theoria* there was undoubtedly another element as well. *Theoria* grasps not so much the present at hand as the thing itself, which still has the dignity of a "thing."⁵⁵⁴

Theoria involves the speaker in a non-alienated self-cultivation of oneself in the world. Theory is not about pointing to knowledge or remembering information but rather about an event in the course of questioning through which one realizes meaning either as the recipient of address by someone or something, or by addressing someone or something where a relationship to Being speaks. That which is shown and what is revealed is a matter of our conception of *theoria*. *Theoria* carries forth in history the double legacy, a paradox, of manipulation and domination that is further and further set

⁵⁵³ Ibid. p. 100.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 455.

apart from the contemplative self-creation that appears in Greek cosmology, and now appears at the center of hermeneutic thinking and hermeneutic grounding.

Plato's discussion on the status of argument, in the *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*, and the exclusion of the poet, discussed in the *Republic*, converge in the status of theory as the oscillation between poetry and theory. Hermeneutics, by posing the question of poetics and thought, echoes Parmenides paradox. Parmenides' writings are, for Heidegger, governed by the special way they occur as a speech that does not distinguish the philosophic word from the poetic word. By which he means the claims of thoughtful words, and being acquainted with them, involves seeing how poetic expression occurs as thought and lays before us a special claim.

Does truthfulness reside in the perpetual tension between theory and poetry? The poem, naturally, attains to something different to that of the Sophist's speech, especially the arbitrary perversions brought on by sophism; but both, while engaging with the power of language, move toward different ends. Gadamer does not argue that the poetic replaces rational argumentative speech; rather he says that we learn to understand how truth happens also in the rational and argumentative. The poetic offers a type of corrective to the self-understanding of the human sciences.

The being of speaking of the word brings things near. Theory, if it detaches us from being in language, removes the possibilities of a living closeness to being, and beings, that poetry can bring forth. Gadamer proposes a dialogue that does not close down the listener but instead, asks the listener (or reader) to hear the words spoken as those that somehow speak for them, to show us who we really are. Thus, a double demand is made because theory involves the consideration of who speaks.

Clarke notes: “This double demand of both commonality and singularity resounds throughout Gadamer’s experiments without ever being discussed at length.”⁵⁵⁵ But we could claim that this question remains at the core of his arguments insofar as it is implicitly inherited from the Greeks. We must recall that everything that makes itself present, for Heidegger entails a publicness that objective philosophy conceals by offering a security of holding onto a *real* that moves away from this truth.

The *Philebus* offers Gadamer an insight into the connection between dialogue and dialectic, but also carries within it a concern with the original pleasure of theory (in art and science). The soul is sometimes like a book, announces Socrates (Plato, *Philebus*). Within this book, memory unites with sense, while the passions write words in our souls. When we write truly then truth is produced in us. However, when the writer within us scripts falsely then truth is no longer apparent. We may further think, in this regard, of the poet’s capacity for seduction and Plato’s famous exclusion of the poet from the city of knowledge.

The human experience of the world concerns that which may be brought forth in language and not what can be abstracted into conceptual purity. Language is the center of an originary co-belonging, a concern that Heidegger lays before us, wherein may be found pleasure. This may be understood in the complex way that language involves concealment and revealment, *aletheia*. Truth as a form of revelation is located in this condition, which does not mean that it is a type of mysticism.

⁵⁵⁵ Clarke, Timothy. *The Poetics of Singularity: The Counter-Culturalist Turn in Heidegger, Derrida, Blanchot and the Later Gadamer*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000. p. 81.

When this sense of truth; i.e. the power of speaking truly, is lost in our modern view of knowledge, the human sciences lead us back to classical metaphysics. Heidegger spoke of the freedom of standpoint that is common to the claims of methodological detachment and methodological alienation. In Plato's Socrates, and especially in the staging of the dialogues, we see the basic outline of Gadamer's work. Heidegger writes:

Rejecting this way of proceeding in which the subject-object schema is foisted on fields of investigation is only one of the most urgent precautionary measure needed today. A second concerns a prejudice, which merely constitutes the counterpart to the uncritical approach of generating constructions and theorizing. This is the *demand for observation, which is free of standpoints*.

The second prejudice is even more disastrous for research because, with its express watchword for the seemingly highest idea of science and objectivity it, in fact, elevates taking an uncritical approach into a first principle and promulgates a fundamental blindness.⁵⁵⁶

Plato's thought never simply justifies the overcoming of the poetic. Likewise, it neither justifies the notion of the power of language by adopting the ideal of a pure symbolic language. However, what arises in the dialectics of speech, in Gadamer's sense of the priority of question and answer found in the event of language, is a setting for a discussion of sophistry, or rather the question of the status of critical thought and speech.

The Greek sense of sophistry remains a question of the correct pursuit of knowledge, and as we know, this question remains central to the entire project. Gadamer sets before him in arguing that methodological knowledge is one-sided and precludes the very grasp of truth.

⁵⁵⁶ Heidegger, *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, p. 63.

“The first course I attended,” writes Gadamer, “in the year 1923 had the title: ‘Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity.’ The whole reach of our topic [hermeneutic ontology] here is presented in the title of this lecture course. Hermeneutics of facticity,” notes Gadamer, “stands before the puzzle of *Dasein*, thrown into the *Da* [there], explicates itself to itself, and constantly projects itself on its own possibilities, on what it encounters. Heidegger made this *as* of the interpretation of its future possibilities the hermeneutical *as*. [To interpret is to see something as something].”⁵⁵⁷ All questioning – the task of philosophical thinking – always dwells with human factual existence of the human.

“Concealment is in all of *Daseins*’s self-explication” therefore: “Every *Dasein* understands itself on the basis of its environment and daily life, and articulates itself in the linguistic form in which it lives and moves. To this extent, then, there is always and everywhere concealment – and always also the deconstructive explication of concealments.”⁵⁵⁸ The conclusions drawn from this involve the complex relationship between Heidegger and Gadamer as well as the way we can see the founding moments of Gadamer’s own thinking on the question of truth.

Heidegger asks the question of truth in a special way. Truth, he points out, concerns a primordial encounter with the meaning process, the way we are actively [*Ereignis*] sustained and appropriated by it as we speak and encounter others and ourselves. Heidegger saw that the being that can be understood is meaning.⁵⁵⁹ It was

⁵⁵⁷ Gadamer, “Hermeneutics and Ontological Difference,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p. 361.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 365.

⁵⁵⁹ See, Dahlstrom, Daniel O., ed. “Facticity and Ereignis.” In *Interpreting Heidegger: Critical Essays*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011. p. 68. Dahlstrom

one step for Gadamer to the being that can be understood is language. In this way, theory occurs in the originary aspect of speech, where we open to meaning and concept creation. Gadamer's emphasis, as Wachterhauser says, on “dialogue as the place where truth occurs”, includes this connection to Heidegger.⁵⁶⁰ Theory is not simply something tested against a model of thinking (built in the image of science), but rather is the communal dialogue that opens to us in speech, which tells of its insights, not just for the specialist, but also for everyone.

“In the puzzling miracle of mental wakefulness lies the fact that seeing something and thinking something are a kind of motion, but not the kind that leads from something to its end.”⁵⁶¹ Finally, in this recognition lies the very notion of why the inner infinity of speech is ontologically prior to theory and yet remains intrinsic to theory. We need now only connect ideality to the movement of being to see how thinking too rests on this condition, grounds us and gives over to an utterance, that if dislocated feels inauthentic to us as a speech that is really speaking.

Theoria is living speech, neither resting on a reductive concept of subjectivity, nor the corresponding desire, generated by the subjectivization of knowledge, to find an objectified methodological ideal. Theory “keep[s] the dignity of the thing and the referentiality of language free from the prejudice originating in the ontology of the

argues: “For me to have knowledge of things only through their meaning, and meaning at all levels is a matter of disclosure-to-understanding...” and, furthermore, characterizing Heidegger, “Ereignis and Faktizität bespeak the same thing: the ‘fate’ of human being as necessary for maintaining (holding open) the meaning-giving process.” p. 68.

⁵⁶⁰ Wachterhauser, *Beyond Being: Gadamer’s Post-Platonic Hermeneutic Ontology*, “Truth is not primarily a private event in the inner life of the singular thinker but an insight confirmed and through dialogue with others.” p. 182.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid. p. 367.

present-at-hand as well as in the concept of objectivity” What is not to be calculated and measured is the sense of *theoria* as originally presented as ‘divine’ contemplation. Gadamer contends that theory is participation, of being present to the thing that includes something we forgo, or even suffer. It is “an event that happens to me” that is likewise a matter of a distance to oneself:

Our starting point is that verbally constituted experience of the world expresses not what is present-at-hand, that which is calculated and measured, but what exists, what man recognizes as existent and significant. The processes of understanding practice in the moral sciences can recognize itself in this – and not in the methodological idea of rational construction that dominates modern mathematically based science.”⁵⁶²

Theory is itself a hermeneutic praxis, not an independent body of knowledge that can be “applied,” which we see transported into Gadamer’s opposition to the one-sidedness of method (and modernity). That which gives being to thought is already there [*Da*]. Much like art *it* gives itself. But how might we better understand the fundamental opposition to theory as an abstraction from the ordinary held in modern thought? We must, as always for Gadamer, return to the Greeks – to the beginnings of what has been thought.

Speech produces; it shows things. Gadamer says, “When someone is looking at something, this is when *he or she truly sees it*, and when one is directing one’s thinking at something, this is when one *is truly producing it* [my emphasis].”⁵⁶³

Critique requires asking new questions. It rests upon and opens up speech to manipulation. The Sophist as a public speaker pretends thoughtful reflection, twisting the founding movement of philosophy, the question of effective speech, into a smart

⁵⁶² Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 456.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.* p. 367.

cosmetic game. Experiencing truth shifts to the truth of the utterance of authority even if that authority is in itself deceptive. So reaching the public, the growth of public dialogue that expands democracy, was also the growth of speech that rather than disrupting order, maintains it.

We can now grasp the nature of the alienation of theory and its relationship to inauthentic speech (false concepts, false speech, false sociology, false poetry, etc...) Motion, Gadamer notes, is “a holding of being, and through this motion of human wakefulness [*Lebendigkeit*, liveliness], a process that ever and again allows a new perception of something to open us.”⁵⁶⁴ One short step from here we are now in language, and specifically the word, especially the word of the poet.

When Gadamer asks: “What is the authentic word?” He also questions: “How is poetry made? How is theory made?” Each step of the way, Gadamer engages in a discussion of the poetic to restructure the way we think about limits of theory framed by western metaphysics.

Celan spoke of poetic language as *vieltellig* [having many places] and leaves many paths open. At the same time, however, he demanded from the readers of his poems a “right” to understanding. We are all spoken to; addressed by language. We speak to something; speaking enters us into something that lies before us, which can be shown without any method blocking our perception. Speech is the coming into meaning of the universal. This allows us to ponder the co-possibility of art, theory, and truth.

In *Gorgias*, Socrates distinguishes between sophistry and rhetoric. Truth of the utterance is always at stake, as may be seen with the Delphic Oracle. Socrates task is to

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 367.

confound the Sophists, by accepting the riddle of speech. Sophistry is charged with the appearance of a truth.

Rhetoric is the art of speaking, but it also reflects the primacy of speech to the question of truth. We are not talking primarily about good and bad speech, but that which illuminates the interconnection between the just, the good and the beautiful. Both *Gorgias* and *The Apology* show a distinctive quality to Plato's thinking. Socrates will not manipulate his speech even to avoid death and the condemnation of his sophistic accusers.

Christopher Fynsk notes that "modern scholasticism," or the rationalism of speech, cuts off discussion.⁵⁶⁵ He speaks, in this regard, of the silence of theory, especially found in the academy, the language of the theory of silence,⁵⁶⁶ arguing that the very structure of theory silences community. The homogenization of discourses, within the academy, produces a decline of critical public discussion. We know that it is this contradictory posture, a consequence of the objectification of speech, which compelled debate in the human sciences concerning the nature of theory, because it impacted the social scientist's ability to find a way for his words to converse in the continuing self-overcoming of concepts that would not end in fixity. His voice, his speaking in a conversation, appeared conceptually compromised. Truth is problematic for modernity because it seeks to find a way to 'correct' the oracle's speech. This primary scene – found in Greek metaphysics – continues to describe the tension in the performance of truth and its representation.

⁵⁶⁵ See, Fynsk, Christopher. "Community and the Limits of Theory." In *Community at Loose Ends*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991. pp. 19-29.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 20.

Theory concerns the play of conversation that structures the dialogue as speech between speakers. This speaker-to-speaker relationship is one where we step outside subjectivity and enter language that binds us. However, it is not a consequence of methodological strategy but, rather, a primary recognition that speech is always spoken to someone. To speak theoretically is to speak at the crossroads of theory, self-creation and public life.

Speech is the tendency to want to be with others (to-be-with-others), speaking with one another, where our being together can be accomplished. It is not so much one's being toward the object as the sharing of this being toward an object. Speech is essentially expressing oneself: a performance that is a communication of how one is faring.”⁵⁶⁷ In this shared performance we are not grabbing a word if one has something firmly in his grasp, but rather, in this resting and tarrying, exhibits our tendency to want to be with others.

In *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, we see one of Gadamer's key themes: speaking and being together constitutes the grounds of an ethics of speech. How one holds speech in mind, is how one holds to an ethics of co-responsibility to an “other.” Theory presents things for consideration. Gadamer notes, “If we keep this in mind, we will no longer confuse the factualness (*Sachlichkeit*) of language with the objectivity (*Objektivität*) of science.”⁵⁶⁸ Reality is intelligible in language. However, language's intelligibility is not a supplement to reality. Language is not imposed in some rationalized fashion upon an indifferent world. Brice Wachterhauser says that language

⁵⁶⁷ See, Gadamer, *Plato's Dialectical Ethics: Phenomenological Interpretations Relating to the Philebus*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 33.

⁵⁶⁸ Gadamer, *Praise of Theory*, p. 31.

“participates” in intelligibility and the intelligibility of reality “participates” in the intelligibility of language.

Method is a paradoxical demand, according to Gouldner, produced a “fatigue of reason” [alienation]. The overreaching and self-certifying tone of methodological speech involves a sense of loss. Only through a return to the speculative structure of speech can one be protected from passivity and alienation that comes from the self-imposed isolation of the panoramic subject. The theorist searches for a genuine encounter with others through himself/herself in the immanent recognition that the metaphysics of modernity promotes the self-alienation of their theoretical utterances.

Gadamer reminds us:

The whole value of hermeneutical experience – like the significance of history for human knowledge in general - seemed to consist in the fact that here we are not simply filing things in pigeonholes but that what we encounter in a tradition says something to us. Understanding, then, does not consist in the technical virtuosity of “understanding” everything written. Rather, it is a genuine experience (*Erfahrung*) – i.e., an encounter with something that asserts itself as truth.⁵⁶⁹

Theory, the conception of Greek *theoria*, illuminates the problem of modern theory that manifests itself in the human sciences. There are two key reasons. First, speech is an essential non-objectivity. Second, speech that is instrumentalized violates what we know and experience in language (i.e., its compelling non-objectivity).

⁵⁶⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 489.

Chapter 5.

Theory and Beauty

The event of the beautiful and the hermeneutic process both presuppose the finiteness of human life.⁵⁷⁰

In my book *Truth and Method* I began with considerations first of all with art, and not sciences or even the “human sciences.” Even within the human sciences it is art that brings the basic questions of the human being to our awareness in such a unique way – indeed, in such a way that no resistance or objection against it arise. An artwork is like a model for us in this regard.⁵⁷¹

In the closing chapter of *Truth and Method* Gadamer addresses the concept of beauty. Beauty is the theme of this chapter because it is key in showing how truth sets the limits upon the idea of modern theory. Beauty brings together several themes – art, theory, truth – but especially how we experience art. Truth and beauty emerge from within themselves; they show themselves. The key term here is presentation or the evidentness of the intelligible. Art is vivid – it stands out – to us.

Beauty, therefore allows us to better grasp what happens when art speaks to us and why it continues to speak to us. Art presents itself without any addition to itself. In this way, we can understand how the experience of beauty is familiar to us and yet also how it surpasses us. Beauty [in Greek, *kalos*, *Kallos*] is, then, also a question of truth.

⁵⁷⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 486.

⁵⁷¹ Gadamer, “From Word to Concept,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p.115.

Likewise, for Gadamer, words (and concepts) surpass subjectivism and enter into the dialogical sphere; the poetic word is a special case, where the word points to itself. Bruns reminds us: “What is it that allows pictures, statues, buildings, songs, texts, or dances, to appear beautiful, and, if ‘no longer beautiful,’ as art nonetheless? Beauty, whether classical or baroque, rather, defines art as art, namely as something that stands out from everything that is purposively established and utilized.”⁵⁷²

Gadamer reminds us that truth, “shines,” “radiates.” He writes, “The metaphysics of the beautiful can be used to illuminate two points that follow from the relation of the radiance of the beautiful and *the evidentness of the intelligible* [my emphasis]. The first is that both the appearance of the beautiful and the mode of being of understanding have the character of an event; the second, that the hermeneutical experience, as the experience of traditionary meaning, has a share in the immediacy which is always distinguished by the experience of the beautiful, as it has that of all evidence of the truth.”⁵⁷³

A second, yet important point is that the beautiful (*kalon*) concerns speech. In this way, beauty (the beautiful, the noble and the fine), for Plato, is key to an individual’s self-formation in life, and this self-formation is also our way of speaking.⁵⁷⁴ Today, however, the concept of beauty and speech seems misplaced, conservative, if not elitist, and yet, beauty matters to us. Speaking is how we are with others. If the gesture of the word is coded before we speak, then how we are with others

⁵⁷² Bruns, *On the Anarchy of Poetry and Philosophy: A Guide for the Unruly*, pp. 50-51.

⁵⁷³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 479.

⁵⁷⁴ In *Crito*, Socrates asks whether his speaking is noble and beautiful (*kalon*), because he wants to show Crito how speaking adequately is a matter of how the beautiful and the good are at play in argument.

is affected. Gadamer's concern is to show us why speaking, truth and the beautiful assert themselves against modern scientific methodology.

We confront ourselves as actors in modernity through the Greeks – as we confront the question of theory – and this confrontation concerns how methodological speaking immobilizes dialogical play of words. Greek thinking presents us with a self-encounter that is otherwise concealed by the epistemological conditions of modernity, revealing why speaking encumbers subjects with monological features through methodological ideals. In the Greek concept of theory, theory concerns a non-instrumental approach to truth and knowledge. In this regard, beauty and theory has a special importance in Gadamer's critique of theory, which is why the topic plays an important role in the closing arguments of *Truth and Method*.⁵⁷⁵

Our desire to create (ourselves), in Plato, is deeply attached to beauty: to the desire to create beauty in oneself. The Greek ideal of *moral beauty*, in essence the *beauty of mind* shows itself to be the best part of the soul.⁵⁷⁶ In Gadamer's view, the concept of beauty extends his own critique of self-consciousness and subjectivism. The ancient vocation of *theoria* confronts us because of what modern theory excludes: the place of self-formation in theory and its ethical task where speaking allows the subject to place themselves more intimately to themselves and others. This is linked to a tension between the ideal of value-neutrality and the question of vital values, like beauty. For Gadamer, modern theory hinders our sharing of speech with the whole

⁵⁷⁵ As well as in Gadamer's subsequent essay, appropriately entitled, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful, and Other Essays*.

⁵⁷⁶ Murdoch, Iris. "The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists." In *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*. Edited by Peter Conradi. New York: Penguin Books, 1999. p. 364 & p. 425.

because *objectivity* stands over *understanding*, therefore, dominating our native speech and sharing.

Theory, for the Greeks, since Plato, concerns being at home with oneself in the world, as a conversation with society and others, where we work upon ourselves in society with others: because genuine conversation expresses our eternal and finite being. Greek *theoria* concerns the vocation of theory. Theory, in its Greek sense, then, puts one in relation to oneself (the care of the soul taking place in conversation), and the social situation in which we live as a whole.

The beautiful reveals the comprehensiveness of hermeneutics: where the event of the beautiful and the hermeneutic process both presuppose the finiteness of human life. The good and the beautiful show that theory [dialectic and argument] is not simply a science but the journey of the soul. The beautiful is self-presentation, standing alone, while evoking us (in the sense of co-speakers) it also shows how we dwell in the world. The concept of beauty illuminates theory with regard to the question of coming to be at home in the world and making oneself at home.⁵⁷⁷ Beauty is knowing the world as a whole that rests in a finite knowing: how the whole of something is there in a different temporal experience (play, festival) other than through distancing or objectification. For beauty is neither objective nor neutral.

Gianni Vattimo explains the connection between theory and the beautiful in this way:

Gadamer describes the linguistic and ethical dimension that governs experience by referring back to the Greek notion of *kalon* [beauty] in connection with *theoria*. In the earliest linguistic usage of the term by the

⁵⁷⁷ Gadamer, "Greek Philosophy and Modern Thought," in *Beginnings of Knowledge*, p. 120.

Greeks, *theoria* is not primarily a formalized conceptual construct that entails an “objectifying” split between subject and object. It is, rather, related to participation in the god’s possession, a participation in which the *theoroi* function, moreover, as the delegates of their *polis*. It is thus a “looking at” which is also a “partaking in” and, in a certain way, a “belonging to,” rather than a possessing of an object.⁵⁷⁸

James Risser notes: “Everything that is language, Gadamer insists, has a speculative unity whereby that which comes into language is not something pre-given before language. This means that the being of language is self-presentation.”⁵⁷⁹

In Gadamer’s view the beautiful is the “most important ontological function: that of mediating between idea and appearance.”⁵⁸⁰ Beauty, then, is ontological. “Beauty of itself, presents itself,” meaning “that its being is such that it makes itself immediately evident.”⁵⁸¹ Beauty, then, shows the evidentness of truth. Such evidentness of something also belongs, he further notes, to the tradition of rhetoric.⁵⁸²

Gadamer says: “Now it [beauty] is no longer a question of, as it seemed in the nineteenth century, justifying the truth claim of art and the artist, or even that of history and the methodology of the human sciences, in terms of a theory of science. Now we

⁵⁷⁸ Vattimo, “Truth and Rhetoric in Hermeneutic Ontology,” in *The End of Modernity*, p. 133. See also, *Science in the Age of Reason*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1981. pp. 56-70.

⁵⁷⁹ *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other, Re-reading Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics*, James Risser, SUNY, Albany, 1997. P.144.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 476.

⁵⁸¹ Gadamer writes: “Through the analogical function of the beautiful, which Plato has described in unforgettable terms, a structural characteristic of the being of the beautiful becomes visible, and with it an element of the structure of being in general.” Ibid. p. 476.

⁵⁸² Ibid. p. 479.

are concerned, rather, with the much more general task of establishing the ontological background of the hermeneutical experience of the world.”⁵⁸³

Both language and art share the self-showing of hermeneutic experience as the claim to truth. When the thing itself compels “us to speak of an event and of an activity of the thing. What is evident (*enleuchtend*) is always something that is said – a proposal, a plan, a conjecture, an argument, or something of the sort. The idea is always that what is evident has not been proved and is not absolutely certain, but it asserts itself by reason of its own merit within the realm of the possible and probable.”⁵⁸⁴ The “evidentness” of concepts, of idea and appearances, is more that one conceptual scheme chosen among others; it is a universal ontological claim. Plato’s concept of beauty merges with the event character of hermeneutic understanding itself.⁵⁸⁵

“The truth of a theory’, Brice R. Wachterhauser reminds us, “is beautiful because it is true not because it is beautiful”.⁵⁸⁶ Gadamer by putting the question of beauty in the closing section of *Truth and Method* [Language as the Medium of Hermeneutic Experience] permits us to see how the universality of hermeneutic practice replaces an estranged conception of theory.

Truth occurs as we experience the world in the “beautiful ambiguity of the question”.⁵⁸⁷ Beauty, then, takes on singular significance in Gadamer’s writings especially in the closing arguments of *Truth and Method*. Beauty is a characteristic of

⁵⁸³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 479.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid. P. 479.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid. P. 481.

⁵⁸⁶ *Beyond Being, Gadamer’s Post-Platonic Hermeneutical Ontology*, Brice R. Wachterhauser, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1999. P.126

⁵⁸⁷ *Truth and Method*, as is widely know, was not the original title for this work, rather it was *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. The publisher thought the word “hermeneutics” was too vague.

our being, like the event structure of all understanding.⁵⁸⁸ Beauty, Gadamer emphasizes, is not different from itself “in presenting itself.”⁵⁸⁹ In this regard, *mimesis* points to the closing of the gap between appearance and the idea. *Mimesis* is not simply about copy of something but the way something presents itself. It is a type of performance, where what is meant is there, it is itself what it means. Thus, art and beauty both are models for understanding prior to formulation, which is self-presentation. Both words and images perform this event of their understanding in this way. Beauty shows how “it is possible for the particulars to participate in one idea...”⁵⁹⁰ therefore, according to Gadamer, “a structural characteristic of the being of the beautiful becomes visible, and with it an element of the structure of being in general.”⁵⁹¹

James Risser notes: “Consistent with Gadamer’s claim that as living language the being of language is in conversation, this means that the structure of being, the intelligible, is not simple copied language. Rather, in language the intelligible forms itself. In the word, as in the beautiful in its shining forth, there is a showing forth.”⁵⁹²

Our hermeneutical experience of the world shows us: “That being is self-presentation and that all understanding is an event, this first and last insight transcends the horizon of substance metaphysics as well as the metamorphoses of the concept of substance into concepts of subjectivity and scientific objectivity.”⁵⁹³

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 487.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 487.

⁵⁹⁰ Gadamer, “Plato’s Unwritten Dialogue,” in *Dialogue and Dialectic*, p. 133.

⁵⁹¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 481.

⁵⁹² Risser, *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other: Re-reading Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p.149.

⁵⁹³ Ibid. p. 484.

Beauty attaches to the genuine experience (*Erfahrung*), where something asserts itself to us as truth. Gadamer writes: “The coming into language that occurs in a poem is like entering into relationships of order that support and guarantee the ‘truth’ of what is said.”⁵⁹⁴ Theory presents more than the scientific outlook. Truth and beauty share this capacity to present. Neither, is methodological, or is known through objectification. Rather, truth and being are part of the self-presenting qualities of thought. Gadamer affirms how ideas can be presented to us, as we participate in them (using the Greek term *Methexis*); as we mediate idea and appearance, which is shown by the way “[t]he idea of the beautiful is truly present, whole and undivided, in what is beautiful.”⁵⁹⁵ “The mind that unfolds from within itself the multiplicity of what is thought is present to itself in what is thought.”⁵⁹⁶ Gadamer asserts: “Just as the mode of being of the beautiful proved to be characteristic of being in general, so the same can be shown to be true of the concept of truth.”⁵⁹⁷

Gadamer’s overall thesis has moved to dispel historicism, relativism, and objectivism from the self-understanding of the human sciences. He asks: *what is true of the concept of truth?* Gadamer’s broader vision draws on what he calls the metaphysical crux of Platonism to confirm the centrality of beauty in understanding the ontological function of language. He writes: “the basic idea [is] that language is the medium where I and the world meet or, rather manifest their original belonging together.”⁵⁹⁸ The universality of the medium of language has something to share with

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 489.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 481.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 483.

⁵⁹⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 487.

⁵⁹⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 469.

the universality of the concept of the beautiful that apply to critiquing the human sciences. With this ontological term, his inquiry has adopted the metaphysical idea that comes from Greek thought. “We will see,” he writes, “that this ancient conception of the beautiful can also be of service to the comprehensive hermeneutics that has emerged from the critique of the human sciences.”⁵⁹⁹

In the beautiful, both *self-presentation* and *being understood* belong together.⁶⁰⁰ The Greek idea of *kalon* (beauty) shows Beautiful things are those whose value of self is evident. The logic of this argument is that we see the beautiful as possessing self-evidentness [presentation], it does not differ to itself, but it is a cognitive faculty. This allows us to see that beauty is a genuine experience of the thing in itself, like art, which is also a self-presentation of the true being of the work of art, and like the poetic word, each entails and asserts the concept of truth. The thing itself cannot be considered methodologically, but resides in the activity itself. Thus, the universal structure of our experience of being is of language as the being: “the being that can be understood is language.”⁶⁰¹

We are being in language before anything else. Our relation to the world is fundamentally verbal. Beauty, truth and language are all manifestations of our original belonging together that are beheld in verbal (speech).⁶⁰²

What Gadamer shows is that the character of understanding, upon which the human sciences really reside, is not a method matter; in fact, methodological conception interferes with genuine knowledge and its transmission as I have sought to

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 477.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 472.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid. p. 474.

⁶⁰² Ibid. p. 474.

show. “The objectifying procedures of the natural science and the concept of being-in-itself, which is intended in all knowledge, proved to be an abstraction when viewed from the medium that language is.”⁶⁰³ The abstraction and loss from a genuine dialogue both with language and others results in the alienating stance of the human sciences and their place in the world. Understanding is a genuine experience we have and share, there is, as Gadamer says, no technical virtuosity involved, rather understanding has to be understood as a genuine encounter we have when something asserts itself as the truth. If nothing spoke to us in this way we would not have a world.

Hermeneutic experience is an acknowledgement that there is an understanding; that understanding comes forth by revealing itself in its being and we experience this in the medium of language. What impact this insight has for our conception of theory has been our on-going concern in these pages. What we know is that being, in Gadamer’s view, is a matter of self-presentation and that understanding is an event, not a method. What is important, argues Gadamer, that these two insights: “[transcend] the horizon of substance metaphysics as well as the metamorphoses of the concept of substance into the concepts of subjectivity and scientific objectivity.”⁶⁰⁴

His critique of the human sciences is completed in understanding that language is the event of understanding in which we are mediated. The truth lies in what we say and how we say it; and the poetic utterance, as we have seen, was for Gadamer a special case of this capacity of language to embody meaning in its utterance.

⁶⁰³ Ibid. p. 471.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 484.

First, the concept of beauty is intimately related to the way we speak and experience words. That is beauty is self-standing in the way the poetic word can be. Our words do not happen through a superior knowledge of objects but rather our words embody us not as a subjective particularity but in understanding what is spoken in the evidentness of the way the words speak and share their truth with us.

Second, scientific methods appropriated into the self-understanding of the human sciences do not suffice to grasp the nature of truth, and the concept of beauty becomes an illustration as to why.

Why is the truth of the human sciences closer to an understanding of the concept of beauty? The difficulty that Gadamer wants to show, as did Plato, is that beauty is not a concept that is amenable to definition. Rather, beauty's showing is different. What beauty repeatedly illustrates is that theory [theoretical utterances and our understanding of them] cannot be reduced to a method of science, but requires recognizing not the limits, as it were, but the expansive meaning of understanding that make theoretical life possible in the first place.

Plato's *Symposium* speaks of the "sudden vision of beauty" that is the experience of nothing other than the good itself. The *Symposium* is also the living embodiment of beauty itself not simply a set of discrete discourses at a party of friends. We can see that it is about beauty and not knowledge.

Beauty reins in the whole of the cosmos and makes this visible. Gadamer claims that it was in the tradition of Platonism that the conceptual vocabulary "required for thought about the finiteness of human life was developed."⁶⁰⁵ Beauty and truth

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid. pp. 486-487.

concern us as participating beings in the world. We are free to choose our way of life, our way of discourse, but we do not choose these for they are part of our lives that exist beyond any subjective appraisal of them.

Gadamer reminds us that speaking is never just when we subsume individual words under universal concepts. Rather, speech unfolds naturally and conceptually in the dialectical unity of the word. Words, especially the poetic word, are themselves made present in what is said.⁶⁰⁶ This is true of the way Plato describes the beautiful. Truth's power of self-presentation, especially, as found in the work of art, like the poetic utterance, attests to what the poem proclaims.

We are engaged in the realm of our senses, beauty and truth claim us, in our fundamental experience of the world, our mode of being in language, because beauty is one thing that opens us to the true nature of truth. Out of our finitude, our hermeneutical experience of the world, what we experience is similar to our way of experiencing the beautiful, and the "idea that the beautiful is present in what is beautiful."⁶⁰⁷

Beauty opens toward the good; they come together, since, both the beautiful appear and goodness appears, to reveal their being: that is, they are in their presentation. Gadamer writes: "What presents itself in this way is not different in itself in presenting itself. It is not one thing for itself and another for others, nor is it something that exists through something else."⁶⁰⁸ Such standing in its truth will be

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 490.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 490.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 487.

important to grasping what exists too in the nature of theory and cannot be expelled by a methodological attitude.

Our place in our life work resides in recognizing our finitude in relation to that which exceeds us and stands before us, and within us, as in the poetic word. Beauty also presupposes our finitude. Beauty challenges abstract consciousness by returning us to ourselves in its self-reflection. Beauty then, is not an act of reason, needing a special (methodological) access, but rather is an awareness of our residing in truth at play. This is especially evident in the being of speaking, where we can see our relationship to all that holds back from us, that refuses transparency, and yet demands we see ourselves within this larger whole as interpretive ethical beings.

In the closing arguments of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer says:

When we understand a text, what is meaningful in it captivates us just as much as the beautiful captivates us. It has asserted itself and captivated us before we can come to ourselves and be in a position to treat the claim to meaning it makes. What we encounter in the experience of the beautiful and in understanding the meaning of tradition really has something of the truth of play about it. In understanding we are drawn into an event of truth and arrive, as it were, too late, if we want to know what we are supposed to believe.”⁶⁰⁹

Chris Dawson expresses the case well in his Forward to Gadamer’s *Praise of Theory*. Beauty, he says, “keeps overflowing the bounds of the aesthetic, spreading out to embrace all those things that *Diotime* calls the whole ocean of the beautiful (*Symposium*, 210d).”⁶¹⁰

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer says that the beautiful plays a role in ethics, while in *Praise of Theory*, he writes that the human impulse toward *kalon* has a

⁶⁰⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 490.

⁶¹⁰ Gadamer, *Praise of Theory*, x. Forward.

decisive, even defining, place in science as well.”⁶¹¹ What might this mean for the human sciences? Ever present is the universality of the beautiful.

Beauty brings us once again, as we have mentioned, to Gadamer’s “Platonism.” Beauty’s affinity to the Greek *logos* shapes Gadamer’s understanding of the linguistic presentation of ideas and the quest of theory.

Beauty lies at the core of human life. This may seem an anomaly to the modern mind but once we follow Gadamer’s arguments, we begin to see why this concept is important. Gadamer tells us: “Science exists and is important for no other reason than because it is ‘beautiful’... This broadly conceived the beautiful (*kalon* in Greek) pertains to all theoretical science. It is the joy of theory, the joy of discovering the truth, that science lays claim to.”⁶¹²

Beauty is not a recipe (or utility); Beauty attaches us to the intricate balance between knowledge and nonknowledge, between dialogue and pure conceptuality, as we articulate ourselves in the zone of theory. This is why the concept is so important to Gadamer. Plato taught that the beautiful is the good and the true. In other words, beauty is the display not only of self-validity in understanding but pertains to moral and intellectual clarity. Finally, beauty exists in the living play and certainty of our speech.

We may be in denial of the true and the beautiful in a social world caught up in extending one’s fulfillment in the logic of converting all experience into consumption. But it would also be true that neither concept can be assimilated; they push back. Truth, according to Risser is the “transformative unfolding of dialogue” but it is also the transformative unfolding of the universality of beauty.

⁶¹¹ From the Forward, Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition].

⁶¹² *Ibid.* x.

Plato's sense of philosophical unity is repeatedly found to be the center of Gadamer's thinking. When we say that our self-attestation occurs in our verbal performance, we mean the good occurs because: "Human life desires the good". Such a seeing of things occurs in the way we are articulating ourselves as theorists, a unity shows itself in theory that involves the good, true and beautiful.

Beauty is the interface of the good and theory; beauty meets us as a "self-evident" truth. What is at our disposal is this capacity to see and speak these things as linguistic events. Thus, in theory we engage in a practice, speech, whereby being and the good are inextricable.

Beauty holds before us something that is common to us, for beauty illuminates the hermeneutic experience in the unity of expression. Beauty tells us something about our relationship to our conceptual work, our power of self-presentation that shows itself in our utterances. For example, the poem stands, like beauty, as a form of self-presentation in which we can see truth. For this reason, poetic thinking is, important to understanding Gadamer's aims. We can recognize things for what they are without further objects being added. We do not ask if art is proved by the facts but whether it is true. Gadamer says to "know what truth is in the human sciences," we must look at the way we encounter a work of art.

By this, Gadamer means that we need to grasp how presentation is the practical craft of theory. Beauty allows us to see the ways in which we do not know ourselves, while articulating ourselves; there is no method, we are not methodologically guided by pre-set conceptualizations like science, rather we recognize ourselves in ignorance and dialogue, in perceptions we bring to presence in the art of talk.

Beauty, like art, or the poem, if conceived in Kantian terms, is absorbed into and restricted by an assumption of a radical subjectivity distorting the meaning of art's communicative power. The human sciences, as they turned away from art and historical studies, challenged the Kantian assumption of subjectivism and relativism, by becoming *objective*, as it were; this principle of justification – if not always consciously – is the counter-point to art and truth.

Beauty emerges naturally and centrally “from the critique of the methodologism of the human science,” according to Gadamer. That is, if one asks a question of the whole procedure of the human sciences in general, then art and beauty both become important in any discussion of understanding and the concept of truth in relationship to them.

The recovery of truth in the human sciences (truth as a belonging /dwelling in conversation) is uncovered by looking at the concept of beauty as a key to the event structure of being in general. What is common to beauty and art is common to all understanding. Encountering an artwork, for example, highlights this where there is always something to be seen that is in itself marked both by dialogue and hiddenness. The core of the experience of understanding leads naturally to finding an account of the truth baring capacities of the concept of beauty. When an *object*, or speaker, becomes an exposition of *itself* (when it stands alone); it exemplifies the concept of a *self-standing truth*, as we discover in the concept of beauty.

Beauty's power of self-presentation is in the act of interpretation. Beauty communicates itself, just as language communicates itself. The beautiful presents, therefore, with the quality of the *self-evident*. In this way, the beautiful has a special

advantage, as Gadamer says, in showing itself. Since such showing, as we have already seen, finds itself in truth. He writes:

If we start from the basic ontological view that being is *language – i.e., self-presentation* – as revealed to us by the hermeneutic experience of being, then there follows not only the even character of the beautiful and the event structure of all understanding. Just as the mode of being of the beautiful proved to be characteristic of being in general, so the same thing can be shown to be true of the *concept of truth*.⁶¹³

Gadamer adds: “Obviously what distinguishes the beautiful from the good is that the beautiful of itself presents itself, that its being is such that it makes itself immediately evident (*einleuchtend*). This means that beauty has the most important ontological function: that of mediating between idea and appearance.”⁶¹⁴ The beautiful like the good, reveals itself in its being: “it presents itself. What presents itself in this way is not different from itself in presenting itself. It is not a thing for itself and another for others, nor is it something that exists through something else.”⁶¹⁵

Beauty restores what was lost in the transformation of the human sciences. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer writes:

If we now follow and examine the importance of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* for the history of the human sciences, we must say that his giving aesthetics a transcendental philosophical basis had major consequences and constituted a turning point. It was the end of a tradition but also the beginning of a new development. It restricted the idea of taste to an area in which, as a special principle of judgment, it could claim independent validity – and, by so doing, limited the concept of knowledge to the theoretical and practical use of reason.⁶¹⁶

⁶¹³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 487.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid. p. 487.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid. p. 487.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid. p. 40.

Art is a mode of self-presentation. Art's autonomy and interpretability coexist; an art work speaks, still further, it speaks of its being to us. "A work of art belongs closely to what it is related to so that it enriches the being of that as if through a new event of being."⁶¹⁷ Art is not simply an object that we stand over but is an object that is able to take hold of us. In this way, the discussion of beauty concerns the question of the self-presentation in theory and how theory takes hold of us. Gadamer says, echoing Heidegger's *The Origin of the Work of Art*, "When a work of art truly takes hold of us, it is not an object that stands opposite us which we look at in hope of seeing through it to an intended conceptual meaning. Rather, it is the reverse. The work is an *Ereignis* – an event that 'appropriates us' into itself"⁶¹⁸

"All encounter with the language of art," says Gadamer, "is an encounter with an unfinished event and is itself part of this event. This is what must be emphasized against aesthetic consciousness and the neutralization of truth."⁶¹⁹ The concept of play is a key to recovering the truth of art in relation to the human sciences. Play, like beauty, will show how we belong to a work of art and ultimately thereby being.

Play, Truth, Art

Gadamer critically discussed *play* [*Spiel*] especially in his essay "Art and Play" in *The Relevance of the Beautiful (Die Aktualität des Schönen)*. The concept of play, he claims, shows how truth appears in self-presentation (words, word combinations and concepts) that is itself to be understood as a form of performance.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid. p. 40.

⁶¹⁸ Gadamer, *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, p. 71.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid. p. 71.

Play, then, is a model of the hermeneutic experience. Aesthetic experience and art are traditionally located as playfulness (aesthetic play) but this does not fully capture how Gadamer uses the concept to counter a subjectivist view of aesthetic consciousness, or what he calls the “abstraction of aesthetic differentiation.”⁶²⁰

If art concerns the concept of play, as Gadamer argues, then “its actual being [being of art] cannot be detached from its presentation and that in this presentation the unity and identity of a structure emerge. To be dependent on self-presentation belongs to what it is [as art].” In the horizon of *play* we both belong to something in which we can no longer speak of having a fixed or controlled *I* as the unproblematic grounds to what we know.

Art’s quality of *self-showing* cannot be defined merely as an object of aesthetic consciousness. The “play character of play,” as Gadamer puts it, offers a way to understand our relationship to truth and language. Gadamer’s effort to define the “being of art” involves a consistent formulation of a hermeneutic ontology. He formulates this concisely in the following way:

My thesis, then, is that the being of art cannot be defined as an object of an aesthetic consciousness because, on the contrary, the aesthetic attitude is more than it knows of itself. It is a part of the *event of being that occurs in presentation, and belongs essentially to play as play.*⁶²¹

Art is itself part of the event of being that occurs in presentation, and belongs essentially to play as play, which implies a different way of understanding our own relationship to presentation, thereby, linking art to an ideality, a way of knowing that detaches itself from subjectivity and indicates art’s autonomy. It also shows that

⁶²⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], pp. 85-87.

⁶²¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 116.

autonomy implies a particular way in which the spectator relates to the artwork.

Theoros is, as Gadamer adds, a spectator, meaning the spectator is part of the play of the art (or festival); theory, insofar as theory involves us in such an act, occurs when a person is lost to themselves because they are involved or are present to the self-presentation of the work (or artwork). This autonomy involves, for Gadamer what he calls a “transformation of structure,” one that occurs between players and in play for play where the players achieve *ideality*.⁶²² Being present retains, paradoxically, the character of being outside oneself.⁶²³

Play, in this special way, implies a form of *transcendence* that is expressed in Heidegger’s use of the term *Er-eignis*, discussed in *The Origin of the Work of Art* and *The Essence of Truth*, as “self-showing.” Such transcendence means we enter and become part of the event of truth of the artwork. *Er-eignis* corresponds to play as Gadamer uses the term. One does not possess the meaning of an artwork the artwork is “there”.

Truth happens in a playful way – it is a self-transformation – that cannot be understood as a passive contemplation. Rather, it involves a change in the viewer, where, as Gadamer says, the viewer has become engaged in the artwork but also has become another person.⁶²⁴ The viewer has undergone a transformation in the process of engagement with the artwork. Play shows us how the subject is taken over by the work that now constitutes the form of the actualization of the experience of art which leaves behind any concept of grounding. Play then offers a way to understand how we are also

⁶²² Ibid. p. 110.

⁶²³ Ibid. p. 126.

⁶²⁴ Ibid. p. 111.

given over to something, and how a hermeneutic grounding involves losing a determinateness of metaphysical thinking.

Theory “plays” the theorist whose self-presentation is in his text, which allows the readers to enter and enjoy the performance. Play shows us that we grasp theory as we might art.⁶²⁵ In this way, theory can be seen also to bring something into appearance, to extend the idea to the way truth emerges through its performance. “My thesis, then,” writes Gadamer, “is that the being of art cannot be defined as aesthetic consciousness because, on the contrary, the aesthetic attitude is more than it knows of itself. It is part of the event of being that occurs in presentation, and belongs essentially to play.”⁶²⁶

For Gadamer, play is an event of being. Theory is illuminated by the concept of play insofar as the understanding of the presentation of art, foregrounds two important points: First, theory is a presentation that takes the form of self-presentation (as it speaks of the “real” world) and second, theory involves an action by all players to make the transformation and reception of the work accessible.

Theoros, Gadamer noted, means someone who takes part in a delegation to a festival. *Theoria*, he claims, is linked to participation (a true participation) and to understand this participation we must understand how we participate in art.⁶²⁷

Play immerses us in the game; we have a stake in the game where theory and practice become one. Play, notes Gadamer, is never a mere object but rather has an “existence for the one who plays along, even if only a spectator.”⁶²⁸

⁶²⁵ Ibid. pp. 72-73.

⁶²⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 116.

⁶²⁷ Ibid. pp. 124-125.

Play is essential to the experience of art; it involves a self-forgetfulness, a giving over to something other than mere subjectivity. Art and speech convey the event of truth in that we recognize in each the way in which we are ensconced in a mode of presentation that is not exclusively subjective – subject and object. Play, involves self-presentation, in which we have a relationship to the way we grasp play as a given and sufficient reality. We are bound up in play and in the presentation of play. Neither is this presentation the mere consequence of some original object, performance or word, rather play is more than the players yet involves all who participate.

The experience of truth is an event of truth. Art brings forth a validity recognized as a total mediation of that which it presents. The spectator is no longer a contemplative being, but an engaged being, losing themselves in the play of thought coming to discover a self-continuity through a common grasp of what is being discussed. One grasps the truth here because, in Gadamer's view, play implies a self-forgetfulness. Such a forgetfulness of oneself (which occurs in language) is required to properly be mediated by the idea (or artwork).

In art we encounter truth as a transformative event. According to Gadamer, truth is a transformation into structure that he identifies with the concept of play. What is present in play is neither reducible to the performer nor the spectator. Truth is not so in and of itself, rather, it is present in the form of a successful event in speech, art or theory. Play presents the way in which we experience truth, since in the playing both the spectator and player are suspended in the autonomous moment of truth.

⁶²⁸ Gadamer, "On the Origins of Philosophical Hermeneutics," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Philosophical Apprenticeships*, p. 178.

Gadamer explains: “Play is structure – this means that despite its dependence on being played it is a meaningful whole which can be repeatedly presented as such and the significance of which can be understood. But structure is also play, because – despite its theoretical unity – it achieves its full being only each time it is played.”⁶²⁹ The transformation in structure that occurs in the experience of art, for example, also involves understanding one quality of the object (of art) as self-presentation. The players are not the subject of play, Gadamer says, rather play is the way presentation (*darstellung*) happens through the players.⁶³⁰

In play, we are autonomous performers bringing forth a representation that is “disassociated from the representing activity of the player.”⁶³¹ Neither the player nor the spectator commands this condition. Gadamer contends we should understand the relationship between performer and observer, artist and artwork, theory and the subject. We see not just ourselves, but another to ourselves in the event of play. Something new comes into existence through the moment of play that depends on the original play yet now exists uniquely. Such a difference, according to Gadamer, now represents itself in the play of art, for example, and “is lasting and true.”⁶³²

Art is a presence whose existence rest on participation and engagement. Within these definitions we can better grasp how Gadamer extends the argument to the human sciences. Since aesthetic experience is close to us it too extends into our understanding of theory as in some measure a quality that involves self-presentation.

⁶²⁹ Ibid. p. 117.

⁶³⁰ Ibid. p. 103.

⁶³¹ Ibid. p. 111.

⁶³² Ibid. p. 111.

According to Gadamer, play has an endless variety and may appear in “The play of light, the play of waves, the play of gears or parts of machinery, the interplay of limbs, the play of forces, the play of gnats, even the play on words.”⁶³³ Chris Lawn puts it this way:

“Play is a constant to-and-fro movement and Gadamer focuses on this incessant back and forth motion because it reveals something about the nature of art as being essentially incomplete and complete. The meaning of art works is what is revealed and opened up in a constant oscillation between artwork and interpreter. The meaning of the art work is never final, just as a game never reaches true finality; the game can always be played again and again and players will always be drawn into its horizon.”⁶³⁴

“All writing is a kind of alienated speech, and its signs need to be translated back into speech and meaning.”⁶³⁵ Play is a moment of suspension and insight that we characterize as a space of autonomy, in which truth happens in language. Gadamer’s emphasis upon speech, therefore, results in an inquiry of how we may once more find our voice in language. We search for a style of writing, says Gadamer, that “reads itself” in the likeness of the verbal, the spoken, the perfect yet unobtainable voice. With this priority of speech Gadamer locates the ontology of the hermeneutic experience in spoken language. Thinking seeks both the clarity of word usage but also struggles today with the metaphysically alienated word.

Plato’s eloquence staged in the dialogues, presents the word (outside a modern technical view) as the word of the thinker that progressively discloses the object as a “positive dialectic” where agreement with oneself and others guides the

⁶³³ Ibid. p. 103.

⁶³⁴ Lawn, Chris. *Gadamer: A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York: Continuum, 2006. p. 91.

⁶³⁵ Ibid. p. 393.

process a shared process of search.⁶³⁶ This is a matter of the power of a conversational logic and the ideal that “what is, can never be completely understood,”⁶³⁷ since speech as living dialogue is always open to the unsaid. Art and speech are ways in which we participate in knowledge. Echoing Plato, Gadamer reminds us that speech opens us to the possibility of experimentation with the word as concept (and the word) that inheres in speech.

What limits the speaking-voice as theory (which both philosophy and poetry anticipate) is the ways in which we have come to consider our linguistic access to the world nominalistically. Gadamer writes: “One moves into a world that is created by the availability and communicative sharing that happens in speaking.”⁶³⁸ Gadamer’s contention is that we have linguistic access before we think of the matter in terms of a speech driven conceptually by a scientific mindset. Such access has already taken place and needs to be part of an account of the structure of theory. The voice is not a conceptualization but a recognition of the origin of the philosophic in speech. Our access to the other cannot be mastered since it is one that already happens within our commonality.

Having appropriated the wider discourse of modernity (*metaphysics*), we have begun to discover ourselves as the voiceless subject. We are neither at one with being nor with our words. This is not simply because of the desire for objective abstraction, or methodological separation, but rather a failure to discover the meaning

⁶³⁶ See, Gadamer’s discussions in *Plato’s Dialectical Ethics: Phenomenological Interpretations Relating to the Philebus*. pp. 17-65.

⁶³⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], xxxv.

⁶³⁸ “Greek Philosophy and Modern Thinking”, in *The Gadamer Reader, A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, edited by Richard E. Palmer, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 2007. pp. 272-273.

of a living shared dialogue that does not lead to self-alienation. The Ancient Greek had confidence in the powers of speech. Can this be regained? Yes, if we see this as the key of modernity; that is, if we see that the voice of the theorist and the way he is asked to inhabit himself to produce a life form is a mirror of modernity.⁶³⁹ Theory and topic merge, in Giddens words, spiraling in and out of each other. Our verbal lives cut down and misdirected, perhaps, as Bauman has argued, away from self-love toward self-hate (*ressentiment*) thus disfiguring life even further away from the unity of beauty, theory and self that was affirmed by the Ancient Greeks.⁶⁴⁰

The totality of the world that is revealed in speech is because the experience is primarily verbal in nature.⁶⁴¹ When Gadamer adopts the idea of *Die Sachen*, he detaches speech from any absolutely transcendent conceptual realm, such as a world of Platonic *ideas*, or the Hegelian conceptualization of the absolute, however, he carefully retains the sense in which language embodies wholeness. This unity itself is a linguistic fabric, found in our quest for the *logos*. When we speak we understand one another in the unity of the word. Speaking remains tied to the language as a whole, the hermeneutic virtuality of discourse that surpasses at any moment that which has been said.⁶⁴²

⁶³⁹ A theme that is taken up by Zygmunt Bauman in several of his works on postmodernity and ethics. Bauman is an important theorist, different to Giddens, for all his particular skill, in that Bauman discusses the way we live our lives without jargon, of the meta-structure of modern theory.

⁶⁴⁰ See, for example, Zygmunt Bauman's book *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?* pp. 35-37.

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 443.

⁶⁴² Gadamer, "Hegel and Heidegger," in *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, p. 115.

Gadamer writes: “The virtuality of speech brings a totality of meaning into play, without being able to express it totally.”⁶⁴³ This remark emphasizes the powers of speech to bring forth something without assenting to any completion of meaning. The word in effect multiplies, breaking down the methodological conception of language.

Every word, writes Gadamer:

Breaks forth as if from a center and is related to a whole, through which alone it is the word. Every word causes the whole of language to which it belongs to resonate and the whole-view that underlies it to appear. Thus every word, as an event of a moment, carries with it the unsaid, to which it is 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 into play, without being able to express it totally.⁶⁴⁴

Bringing forth a word is already a part of the whole that lies within every being’s finite speech. This speculative idea of speech, speaks in dialogue with another that resonates beyond either speaker, speech then implies something to say without technical predefinition. Speech is, as we have seen earlier, more than what is said, and what may not be said.

Modern science operates to create its representations by generating technical discourse that forces them upon us as if they are self-evident terms. However, these merely become the self-concealment of truth. They are but a dream; to understand others through calculation and power. Gadamer invites us to consider the ways in which a tyranny surfaces amidst the domination of certain modes of speech. Gadamer argues that our struggle between truth and tyranny is still a matter of how we

⁶⁴³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 458.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 458.

understand our relationship to living dialogue.⁶⁴⁵ An ethics of respect requires that we do not view theory outside the play of self-assertion or a need to acquire control.

Play, in Gadamer's view, is a medial voice that opens us to the middle space of understanding. While instrumental speech displaces truth and our primordial space of play as it is constituted in language. Giddens, in his terminology, speaks of how the subject today is "dis-embedded." Modern science dis-embeds us from the primordial play of language. Speech after all is a space in which, at least in Heidegger's terms, we are suspended because we are properly speaking in language that speaks.

Speech implies the commonality of speaking beings that is neither a given community nor one tradition over another, rather it is a matter of dialogue across such differences, the possibility of coming to understanding across our differences.

Art is Not Theoretical

Art is neither subjective nor objective in our understanding. This is why the question of art becomes pertinent to social science. Gadamer writes:

Art begins precisely there, where we are able to do otherwise. Above all, where we are talking about art and artistic creation in the preeminent sense, the decisive thing is not the emergence of the product, but the fact that the product has a special nature of its own. It 'intends' something, and yet it is not what it intends. It is not an item of equipment determined by its utility, as such items or products of human work are. Certainly, it is a product, that

⁶⁴⁵ "The question is not whether human facilities, and thus the achievements of science in making our world known, also find sufficient reception in the minds of humanity. The opposite is the real life question for human beings: whether we will succeed in tying the immense increase in human power, but only through insight and increasing solidarity between people as it has been conceptualized via the heritage of Aristotle's practical philosophy and paralleled in the great religions, as well as in other cultural circles." Gadamer, "Aristotle and Imperative Ethics," in *Hermeneutics, Religion, and Ethics*, p.160.

is, something produced by human activity that now stands there available for use. And yet the work of art refuses to be used in any way that is not the way it is 'intended'. It has something of the 'as if' character that we recognized as an essential feature of the nature of play."⁶⁴⁶

Gadamer shows us that there is a manifestation of an object, or work, as in a work of theory, that is apprehended in itself. Once it was common to say that theory needed *empirical verification* that always implied a negation of theory in proportion to the greater truth to be found *outside* the work as a self-sufficient creation.

Art points beyond itself within its manifestation. Theory may not be the same as the reproductive arts but, nonetheless, theory can generate a productive play of shared meaning through its rhetorical nature, which is the ideality of showing. To show something means that the thing shown is seen correctly by the spectator (or reader). Here, "[w]hat is shown is, so to speak, elicited from the flux of manifold reality. Only what is shown is intended, it is held in view, and thus elevated to a kind of ideality. It is no longer just this or that thing that we can see, but it is now shown and designated as something. An act of identification and, consequently, of recognition occurs whenever we see what it is that we are being shown."⁶⁴⁷

Art shows self-concealment, i.e. that there is no truth unto itself, only the play of truth. Truth is the play that presents. The joy of recognition is the pleasure of knowing more than that which we are familiar. Recognition resonates with play. It is a concept of participation. We are not speaking of knowing something because it accords with some external fact, or something that is given by conceptual language, or in the alienated language of methodological thinking. According to Gadamer, we see where

⁶⁴⁶ Gadamer, "The Play of Art," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, pp. 125-126.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid. pp. 128-129.

“the known enters into its true being and manifests itself as what it is only when it is recognized.”⁶⁴⁸ Speaking of the concept of play he writes:

This kind of representation leaves behind it everything that is accidental and unessential – e.g., the private, particular being of the actor. He disappears entirely in the recognition of what he is representing. But even what is represented, a well-known event of mythological tradition, is – by being represented – raised, as it were, to its own validity and truth. With regard to the knowledge of the true, the being and representation is more than the being of the thing represented...⁶⁴⁹

Speech is the relationship between things. It is communicability at its finest.

“(I)n communicating with others, it presents the entities.” Conceptual clarity is a resting and tarrying, or “a way of being together,” an accomplishment as vital as the actual object of discourse. Here the emphasis is shifted to the saying (presenting) not the method of saying.

Theory remains a communal dialogue because it presupposes speaking beings already within the commonality of speech.⁶⁵⁰ Theory is a dialogue between speaker and speaker – a space wherein one is present but only insofar as one has disregarded self. It is not a relationship between neutral thinkers to facts. Gadamer sees it as a “subject-to-subject” model that only makes sense when the speaker is understood to be involved in a conversational logic that knows no bounds.

The event of art concerns the participatory dimension, so does theory. Art is not theory, and theory is not art. However, our participatory entry into the work and the

⁶⁴⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], pp. 101-110.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 114.

⁶⁵⁰ “This idea of coming to shared understanding, which arises from a specific tendency of self-reflection in being with one another, must contrast the idea of coming to a purely substantive shared understanding and the way in which that idea is implemented in scientific conversation.” “On Plato’s Ethics,” in *Plato’s Dialectical Ethics: Phenomenological Interpretations Relating to the Philebus*, p. 38.

idea do happen. We agree to go along with the very play of discourse itself as it opens us toward a place of difference that does not control. Plato once termed this *nowhere*, a place where we write words within our souls that is true beyond self or other.

The Beautiful is the universal character of being. The artist's construction and the poet's construction, for example, also present the appearance of being in this universal manner.⁶⁵¹ Beauty, like art, is self-presentation, which I have linked to the special qualities of both the poem and theory (neither is reduced by the other, rather they are mutually part of the coming to speech of ideas). Being is recognized in these realms, primarily as a form of belonging that is not reducible to a discourse based on method, or as Gadamer argues, neutralized by western metaphysics.

Plato prepares the ground for aesthetic discussion of the beautiful. He nonetheless also thinks of the concept of the beautiful non-aesthetically.⁶⁵² Metaphysics delimits the concept beauty by delimiting it to aesthetics. The character of the beautiful, Gadamer argues, is the universal character of being. What Plato shows is that the speculative movement and mode of being has "a universal ontological significance."⁶⁵³ Gadamer reconstructs the "classical" Greek ideal of the beautiful for the modern reader to overcome the aestheticism of art, and point to the way art (and theory) to emphasize the speculative event presented by words and art, but most importantly to show Beauty engages us in self-evident appearance that is no longer contemplative but active, in the classical sense of *poiesis*.

⁶⁵¹ Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, p. 13.

⁶⁵² See, Heidegger's lectures on Holderlin in *Holderlin's Hymn 'The Ister'*. Translated by William McNeill and Julia Davis. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984. pp. 87-88.

⁶⁵³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 475.

The Platonic theory of beauty has an affinity with the universality of hermeneutics, Gadamer writes: “If we start from the basic ontological view that being is language – i.e., self-presentation – as revealed to us by the hermeneutic experience of being (or we can add the pure poem), then there follows not only the event-character of the beautiful and the event structure of all understanding. Just as the mode of being of the beautiful proved to be characteristic of being in general, so the same thing can be shown to be true of the *concept of truth*.”⁶⁵⁴

Art is not theoretical but like theory expresses the origins of conceptualization itself found in the weave of thinking and being. Art speaks to a belonging in which we participate and observe: we actively secure a place for ourselves in the art. Gadamer writes; “The experience of the work of art does not only understand a recognizable meaning, as historical hermeneutics does in its handling of texts. The work of art that says something confronts us itself. That is, it expresses something in such a way that what is said is like a discovery, a disclosure of something previously concealed.”⁶⁵⁵

The beautiful provides an image of something that discloses itself both by appearing, as a presentation and as a completion. Beauty is harmonious because it adequately shows something. Gadamer turns to speak of beauty as being a mode of light. Which means it is visible itself, not by making something else visible to us but by making itself visible.

The human sciences should be brought closer to the rhetorical speech so that they can honestly speak of their work as bringing ideas to presence, and of providing

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 487.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 487.

listeners with believable statements. According to Gadamer, sight becomes idea but only insofar as it “is only encountered in a form that resists *pure conceptualization*.”⁶⁵⁶ Art is likened to participatory understanding – to play. Commonality or participation is lost within the privatization of knowing that flows from the subjectivism and objectivism of modern social science.

Gadamer writes, “This is the focus of our question: What does it mean,” he writes, “to speak of the ‘coming forth of the word’ [*das Hervorkommen des Wortes*] in poetry?”⁶⁵⁷ Gadamer sees the being of truth in the way language and art can be shown to weave together our discourse on the world. It involves the possibility of communal understanding that does not involve the necessity of a predetermined structure (dogmatism) of the *logos*.

Truth speaks to the self-understanding of every person. We are bound to truth in our shared finitude. Truth lies within the human dimension of communication. Beauty and art both show that our understanding of truth concerns sharing that cannot be understood as in a model of total self-certainty, clarity, objectivity and transparency. Gadamer writes: “the language of art is constituted precisely by the fact that it speaks to the self-understanding of every person, and it does this as something ever present and by means of its own contemporaneity.”⁶⁵⁸ Art, Gadamer says, has its *being* in the *Vollzug* – the vital, living event of its appearing, or its performance.”⁶⁵⁹ Gadamer says,

⁶⁵⁶ Gadamer, “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, p. 37.

⁶⁵⁷ Gadamer, “On the Truth of the Word,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p. 143.

⁶⁵⁸ Gadamer, “Aesthetics and Hermeneutics,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 100.

⁶⁵⁹ Gadamer, “The Art Work in Word and Image,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p. 215.

“I take a different approach to the question of what truth, *aletheia*, or unconcealment really means. I invoke the concept of *energeia* here, which has special values because in dealing with it we are no longer in the realm of sentence truth.”⁶⁶⁰ We cannot do this with any method; rather, truth and living, is a part of all understanding, a part of our hermeneutic being. Art then, has its being in this vital event of appearing and this agrees with the “Greek teachings about beauty and its application.”⁶⁶¹

His vision of art agrees with his conceptual reflections on the Greek concept of beauty. However, we are presented with a paradox if what comes forth cannot be explained, or rather “cannot be put into words.” What we have to understand is that Gadamer is saying we have language and language understands, within limits, yet produces because of the fact that presentation may hold something back within itself and does not yield entirely to our comprehension. Art speaks. Art shares something along with all speaking, since like speaking it is “more than an anticipation of meaning. It is what I would like to call surprise at the meaning of what is said. [...] The work of art that says something confronts us itself. That is, it expresses something in such a way that what is said is like a discovery, a *disclosure of something previously concealed*.”⁶⁶² This must be understood as active in relation to us, as something having a reality for us, where the lyrical and ethical are linked. Gadamer speaks of the Greek concept of *energeia*, of the simultaneity of activity and reality. Like understanding speech, we understand something more than what appears in the wording of what is said, Gadamer describes as a unity of meaning that “always transcends what is expressed by what it

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 213.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid. p. 215.

⁶⁶² Gadamer, “Aesthetics and Hermeneutics,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 101.

said.”⁶⁶³ Art then consists in the way we experience this while “it both conceal[s] itself and at the very same time authenticates itself.”⁶⁶⁴

Richard Bernstein and the Question of Truth in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics

By contrast, the ideal of knowledge, determined by the concept of method, “consists in pacing out a path of knowledge so consciously that it is always possible to retrace one’s steps. *Methodos* means a path of recreated investigation. Always to be able once again to go over the ground one has traversed, that is methodical and distinguishes the procedures of science.” In *What is Truth?* Gadamer remarks:

There is [also] much in the human sciences that can be brought under the concept of method of modern science. Each of us must allow as valid the verifiability of all knowledge-claims as an ideal at the limits of possibility. But we must admit that this idea is very seldom reached and that those researchers who are the most precise in striving for it often do not have the truly important things to say.⁶⁶⁵

Richard Bernstein has written a comprehensive and eloquent account of Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, nevertheless he challenges the significance of Gadamer’s concept of truth.⁶⁶⁶ He seeks a *positive* concept of truth, and, to put it simply, Gadamer is asserting a *negative* understanding of truth (which he says includes echoes of Hegel). This puts the matter rather simply, but it captures the way Gadamer draws on the Greek sense of *aletheia* of concealment and revealment. Bernstein feels that in the end we do not get a clear distinction between the meanings of truth and “the

⁶⁶³ Ibid. p. 101.

⁶⁶⁴ Gadamer, “The Art Work in Word and Image,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Works*, p. 214.

⁶⁶⁵ Gadamer, “What is Truth?” in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, pp. 33-41.

⁶⁶⁶ See, Bernstein, “From Hermeneutics to Praxis,” in *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*, p. 168.

validation claims of truth” from Gadamer. In this way, Bernstein introduces Habermas’s critique of Gadamer.⁶⁶⁷

Bernstein objects to Gadamer’s devaluing Enlightenment thinking. He thinks that Gadamer is not providing an adequate hermeneutical account of its political and social roots. He sees this as a fundamental ambiguity in Gadamer’s treatment of the human sciences. He writes:

There is a fundamental unresolved ambiguity in Gadamer’s philosophy concerning the social sciences. However much one recognizes the importance of the hermeneutical dimension of the social sciences, one must also forthrightly confront those aspects of these disciplines that seek to develop theoretical and causal explanation of social phenomena. Sometimes – and Gadamer’s remarks about the social sciences are very sparse – he writes as though they are like underdeveloped natural sciences, implying that it is essential for us to realize their limited relevance,” because they never tell us how they are to be applied.⁶⁶⁸

Bernstein’s argument can be challenged because it is evident he is asking of Gadamer what Gadamer is not proposing. Gadamer is not proposing a theory of science, although he retains a vision of that culture. What Gadamer does want to say is that both sciences and human inquiry reside in a fundamental conception of the beautiful. This is not about the adequacy or inadequacy of his view of science, or the human sciences, but his view of the wider question of our relationship to theory as either alienating or non-alienating. Bernstein has not addressed Gadamer’s discussion of beauty adequately. He overlooks the way this poses a question about what a philosopher’s discourse is and what a philosophical life is.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 168.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid. pp. 160-161.

Bernstein does not see it as a question of philosophical writing itself or the manner and way we take up theoretical writing. It means that to arrive at any assent in dialogue involves more than validity claims. Truth involves overcoming oneself in the process of theoretical discussion, not just an artificial agreement or consent with others driven by a methodological stance but through a stance that anticipates dialogue.

Beauty, as a concept, is a counterpoint to the alienation of dialogue. James Risser notes that: “For Gadamer, the mimetic field, although endless by virtue of its practical performance (which we describe as the temporal aspect of theory), is not a house of mirrors without a referent, an endless play of a copy copying a copy. Rather to be caught up within the mimetic field is to be caught in a play of truth.”⁶⁶⁹

Bernstein claims that truth, in *Truth and Method*, never becomes “fully thematic.” Truth though is not something that is “fully thematic” or “true”. As if there is a truth of truth. We are still able to say things that we cannot fully thematized. However, this does not exclude truth. Truth signifies a limit on the thematic, not the exclusion of judgment, but rather alludes to the way we think we are acquainted with what we know. Bernstein seems to capture, but not capture what this implies for any critique of metaphysics. Perhaps the problem is that Bernstein is still within the problematic of metaphysics and construes the debate as purely a duality, rather than seeing that what Gadamer seeks is a reconfiguration of our prejudice for metaphysical thinking.

⁶⁶⁹ Risser, James. “The Imaging the Truth in Philosophical Hermeneutics.” In *Phenomenology, Interpretation, and Community*. Edited by Lenore Langsdorf and Stephen H. Watson with E. Marya Bower. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996. p. 166.

We are reminded, once again, of Gadamer's thesis: "The humanities and the social sciences, whose honor I am trying to defend by offering a more appropriate theoretical justification, really belong in the same line of succession, and have the same heritage as philosophy."⁶⁷⁰

Critique is in an awareness of our hermeneutic situation that implies a relationship to the question of *Being* [*Sein*] insofar as being is self-reflection in the universality of language [*being-in-language*]. Gadamer has said: "We encounter the world as we encounter another human. Speech makes Being accessible, we are accessible to one another, and this is not a matter, as we know, of an appropriate method – a *methodos* of logic."

Anthony Giddens spoke of the theorist/theory as a "subject standing over and against as 'object' – our world of 'objects'". Giddens summarizes the logic of *methodos*, one that estranges truth from theory. But Giddens theorizing is deeply wedded to a view of theory, like modernity, as something apart from us; between lay culture and theory culture. The distinction of the human sciences then is not that they are sciences but that they address us when "we repeatedly come to realize something we did not know before, something we have always wanted to know. What they offer has first to be said to us and then we respond by saying, 'I understand.'" ⁶⁷¹ Giddens, however, is not interested to hear what addresses us but rather he wants to validate "theory" (sociological knowledge) as a knowledge that "spirals in and out of the universe of social life, reconstructing both itself and that universe as an integral part of that

⁶⁷⁰ *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, p. 53.

⁶⁷¹ See, *Gadamer in Conversation, Reflections and Commentary*. Edited by Richard E. Palmer, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2001. p. 50.

process.”⁶⁷² Thus, conceding to a hermeneutic vision, but clearly staying within a metaphysical pattern of thinking. Understanding is not the apprehension of an object over which we stand; rather, understanding is an event of our being in language, of our being in the world.

Beauty concerns a self-attestation and presentation that is inherent to theory too. A concept tells me what it wants to say; beauty reminds us of the occasions when there is a closing of the gap between idea and appearance, when our belonging to speech and concepts, is quite different to concepts that seek *self-transparency* (the absolute assumption of “scientific” consciousness), or mastery. Concepts rather can disclose something in a harmonious way within themselves.⁶⁷³ Concepts speak to us; this is the truth of a concept, and we learn this with the concept of beauty.

Beauty shows how speech and human understanding is not about mastering something that stands opposite us; it is not simply a question of knowledge but more importantly is a matter of understanding. Understanding occurs as an ethical relationship. A question happens; we can recognize what someone is saying or what they want to say as an unthematized truth. Beauty is not thematic, we have seen. We share in the possibility of a universal agreement. Thematizing something simply fails to acknowledge how things come to appearance in speech, how something is shared that has already placed me in relationship to others. Beauty shares itself without conceptual definition. When we are caught in the self-objectifying tendency of the mastery of doing a “science” the human scientist sets in play a self-alienation from the core nature of the theorizing self. To self-annul what already concerns me as well as others, is to

⁶⁷² Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, p. 15-16.

⁶⁷³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 481.

alienate myself. Beauty, however, shows us how we have access to a non-objectifying sense of the truth.

What Gadamer's discussion of the beautiful allows us to see, I argue, is that the whole can become visible to us in speech. Each of us can agree, should we wish, to an assertion not purely by argument but by the play of speech that aims to say what is true, especially, of things that we cannot subsume under the language of science.

Chapter 6.

The Nature of Theory

It is not easy for the human sciences to find the right understanding for the nature of their work with the public at large. What truth is to them, what disseminates from them, is difficult to make visible.⁶⁷⁴

Our concluding chapter takes up two challenges to Gadamer's conception of truth and theory. Before I turn to discuss both Richard Bernstein and Karl-Otto Apel, I want to clarify further the context for the claim that theory is an ethical and lyrical practice, and, second, why, I have adopted the broader term 'poetics'. Once again our chapter takes up the argument that Gadamer's hermeneutic theory grasps the truth of the human sciences. As I have argued at length, the human sciences have phrased this matter in divergent ways, but what should by now be clear is that the question of truth and theory recurs in different ways. One of these is Zygmunt Bauman's declaration, which, I think summarizes the question:

We sociologists rarely write poems and yet, if we do not share the fate of "false poets" and resent being "false sociologists," *we ought to come close as the true poets do to the yet hidden human possibilities* [my emphasis]; and for that reason we need to pierce the walls of the obvious and self-evident, of the prevailing ideological fashion of the day whose commonality is taken for proof of its sense.⁶⁷⁵

⁶⁷⁴ Gadamer, "Truth in the Human Sciences," in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, p. 25.

⁶⁷⁵ Bauman, "Afterthoughts: On Writing and Writing Sociology," In *Liquid Modernity*, p. 203.

Bauman reaches toward a rhetorical conception of theory. Bauman's conception of theory, I argue, is the meeting point between historical concepts, new concepts, and living conversation with theory as it moves within contemporary social life as the language of insight. Bauman reinvents his own language, like a writer of prose, he is not encumbered by a conceptual machinery of disciplinary rhetoric. Social life resides in his prose style. His is not a "sociology" of "objects", but rather, it is a language that is more musical than scientific, (Socrates in the *Phaedo* said his work was 'music' for this was what he was already doing) as we enter along with his concepts we enter into a public discussion. That discussion is conceptually illuminating and that brings us closer to being at home (a comportment in which we hold ourselves) in what is being said. Thus, we are no longer alienated by the prose of a thinker who is theorizing our world. Theory concerns conceptual work that we are already doing but becomes misplaced when we conform to the ideal of scientific theory. It is here that social theorists recognize that they are out of sync with what they are actually doing because it was self-alienating. Bauman's own prose and concept formation echoes the memorable way Socrates spoke of his task. Bauman reaches toward the listener and shares his concepts without the distraction of methodological pretensions.

Here we see how Bauman identifies the poet's special power, in relation to the practice of writing theory in the human sciences. The implication is that it is the power of the word to redirect our thinking, to mobilize our moral sense, and break through objectification and its alienating walls. When Gadamer identified the problem of the human sciences in terms of the dimension of self-creation over that of self-alienation that has plagued the human sciences in their traditional self-conception, his project

converges in some measure with Bauman's formulation. And in answer to Bauman we argue that it is the hermeneutic dimension of being humans that opens toward speech that is not false, for it concerns how we take up ourselves as we speak. Hence, as we have seen, Gadamer's way of drawing upon the Greek conception of thinking and self-discovery as dialogue now emerges through Bauman's own formulation of sociology and poetics.

For Gadamer, "Our verbal experience of the world is prior to everything that is recognized and addressed as existing."⁶⁷⁶ This means we can say that true meaningfulness for example, in the human sciences, concerns a deeper question than what their scientific self-understanding might provide. It points to the ethical and moral dimension of thinking that came into view with the ethical paradox of sociological discourse.

Alan Blum, we may recall, calls for a change in the sociologist's relationship to the "language of sociology." Like Gadamer, Blum identified the problems of sociology in terms of the rules of creation of their speech. Speech transforms its objects of study into external objects (thus rationalizing the other) bringing about a paradox (rationalization of the self) through the inner speech of the sociologist. Blum puts the problem this way, "Talk about 'solving problems' then permits the sociologist to speak as if he has an independent criterion for deciding the adequacy of sociology because it

⁶⁷⁶ In *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], Gadamer writes, "That language and world are related in a fundamental way does not mean, then, that world becomes the object of language. Rather, the object of knowledge and statements is always already enclosed within the world horizon of language." p. 447.

sounds as if the problem is external to sociologizing itself rather than a product of its creation.”⁶⁷⁷

Bauman contextualizes the problem as a product of the paradox of the human sciences in postmodernity. In *Intimations of Postmodernity*, he points out that a changed social reality requires a new relationship to modernity found in a reorientation to both social reality and the reality of sociological theory, both of which require grasping the connection between speech and theorizing. Sociology’s need for new strategies, to generate sociological discourse as ethical discourse requires what he calls the “sociology of postmodernity.” This is a two-fold demand to respond to the changes in society and a sociological discourse to capture these changes. The shift concerns, in his view, with the replacement of one ethical discourse (the objective, trans-local and impersonal truth) of modernity, with another, that is hermeneutic in conception.

Hermeneutic universality places into the context the ethical and linguistic dimension of being human (our lyrical and ethical being), that, to use Blum’s conception, concerns how “What I hear my-self speak (voice) must be converted into some thing that all can hear,”⁶⁷⁸ so that, in this *listening*, we can now change our relationship to the scientific self-understanding of the human sciences, thereby challenging our self-conception and our relationship to the human sciences and, consequently the way we think we are using the language of sociology. In this regard, both Gadamer and Bauman identify how speech and sense lie at the root of this “ethical paradox of modernity” that is also the ethical paradox of theorizing.

⁶⁷⁷ Blum, *Theorizing*, pp. 237-238.

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p. 131.

Zygmunt Bauman will be our example of this new self-understanding of the human sciences. We will also discuss the arguments of Karl-Otto Apel and Alan Blum, mentioned above, and revisit the singular significance of Plato once more, in order to further illuminate Gadamer's position.

When we go back to the Greek idea of understanding the world, as we have seen, we see that *theoria* is conceived as an overwhelming presence that is accessible to all in common. Further, were the truth of Being enters in this commonality through the sharing of language in dialogue. *Theoria* concerns sharing one self with the other in speech. Our original belonging together, of man to Being, traverses ancient and modern conceptions of theory. An autonomous, neutral, and objective character of speech, ruptures the interweaving of the one and the many, reducing social life to an object, and not the truth effect of speech.

Theory, then, concerns "belonging to" something, which we experience in our questioning; It is not simply something that we possess, since if thinking were only a possession we would be estranged from truth. Theory is the "onto" - "logical" structure of self-differentiation. Theory is not simply the production and reproduction of a neutral body of knowledge. Theory carries this contradictory movement, truth as non-contradiction, and to the art of discourse and rhetoric that Vattimo reminds us asserts itself as ethical stance.⁶⁷⁹ In the Greek view, theory was *methexis*, (participation); the modern human sciences then reveal to us the paradox of theory that attempts to detach itself from *methexis*.

⁶⁷⁹ See, Vattimo, "Truth and Rhetoric in Hermeneutic Ontology," p. 135.

We are inescapably connected to our participation in conversations that make it possible to convey thoughts, a theme that recurs throughout his discussion of theory. A central theme of Gadamer's thinking is Plato's dialectic. Gadamer notes that the "doctrine of ideas" is a defense against Parmenides' thesis, a way of thinking as questioning. Thus: "dialectic is the art of conversation and includes the art of having a conversation with oneself and fervently seeking an understanding of oneself. It is the art of thinking. But this means the art of seriously questioning what one really means when one thinks or says this or that."⁶⁸⁰ For Gadamer, the Platonic dialogue is thinking as questioning, a journey where one is never satisfied with what they are saying. Theory, therefore, is a "good" because it is a desire of speech to speak the good, as we see in the figure of Socrates. Theorizing does not concern simply putting something at our disposal, but rather, "constantly points beyond itself. The work that goes on in a Platonic dialogue has its way of expressing this: it points toward the One, toward Being, toward the Good which is present in the order of the soul, in the constitution of the city, and in the structure of the world."⁶⁸¹

Speaking is already interpretation; it is normative and shared; but it is also the place where we are already on the way to truth. Such a questioning inquiry (question and answer) is what characterizes the human sciences and positions them in truth: that is, in the power of their conceptual speech and not the power of the use of scientific

⁶⁸⁰ Gadamer, "Autobiographical Reflections," in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p. 31.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid. p. 31.

methods that traditionally defines them.⁶⁸² Gadamer argues that the ideality of meaning of the word shows that “it is meaningful already,” thus our “experience of the world is not wordless to begin with.” Rather, “experience of itself seeks and finds the right words that express it.”⁶⁸³ Understanding, conceptual words are not solely or purely technical⁶⁸⁴ but are part of the dialogic capacity of the speaker. When words are perceived as tools they lose purchase on us, they are no longer authentic words of speech or theory, words that we can experience both as true and as a part of our experience.

We dwell in speech that accesses Being. There is no way of fully encompassing language, for its capacity for truth resides, as it were, in the *ontic* mystery of speaking⁶⁸⁵ summarized in Heidegger’s remark: “Being that can be understood is language.” Truth exists in the mysterious balance of the “onto” - “logical”,⁶⁸⁶ Being and language. That untruth inheres in the concept of knowledge itself is productive of knowledge.⁶⁸⁷ Thus, there is no outside to the word that struggles to speak more authentically or truthfully to us. Heidegger’s later direct turn to “poetic thinking” (a thinking in his view, that is genuinely philosophical rather than technically

⁶⁸² Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], pp.481- 484. “Throughout our investigation it has emerged that the certainly achieved by using scientific methods does not suffice it guarantee truth.” p. 484.

⁶⁸³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 415.

⁶⁸⁴ “A word whose meaning is univocally defined, inasmuch as it signifies a defined concept. A technical term is always somewhat artificial insofar as either the word itself is artificially formed or – as is more frequent – a word already in use has the variety and breadth of its meaning excised and signed only one particular meaning.” Adding, “Using a technical term is an act of violence against language.” Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second Revised Edition], p. 415.

⁶⁸⁵ Heidegger, *Parmenides*, p. 12.

⁶⁸⁶ From the Translator’s Epilogue to Heidegger’s *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, pp.88-99.

⁶⁸⁷ Gadamer, “Parmenides and Being,” in *The Beginning of Philosophy*, pp. 107-125.

scientific) follows his early conviction that language is not simply a medium for conveying meaning. Gadamer conceptualizes the difference between ancient and modern theory this way:

The difference between Greek *theoria* and modern science is based, in my opinion, on different orientations to verbal experience of the world. Greek knowledge, as I pointed out above, was so much within language, so exposed to its seductions, that its fight against the *dunamis ton onomaton* never led it to develop the idea of a pure symbolic language, whose purpose would be to overcome entirely the power of language, as it is with modern science its orientation toward dominating the existent.⁶⁸⁸

Speech lies at the center of life and theory. The Greeks recognized this in their view that life can be understood only with a philosophy of dialogue. The *logos*, argument by reason does not, as Plato knew, fill the space of persuasion and understanding fully. Speech concerns a sharing [being-with-others], yet speech that aspires to “pure reason” is not able to sustain a sense of communal life. Conversation and argument entail, in some measure, both crafting of stories and conceptual invention. Theory creatively assembles our words into a communal communication that becomes effective as an understandable way to read the world.⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 451.

⁶⁸⁹ Richard Sennett, addresses his relationship, as a theorist, to his style of writing, in *Together, The Rituals, Pleasure and Politics of Cooperation*, where he points out that writing is a cooperative practice, a communal action, with the reader. He writes, “I want to practice cooperation on the page.”⁶⁸⁹ Sennett, Richard. *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012. p. 30. Here conversation, between teacher and student, is, in the sense that Plato understood, about how a teacher leads a student to enter knowledge in sharing conversation together, thus, as Plato says, progressing toward “many beautiful discoveries” (150D7-8) that, due to their taking up of ideas for themselves, now appear to come entirely from “within themselves (*par’ hauton*: 150D7).”⁶⁸⁹ See, Sayre, Kenneth M. *Plato’s Literary Garden: How to Read a Platonic Dialogue*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995. pp. 17-18.

Clearly, the emphasis here on the reader/listener relationship concerns how speakers keep company with each other, with the argument of the philosopher.⁶⁹⁰ In other words, Plato's dialogues represent a sharing (cooperation) that happens in conversation as knowledge. Plato emphasized that knowledge takes place in conversation. Socrates did not simply see speaking as superior to writing, but that writing and speech, were a moral responsibility, the responsibility to speak and write truthfully. Speaking is never simply a technically neutral act.⁶⁹¹ Speaking, as well as our speaking-in-writing, animates the act of understanding. This would be equally true in writing theory. Theory then takes natural language, everyday language, as its resource to shape and transform its own speaking that is not simply a way of creating a symbolic language.

The human sciences are inescapably rhetorical. Theory seen as an ideal of a non-participating observer, the detached theorist (as a "scientist"), "neutral" and "scientific" speech [rhetoric], now contrasts with a notion of theory that "endeavor[s] instead to bring to our reflective awareness the commonality that binds everyone together."⁶⁹² We share theory, as we know, on a page (except when we bring it into a classroom or share it in a public speech) according to the power of speech, and the way we can bind one another in our written relations. In "To What Extent does Language

⁶⁹⁰ Sayre notes that in *Seventh Letter*, Plato speaks of conversations that include "well-disposed refutation by cross examination," also described as "question and answer without indulgence and ill-will (*eunioa*: 151C8)." Ibid. p. 17.

⁶⁹¹ "So, this then is quite clear: Writing speeches is not in itself a shameful thing. Ph. How could it be? So. It's not speaking or writing well that is shameful; what's really shameful is to engage in either of the shamefully or badly." Plato. *Phaedrus*. Translated and Introduced by Alexander Nehamas & Paul Woodruff. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995. p. 51.

⁶⁹² See, Gadamer, "Hermeneutics as a Theoretical and Practical Task," in *Reason in the Age of Science*, p. 135.

Perform Thought,” Gadamer writes: “The persuasive speech is one that binds one man to another or even with himself is so intuitive and living a way that they seem inseparable from one another can nevertheless take on the rigid form of written relations.”⁶⁹³ Theory then is a form of cooperation we enter into with a reader (audience). Theory concerns, therefore, how we participate in these conversations, about social life (and tradition), as well as how, when we participate, we are also in a conversation with ourselves.

Theory makes a claim upon us, concerning the good and the true; through a cooperation that resides in dialogic skill. Social life itself is a conversation⁶⁹⁴ rooted in cooperation. In one form or another, theory skills are a part of our social dialogue rooted in cooperation. Gadamer, then, in this respect, follows Aristotle, by recognizing that although we may not always understand, there might be something perhaps insufficient in our words, yet we, nonetheless, communicate, because conversation moves forward in our verbal play and listening; as Plato presented in the figure of Socrates. The theorist, then, aims at a balance between the two, finding the right way to speak and finding the right understanding. By following discourse with understanding (sharing in that discourse), either in living discussion or in theory, we aspire to be conceptually convincing. This is a persuasion that is founded on the rhetorical aspect of speech and dialogue [conversation] that completes itself with our experience of having to hand, in what we say, knowledge of the true.

⁶⁹³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second Revised Edition], p. 551.

⁶⁹⁴ Richard Brown sees social reality as symbolic [like a “text”] therefore, rhetoric is “central to the constitution of truth” and “there is no social reality that is not experience through the matrix of discourse.” Brown, *Society as Text: Essays on Rhetoric, Reason, and Reality*, p. 86.

The Rhetorical Nature of the Event of Truth

Hermeneutic truth is clearly not a truth proper to science; rather, hermeneutic truth permeates life and gives birth to science, but its base is speech (dialogue and dialectic). Hermeneutic truth, in fact, is the larger (ethical) context for mediating scientific understanding. The question of truth is something that returns to us, exemplified in the human sciences, and the question of theory, pointing back to Plato, and the Greeks. Gadamer's concerns, to answer why theory has become "truth in itself" and how the telling of truth, is enchanted with the methods of science.

Gianni Vattimo observes, "the rhetorical essence [of science], in a sense, of scientific logic itself is for the most part limited, however, to a generic acceptance of the conventionality of scientific paradigms,"⁶⁹⁵ adding: "If we take seriously Gadamer's discourse concerning the *theoria* and the *kalon* as sites of truth, then we must say that the moment of truth for science is not primarily that of the verification of its propositions or the laws that it discovers; rather, it consists in a "reconnection" to collective consciousness, and it too is therefore characterized in essentially rhetorical terms, though necessarily deeply colored with pragmatic concerns."⁶⁹⁶

Truth is in the speech event of natural language. It is the ground that makes possible all concept formation (which is why speech unfolds for Plato into dialectical enunciation that governs thinking critically and analytically, and why Socrates practices its art as an ethical commitment), that helps us further understand why the nature of

⁶⁹⁵ Vattimo, "Truth and Rhetoric in Hermeneutic Ontology," in *The End of Modernity*, p. 137.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 136.

social theory occurs inside of the practice of the truth of science, with its neutralizing capacity. The tension between a scientific speech and a non-scientific speech lies at the center of our concern, because understanding theory in the human sciences, involves consideration of both the style and rhetoric of concept formation, thus the limitations of scientific rhetoric to its concerns.

Truth is pervasive to life; truth shows the limits of deep metaphysical assumptions that guide modern thinking, and, specifically, the human sciences, whose authority rests on an ideal (of its own speaking) of a “scientific” theoretical knowledge. Gadamer notes in *Truth and Method*, “The point is to ask how far we can think language independently of the sign of representational conception of language that is governed by metaphysics.”⁶⁹⁷ Since their founding, the human sciences adopted specific knowledge claims and procedures for how they evaluate knowledge claims. But alongside this concern, there is a forgetting that unfolds in having adopted the ethics of the language of scientific speech (scientific speech is detached, neutral, “objective” etc.) that rests on an unquestioned metaphysical foundation. This “ghost,” as it were, haunts the human sciences and continues to haunt the question of theory.

Dennis Schmidt remarks: “Among the most distinctive trademarks of the hermeneutic approach to language is an effort to attend to a double force – both finitizing and fusing – of language in every human affair and to do so in a manner that resists any abstraction which results in the construction of an artificial rational language. Attentive to the self-effacement of language, its capacity to throw itself ever anew into the darkness beyond reach of its own reflexivity, hermeneutics has been first

⁶⁹⁷ Schmidt, “Putting Oneself in Words...” in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer. The Living of Philosophers Volume XXIV*. p. 419.

and foremost a theory alert to the finitude of all understanding and the compressions placed upon every human affair.”⁶⁹⁸

The Lyrical and Ethical Nature of Theory

It is to Gadamer’s first published study, *Plato’s Dialectical Ethics: Phenomenological Interpretations Relating to the Philebus* (1931) that we can turn to find the claim that coming to understanding appears “as the root of the theory of the dialectic in Plato’s critique of rhetoric in the *Phaedrus*.”⁶⁹⁹ Gadamer’s early writing, like many thinkers’ contains the one idea that will recur throughout a lifetime. Here, modernist perspective of modern theory may see the claim as a weakness which turns out to be strength. For Gadamer, in the Platonic dialogue we find a notion of incompleteness: what is signified is that we are always on the way to understanding. Di Cesare notes that it is “precisely from this weakness – as Gadamer writes in his study on “Dialectics and Sophism in the Seventh Platonic Letter” – the ‘productivity’ of dialectic will emerge.” Adding, “Every *diaeretic logos* always permits its own overcoming, because its unity arises from the interweaving of the many, which can always be dissolved anew.”⁷⁰⁰

Gadamer shares with Plato the idea that the movement of the dialectic refers back to the original movement of conversation, in saying and logos, and that Plato’s dialectic shows “the one in the many and the many in the one.”⁷⁰¹ For Plato speech is

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 485.

⁶⁹⁹ Gadamer, *Plato’s Dialectical Ethics: Phenomenological Interpretations Relating to the Philebus*, p. 83.

⁷⁰⁰ Di Cesare, *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait*, pp. 129-130.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid. p. 130.

the original mode by which people come to an understanding – namely, by questioning and answering. Speeches concern knowing how to bring about the possibility of “developing language in itself into a sufficient means of coming to an understanding” [*techne*], as well as knowing the individual forms of the soul (it is not simply about exchanging arguments), on which it intends to operate; dialectical speech rests on knowing of what one speaks, of the living dimension of theory-speech, knowing it as one might understand it oneself, and sharing of this speech with others by inviting them to participate in this understanding.

Ethical discourse is part of theory, because theory is a dialogue with the other, an invitation to share, not an abstraction of life (abstract ethics such as we find in Habermas), which, results in alienation. The living experience of theory then must be in some measure analogous to friendship, to a relationship with the other, to whom we speak and address ourselves.

Socrates’ apparent resistance to writing [*Phaedrus*], as we have now seen, is not simply a refusal of writing over speech but is an ethical action that says we cannot, as it were, forget the ethics of speech, even in writing. Theory is a deeply human task, not simply a technical task. Speaking is vital; it conveys the word as coming from the soul of the speaker. Socrates’ priority on speech “establishes community (sharing the soul, that also underpins the just, in contrast to the isolated, as discussed in

Cleitophon),⁷⁰² being one and being together, speech is knowing the whole. “The genuine art of rhetoric that Socrates presents in the *Phaedrus* is a human task.”⁷⁰³

Speaking together implies a genuine sharing. We come closer to those we wish to address, so the manner of our speech concerns not only good writing, but also an ethical encounter, the finding a genuine way of speaking to those we wish to address. Some writing then may be writing that converses with us, like some theory, too, that calls attention to its speech, as in the Platonic dialogue, as in Plato (Plato’s writings dramatize conversations), that concern not only the subject of speech but the way the subject of the discussion seeks a way to make theory speak to us.

Socrates’ conception of correct speech – what the standard is for a “good” speech – concerns more than style. But Style is not treated as mere embellishment, which naturally, Socrates does not do. Speaking or writing articulates us knowingly. The *Phaedrus* is a work that is self-reflective in construction. So even if we see the Platonic dialogue inviting their audience into them (into an on-going dialogue), it is yet another concern that is taken up in the *Phaedrus*.⁷⁰⁴ *Lysis*, offers a profound sense of how, as readers, through the activity of interesting, our experience of another as our own and their own as other, (either as speaker or writer) is essential to friendship. In other words, *Lysis* and *Phaedrus* address the concerns of true speech as well as shared

⁷⁰² See, Davis, Michael. “The Subject of Justice: On Plato’s *Cleitophon*.” In *The Soul of the Greeks: An Inquiry*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011. p. 164.

⁷⁰³ Nichols, *Socrates on Friendship and Community*, p. 139 & pp. 148-9. She writes: “Although Socrates has contrasted the playful written word with the serious spoken one, he now acknowledges that his own spoken words are playful.” Indeed, this may be the point that the playful and the serious are not exclusive of one another, but play together, where one plays in a measured way.

⁷⁰⁴ “Because Socrates’ and *Phaedrus*’ discussion of rhetoric includes a discussion of writing, moreover, the *Phaedrus* serves as Plato’s reflection on his own activity of writing dialogues.” Nichols, *Socrates on Friendship and Community*, p. 90.

community.⁷⁰⁵ The commonality of theoretical speech shares with its reader a sense of participation, the art of words, and is what resists alienating separation between theorist and reader.⁷⁰⁶

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates debates the question of the nature of the speechmaker and the quality of speech. One aspect of his argument concerns the art of words that is not simply about persuasion, but is encompassed by his terms “speech writing” or, “logographic necessity” where speech is created into a whole where all the parts “are written appropriately to each other and to the whole (264c).”⁷⁰⁷ This coherence is contrasted with the example of the butcher, since he describes the wholeness, as “living animal,” in this case, “by the time the butcher does his job, the living being is no more than a sum of its parts. Its unifying principle, its soul, and the cause of its motion has disappeared.”⁷⁰⁸

On the one hand, we learn that “logographic necessity,” i.e. consistency, is still not enough, even if practiced well. Something must be maintained within the art of writing and our searching for the right words, in the very art of this process that concerns, moreover, how we are leading someone through an argument. Speech, and writing not only connect one thing to another (collection and division), but also concern

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 194.

⁷⁰⁶ Not only in terms of the relationship between theory and everyday knowledge, but in that very configuration, in terms of the role of scientific speech and the way it impacts the self-comprehension of the reader as they enter into the dialogue that theory implies. The relationship between the sociologist and the public becomes a source itself of contention and suspicion. See, for example, Jonas and Knobl, *Social Theory: Twenty Introductory Lectures*, p. 2.

⁷⁰⁷ Nichols, *Socrates on Friendship and Community*, p. 127. Clearly, I am reworking Socrates through the insight of Mary Nichols writings, placing a specific emphasis on what we can learn about the nature of rhetoric from Plato’s writings.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 130.

how people connect together in a shared encounter (conversation constitutes understanding and sharing as well as being the essence of the dialectical), even if it is an audience of one, or many (even if the many are not the one). Socrates understands that his dialectical approach involves the way one is concerned with “soul leading,” rather than simply seeing rhetoric as a matter of persuasion.⁷⁰⁹

The shift to theory as dialogue now takes place. Dialogue is to be on the way to the concept that now rests on “arriving at a shared understanding that depends upon having in common a pre-understanding of the good.”⁷¹⁰ Dialectical speech, which Plato shows to be the truly philosophical speech, concerns this way of being with knowledge, of sharing, and learning together. Speech, specifically Socratic speech (becoming good dialecticians), involves sharing ourselves with others on the basis of the possibility of the common good, and with it, justice.⁷¹¹ In other words, the speech that isolates makes ordinary communication into a diction that self alienates resulting in a loss of solidarity; signifies the suffering of isolation (Bauman speaks of “loneliness”), and requires understanding as solidarity – the Greeks understood this concerned “friendship with one self.”⁷¹² And it is the growing sense of the way our interior dialogue is already an anticipation of our ethical relations, that the human sciences have a way to overcome their participation in an alienating discourse, found in a technocratic culture, since the very hermeneutic structure of theory concerns an open attitude to changing social

⁷⁰⁹ Nichols, *Socrates on Friendship and Community*, p. 125.

⁷¹⁰ Gadamer, *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, p. 63.

⁷¹¹ Davis, *The Soul of the Greeks*, p. 164.

⁷¹² Gadamer, “Isolation as a Symptom of Self-alienation,” in *Praise of Theory: Speeches and Essays*, p. 111.

reality as well as a changing social discourse that keeps open this interior dialogue with the other, by which we face new tasks and new problems.⁷¹³

Kenneth M. Sayre points out that Plato's *Phaedrus* turns to the question of speech and writing, because it is a work that seeks to discover that both writing and speaking concern the genuine path of shared learning. Autonomy and solidarity are played out in this pivotal dialogue as a question of ethical and lyrical speech. He notes: "That what commentators who dwell on these passages tend to overlook, however, is that in the passages immediately following the reference to writing as a kind of 'image', Socrates goes on to acknowledge the fully legitimate role for written language in the activity of the dialectic. Although the dialectician will place a higher value on activity planting and cultivating 'words accompanied by knowledge' in souls capable of learning – a task best pursued in actual conversation – another activity that is 'entirely noble' in itself is to sow these seeds of knowledge in a 'literary garden.'"⁷¹⁴

In the final instance, it should be clear that following Plato's conception of speech, we reached a conclusion regarding the nature and structure of social theory; that social theory matters when both the establishment of the "literary garden" and the technical "logographic necessity" coincide as they implant words "infused 'with knowledge' (*Phaedrus*, 276E7) that might germinate as 'living discourse' (*logon.....zonta*: 276A8) in the mind of the learner."⁷¹⁵

⁷¹³ Christopher Fynsk, says: "if theoretical discourse in the academy is marked by an absence of distress about the absence of community, this is also for sociopolitical and institutional reasons." Fynsk, "Community and the Limits of Theory," in *Community at Loose Ends*, p. 20.

⁷¹⁴ See Sayre, *Plato's Literary Garden*, p. 20.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.* Introduction, xvii.

Alan Blum on the Question of Theory

Alan Blum's two books, *Socrates, The Original and Its Images* (1972) and *Theorizing* (1974) consider the relation of the Greeks to the question of modern theory. Blum anticipates the shift we find in the later writings of Zygmunt Bauman. Bauman shares the idea that theorizing concerns the way we share what we have to say. Blum, we note, when speaking of how writing becomes present to all, remarks, "The theorist shows what he shares with all men by exemplifying what he writes about in his very writing."⁷¹⁶ Blum, like Gadamer, sees the Greeks as central to his own philosophical outlook. He also has his eyes on the question of the human sciences. What they share is, among other things, the perception that is summed up in Blum's remark that "to write about Socrates is to interact with him".⁷¹⁷ Blum's reading of the Greeks is linked to Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodology that in turn addressed the problems of the language of theory by approaching the self-reflective aspects of the structure of social speech.⁷¹⁸

Blum's investigation of Plato concerns theory and speech production as intimately woven into each other, how theorizing and living life bare upon each other, exemplifying one another in the figure of Socrates' conception of the art of speech.

Blum formulates Socrates' concern with speech in the following remarks:

Socrates asks: how does speech as a thing acquire value by virtue of its relationship to the worthy, the excellent and the valuable? How does speech acquire value through its relationship to what is not a thing? Thus, Socrates quest for the value of speech, for its reason or for the Good, which it fulfils,

⁷¹⁶ Blum, *Theorizing*, p. 131.

⁷¹⁷ Blum, *Socrates: The Original and Its Image*, p. 12.

⁷¹⁸ Ethnomethodology sought to "de-reify" sociological speech, its abstractions of social phenomena as given, objective, and thing-like.

asks for the difference speech makes between the valuable and the common. From this day on, Socrates forces speech to defend itself by conceiving itself as a contribution of value; it demands of speech that it comprehends its requirements to make a Real difference where such a comprehension is shown in speech it-self as the difference that is Real.⁷¹⁹

Blum explains, the question of the connection between commonality [social consciousness] and rhetoric. He writes:

Where the problem for theorizing lay in the differences to which theorizing was a response, the standard for resolving the problem was anchored in an ideal commonality reformulated as the necessary condition of the failure of unity. The theorist, speaking under the auspices of such a standard with concrete expectation, would silence difference, i.e. would quiet rhetoric.”⁷²⁰ Echoing Gadamer’s ideas, Blum notes that it was otherwise, especially for Plato, because, “what we moderns took as difference – as a concrete, empirical starting point for the problem to be resolved – is actually a display of commonality, the community in which speaking unfolds and which is affirmed in the very act of speaking.”⁷²¹

Blum tells us that there is a silent center in sociology, an isolation that sets up an inside and outside, a break between theorist and public. The dialogue between theorist and public is one of alienation. Theory concerns, in part, the problem of commonality, as it was for Plato; it concerns the unity and universality of speaking and the differences that it must embody. Blum writes: “The modern view isolates the theorist from that about which he speaks because the unity of difference about which he speaks is itself a production of a unity of understandings of which it is an appearance.”⁷²² By silencing the rhetorical dimension of theory, theory in effect conceals its own grounds. Blum says: “The version of theory as a silencing of rhetoric

⁷¹⁹ Blum, *Socrates: The Original and Its Image*, p.153.

⁷²⁰ Ibid. p. 179.

⁷²¹ Ibid. p. 179.

⁷²² Ibid. p. 179.

through the creation of unity overlooks the question of the unity in which the very speaking that is theorizing is grounded: theory displays a unity already achieved.”⁷²³

Karl-Otto Apel on the Ethics of Discourse.

Key to Apel’s writings is to repel any conception of the poetic in theory. When he asks, “How do words create understanding and acquire validity and authenticity? How do the words we speak, speak truly?” he argues that a word makes a claim to validity as we do in speaking it.⁷²⁴ In poetry and literature, Gadamer, shows that the text speaks to us, like theory, because it is speaking in “nobody’s name, not the name of a god or a law, but from itself.”⁷²⁵ Gadamer, therefore, emphasizes the truth of the word in the context communicating something that is not just a statement (nor an utterance that concerns validity claims), but as he puts it, how the word can “exist in itself,” and, “lifts and grants itself a claim about being.”⁷²⁶

Between Gadamer and Apel lies the difference of how we achieve a conception of truth-theoretical speech, in other words, how we reach understanding. Apel says even if truth as context bound is true, if we are “always understanding differently” as we manifest unmeaning, the “fact related truth of validity claims is not yet sufficiently determined by the factual manifestation of meaning. Rather, it requires some additional fact-related insight to access it, and this insight needs to be counterfactually valid at any time, namely, for an infinite community of

⁷²³ Ibid. p. 181.

⁷²⁴ Gadamer, “On the Truth of the Word,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of Later Writings*, p. 133.

⁷²⁵ Ibid. p. 147.

⁷²⁶ Ibid. p.134.

interpreters.”⁷²⁷ What makes a word a telling word is not its verification but its validity among speech partners, for it holds out the possibility for further discussion and progress in speaking to one another [dialogue].⁷²⁸ The dialectic of the word emphasizes the speculative nature of language itself, that there is something in the words that brings forth meaning, what Gadamer describes as the “inner dimension of multiplication,” that is not about a pre-given meaning but about the event in which “meaning announces itself.”⁷²⁹

We can identify the points that begin to clarify our understanding of theoretical utterance: a distinction that recognizes validity of theory over verification of theory, and, the dialectic of the word over nominalism. What are the knowledge-claims of the human sciences founded on? Does the hermeneutics of speech, in other words, make knowledge claims that are part of what we mean by theory? For Gadamer, “The word has a collective meaning and implies a social relationship,” therefore meaning occurs in the virtuality of speaking the word.⁷³⁰

⁷²⁷ Apel, Karl-Otto. “Regulative Ideas or Truth-Happening?: An Attempt to Answer the Question of the Conditions of the Possibility of Valid Understanding.” In *Karl-Otto Apel Selected Essays: Volume Two, Ethics and the Theory of Rationality*. Edited by Eduardo Mendieta. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996. p. 75.

⁷²⁸ Overall, a view of validity and verification is discussed in terms of theory making in the social sciences, since, it is often said that a theory requires some sort of empirical support, See, for example, Bryant, Anthony and Kathy Charmaz. *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory*. London: Sage Publications, 2012. “If we think of validity as the extent to which a theory is well-grounded empirically and conceptually, then we can better appreciate the importance of theoretical consistency as well as accuracy” p. 19. Theory is seen essentially as the testing of a hypothesis requiring “logic of validation.” In other words, theory is a method.

⁷²⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 464.

⁷³⁰ Gadamer, “On the Truth of the Word,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of Later Writings*, p. 133.

Apel engages Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy by sharing an awareness of the difficulty of locating the truth power of communicative utterances in the age of science. Apel writes, "the philosophical task of rationally grounding a general ethics never seems to have been so difficult as it is in the scientific age. This is because in our time the notion of intersubjective validity is also prejudged by science, namely by the scientific notion of normatively neutral or value-free science."⁷³¹ Gadamer naturally would not nor could not entertain the notion of an "intersubjective validity" that would somehow structure the experience of language and truth. Apel writes of his overall project this way: "My chief thesis will be that the hermeneutic dimension of the social sciences as well as the necessity and possibility of its normative foundation can only be understood if epistemology is, as a whole, no longer grounded by recourse to the *subject-object* relation of cognition but rather by recourse to a transcendental-pragmatic structure of communicative understanding and consensus formation about something in the world."⁷³²

Apel argues that we have to choose between a regulative idea and truth-happening.⁷³³ Gadamer and Apel, see a deep rift between understanding and progress, but the differences are informative. For now, how do we understand this two-fold movement of theory between truth and rationality that for Apel concerns making valid

⁷³¹ Apel, "The *apriori* of the Communication Community and the Foundations of Ethics: The Problem of a Rational Foundation of Ethics in a Scientific Age," in *Karl-Otto Apel: Selected Essays, Volume Two: Ethics and the Theory of Rationality*, p. 1.

⁷³² Apel, "The Hermeneutic Dimension of the Social Sciences," in *Karl-Otto Apel: Selected Essays, Volume Two: Ethics and the Theory of Rationality*, p. 294.

⁷³³ This question is taken up in Apel's work, "Regulative Ideas or Truth-Happening: An Attempt to Answer the Question of the Conditions of the Possibility of Valid Understanding" in *Karl Otto Apel Selected Essays: Volume Two, Ethics and the Theory of Rationality*.

judgments or understandings? To grasp this, we must see that the original place of truth lies in an undecided relation we have to the metaphysical concept of truth. So, Gadamer's concern is at once to reread the question of truth, but to do this in relation to the human sciences.

Theory should not be consumed by hermeneutics, according to Apel; rather, what we need is recourse to a Kantian conception of the *a priori* of reason with a "transcendental conception" of the speaking subject. Such a subject is guided by a rationality that applies to all communicative utterances concerning agreement and validity. His appeal, then, is to the autonomy of the reason that rests on an interior transcendental ideal that guides all speech. In Apel's eyes, Gadamer's hermeneutics would, in effect, present an obstacle to social theory insofar as it would relinquish the transcendental touchstone of understanding.⁷³⁴ To understand how the human sciences bring things to thought such that they can be shared and recognized as valid arguments requiring thoughtful consideration is not the matter of propositional truth, but how language happens to us, how we mediate our understanding through language, prior to any propositional truth. Setting before us the question of hermeneutics as validity? Gadamer's critics argue, how does the structure of argumentative discourse claim

⁷³⁴ Karl-Otto Apel says that by giving up the *a priori* of a subject-object relation, and thus the idea that social theory can be understood as "methodological" and replacing it with a self mediation with tradition (what he terms "truth-happening") "there can be no factual reference for hermeneutic understanding which allows for progress in knowledge." Apel, "Regulative Ideas or Truth Happening? An Attempt to Answer the Question of the Conditions of the Possibility of Valid Understanding," in *Karl-Otto Apel Selected Essays: Volume Two, Ethics and the Theory of Rationality*, p. 77. Apel, however, is not using the conception of objectivity as an ideal of natural science "as a possible paradigm for factual reference of hermeneutic understanding."

validity?⁷³⁵ Or, that hermeneutics cannot provide justification for a regulative principle of possible progress.⁷³⁶ Underlying Habermas' and Apel's view is the question of public dialogue and expert opinion (including the role of the human sciences in adopting this position). Habermas' work, especially, after the shift to language, was to understand the underpinnings of social theory.⁷³⁷

Concerned with the implications of a theory of truth happening, Apel explains: "I should like to go back to the structure of argumentative discourse. This represents that a form of reflection of communicative understanding which philosophy – including 'philosophical hermeneutics' – take for granted in the context of the justification of validity. Should this form of reflection, in turn, only be conceivable as an instance of a historically located meaning – and truth happening? Or should it, as a condition of the possibility of validity of its philosophical function of reflection, imply an intersubjective, and hence historically independent, validity claim *per se*?"⁷³⁸

Theory ["universally valid norms and regulative ideas" of theory], in Apel's view, is not a "truth-happening" like art.⁷³⁹ But in *Truth in the Human Sciences*, Gadamer writes: "The fruitfulness of a knowledge claim in the human sciences appears

⁷³⁵ Apel, "Regulative Ideas or Truth Happening?" in *Karl-Otto Apel Selected Essays: Volume Two, Ethics and the Theory of Rationality*, p. 77.

⁷³⁶ Ibid. p. 98.

⁷³⁷ The language of technocratic ideology for Habermas required a context where one would be free of distortion, where the public is not reduced to technocratic speech. For Apel, it was the problem of a reduction of language to a "poetics" of "truth-happening." See, *Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Politics and Society*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971, and the later work, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Volumes 1 & 2), Boston: Beacon Press, 1985.

⁷³⁸ Ibid. p. 78.

⁷³⁹ Ibid. p. 84.

more closely related to the intuition of the artist than the methodological spirit of the scientist.”⁷⁴⁰

Apel responds to the hermeneutic position with an attempt to stabilize a critical social theory, by adopting what he calls the “normative presuppositions” that all participants in dialogue, and in theory making, would need to have adopted to avoid what he calls a “performative contradiction.”⁷⁴¹ Truth happening [of speech] occurs in the natural setting of language, especially, as we move toward, or through, the art of words, in a conversation. Plato’s dialogues themselves traverse and announce openness to truth, the truth of what we can say (or hear), since the truth of being and being true are happening in speech and are made possible by speech, suggesting a specific connection between truth and rhetoric.⁷⁴² What permits Gadamer to speak of truth is

⁷⁴⁰ Gadamer, “Truth in the Human Sciences,” in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, p. 26.

⁷⁴¹ These, in summary are: Apel’s normative presuppositions for the structure of social theory: 1) Philosophers strive to achieve *consensus* on *validity* of their own *validity claims* in principle with all (ideally, with all possible) partners in the discourse [...], 2) When arguing, philosophers necessarily have at least the following *four validity claims* [...]. 2.1. Philosophers must have a claim on *intersubjectively sharable meanings* of their speech acts as a precondition of all further validity claims [...]. 2.2. In *theoretical discourse*, the *claim to truth* of the claim to the unlimited capacity for consensus of assertions must be at the forefront. [...]. 2.3. A precondition of any further validity claims – along with the *claim to meaning* – is the *claim to truthfulness*, which refers to subjective intentions. [...]. 2.4. A precondition of the exposition of the *claims to truth* as claim that can be accepted or rejected in a – in principle unlimited – community of communication is an *ethically relevant claim to rightness* in every argument [...]. It is clear that there are supposedly no ontological claims made here. Apel, Karl-Otto. “Regulative Ideas or Truth happening?: An Attempt to Answer the Question of the Conditions of the Possibility of Valid Understanding.” In *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, The Living of Philosophers Volume XXIV*. Edited by Lewis Edwin Hahn. Chicago: Open Court, 1997. pp. 86-87.

⁷⁴² Vattimo, “Truth and Rhetoric in Hermeneutic Ontology,” in *The End of Modernity*, writes: “Hermeneutic truth, which is the experience of truth to which hermeneutics refers and which it understands to be exemplified by the experience of art, is essentially rhetorical.” p. 135.

that he, in following Heidegger, sees that language unfolds in our familiarity with the world, one that is always historically a finite and situated condition of the possibility of experience and not the autonomy of reason as an underlying perspective. As one moves through the movement of a discussion or an argument, how are formal concepts to be used? What happens to our natural language? To what extent following the Greeks, are we speaking of this question as one of beauty, the Eros of true speech, and the concept of living language rather than utility? Is this not Gadamer's question as much as it was the Greeks'?

How do we establish a formal conception of the structure of argument?

Apel's *de-ontological* view of theory [constructing an argument] confronts Gadamer's ontological conception of speech [as conversation]. What is the art of words for which they are searching?⁷⁴³ Since language binds us to thinking as time, as Heidegger shows, and this means that one cannot say that philosophy can progress, like science, Gadamer asks: "Can progress in the human sciences be such a progress?"⁷⁴⁴

Gadamer's emphasis on the rhetorical nature of theory contrasts with Apel's account of the form and context of rational argument. Eduardo Mendieta, editor of works by Apel, describes this distinction in this way: "Apel understands hermeneutics from the standpoint of the *a priori* of the communication community which is always presupposed in all discourse. In opposition to the ontological hermeneutics of Gadamer and Heidegger, Apel develops a normative hermeneutics of the ideal communication

⁷⁴³ Socrates claiming to have described, to Phaedrus, "the art of words for which they are searching" (266c). Nichols, *Socrates on Friendship and Community: Reflections on Plato's Symposium, Phaedrus, and Lysis*, p. 130.

⁷⁴⁴ Gadamer, "Reply to Karl-Otto Apel," in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, pp. 94-97.

community which transforms the hermeneutic circle and the pre-giveness of meaning in terms of the conditions of validity of inter-subjective agreement.”⁷⁴⁵

Apel is concerned to discover moral norms in communication – discourse ethics – that follows the *deontological* thrust of Kantian ethics (a philosophy of rights) that now becomes an ethics of communication, clearly differing from the substantive, interpretive and ontological ethics presented in Gadamer’s writings.⁷⁴⁶

Gadamer says: “understanding in the human sciences, however, is quite a different matter. In order to understand one another we certainly need to attempt at communication, where communication means reciprocity in understanding the arguments of both interlocutors. But whether communication in the sense of agreement and concurrence will result from this, or whether communication fails, the hermeneutic virtue consists above all in understanding the other without which communication could come about at all.”⁷⁴⁷ Dennis Schmidt puts it this way: “Hermeneutics pays homage to this relation of language and being insofar as it recognizes that when we understand something about the need for words, about how it is that we make contact with one another insofar as we put ourselves in words, we understand something important about ourselves [my emphasis].”⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁵ From Apel’s Introduction in *Karl-Otto Apel: Selected Essays, Volume Two: Ethics and the Theory of Rationality*, p. xiv.

⁷⁴⁶ See, Habermas, Jurgen. “Reconstruction and Interpretation in the Social Sciences.” and “Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification.” In *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Translated by Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1995.

⁷⁴⁷ Gadamer, “Reply to Karl-Otto Apel,” in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, p. 96.

⁷⁴⁸ Schmidt, “Putting Oneself in Words...” in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* p. 483.

Zygmunt Bauman and the Question of Social Theory

Three terms might capture the later Bauman: ambivalence, responsibility and the other. Such terms might define his “hermeneutic turn,” especially with regard to the way he will read modernity and the holocaust in relation to the dominance of certain modes of theory. The turn is ethical and lyrical. William Outhwaite says: “Bauman’s sociology, like his public announcements, is not, as *Spiegel* once wrote of Luhmann, ‘above the clouds.’ It is grounded, not so much in empirical data as in striking examples selected with a keen eye to the telling illustration of the theme which might otherwise seem speculative...”⁷⁴⁹ while, as Tom Campbell and Chris Till note, Bauman’s work is indebted to Ossowski and Simmel, but clearly aims at a “fragmentary style that is difficult to systematize.”⁷⁵⁰

Bauman’s power lies in his understanding and seeing the crisis of sociology as reflecting the crisis of modernity, and key to this: as a crisis about the “social relevance of sociological discourse.”⁷⁵¹ Sociology is a discipline that becomes obsessed with its own possible extinction, with its self-founding and self-alienating tendencies; At the same time, it also displays an ethical posture and understanding of our ability to still speak about an alienating society without self-alienation. Bauman tells us that sociology has to situate itself in a new world that is strikingly dissimilar from that which set its orthodox goals and strategies in place. He asks: “Can sociology enter this world?”⁷⁵²

⁷⁴⁹ Outhwaite, William. “Bauman’s Europe, Europe’s Bauman.” In *Bauman’s Challenge: Sociological Issues for the 21st Century*, p. 10.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 182.

⁷⁵¹ Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, p.107.

⁷⁵² Ibid. xxv.

Bauman's theorizing tackles the problem of theory as simultaneously an adjustment to the world of postmodernity (he later adopts the term "liquid modernity") that alters our understanding of modernity. But Bauman's work still remains enfolded by his deep commitment to the validity and vocation of sociology. But now attention has shifted also to style, for style is now deeply connected to moral responsibility, especially in the face of the overwhelming tendency to subsume moral responsibility into technical responsibility. The reflexivity of prose style and the formulation of concepts are both a moral and a lyrical responsibility. We learn that Bauman's answer to the paradoxes of sociology parallel the ethical paradox of postmodernity. "The ethical paradox of the postmodern condition is that it restores to agents the fullness of moral choice and responsibility while simultaneously depriving them of the comfort of the universal guidance and modern self-confidence once promised."⁷⁵³

In this way, Bauman not only points to the sad complicity of the holocaust and the broader development of Enlightenment goals that inserts technocratic and bureaucratic goals into both modern life and theory which he identifies as a moral barrier.⁷⁵⁴

⁷⁵³ Ibid. xxii.

⁷⁵⁴ Hannah Arendt, for example, addresses civic speech and political violence. Fundamentally, claiming, using the historical example of the Danish resistance to the Nazis, that "mere words, spoken freely, and publicly" are always a point of resistance to violence. Her Copenhagen lecture, concerned with her relationship to political belonging and belonging to language, brings into view, a way to understanding Bauman's deep ethical sense of his writing as a counter weight to public clichés and alienating conceptual speech in social theory. In this lecture, Arendt while discussing the Latin word *persona*, that metaphors are "the daily bread of all conceptual thought." Arendt, Hannah. From the Prologue to *Responsibility and Judgment*. Edited by Jerome Kohn. New York: Schocken, 2003.

Gadamer's hermeneutics, we can now see, shape Bauman's ideas in several ways. We note that there is a turn to a "postmodern ethics" which is deployed in his style of theorizing. By the mid 1990s Bauman's work is characterized as sociology of postmodernism (and postmodernity) concerned with elucidating the new social reality and how the new postmodern outlook impacts theorizing these changes, a strategy we find in *Life in Fragments* (1990), *Intimations of Postmodernity* (1992), and *Postmodern Ethics* (1993). Theorizing comes closer to the "mind's struggle with the unfamiliar, than a comprehensive theoretical model of reality-in-the-process-of-becoming, a reality thus far stubbornly defying all efforts of rational ordering."⁷⁵⁵

In *Thinking Sociologically* (1990), an introductory text to sociology, the sociological vocation is laid out. As Peter Beilharz notes, this is a work that by default adopts a view of sociology as critical sociology.⁷⁵⁶ Here is Beilharz's full summary of Bauman's position on sociology. It is worth reading these thoughts with the topological spaces of Plato's dialogical dialectic in mind:

Bauman offers four possible ways of distinguishing the sociological sensibility from the logic of common sense. *First*, sociology, unlike common sense, makes an effort to subordinate itself *to rules of responsible speech*. What does Bauman mean by this? We are all social animals; therefore, we are all specialists or natural authorities on matters social. Prejudice or mere opinion thus often masquerades as sociology, and not only at the hands of non-specialists; sociologists in general suffer from a terrible tendency to generalize the particular, tendency we need to recognize and work against. *Second*, sociology claims to draw on a larger field of evidence in order to arrive at its judgments; no research, no right to speak when it comes to properly sociological (but not ethical, or political) matters. A *third* difference between sociology and common sense pertains to the way in which we seek to make sense of human reality. Sociology stands in opposition to the overly personalized worldview. It shifts, rather, from figuration (networks of dependencies) to actors and actions,

⁷⁵⁵ Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, xxvi.

⁷⁵⁶ Beilharz, *Zygmunt Bauman: Dialectic of Modernity*, p. 46.

seeking to make sense of the human condition through analysis of the manifold webs of human interdependency. *Fourthly*, and in some ways most significantly, sociology seeks to defamiliarize the familiar [my emphasis].⁷⁵⁷

Bauman's tendency to read his own approach to Marx hermeneutically, points back to the so-called "humanist" writings of the early Marx. Beilharz observes:

"Certainly the whole of Bauman's *Hermeneutics and Social Science* (1978) is constructed within that sense of Vico, mediated through Gramsci, that we know best is what we make or create: only this is not simply an occasional, accumulative process, but is also accidental and ruptural."⁷⁵⁸ In the same work, Bauman makes his most specific hermeneutic assertion, echoing Gadamer, when he says that understanding is no more than struggle against incomprehension.

The force of this idea will guide Bauman's conception of the vocation of sociology in terms of ethical and lyrical leanings of his later works. Bauman's sociology, then, appears to construct a non-systemic "scientific" approach (of "legislators") with the open hermeneutic implications of theory as made by "literary" and "ethical" interpreters. For Bauman, the question of style and writing marks a break with disciplinary thinking, but not with the vocation of sociology. Peter Beilharz notes: "to introduce hermeneutics into social sciences is to add into it respect and curiosity for the book of life."⁷⁵⁹ We may also recall Berger's discussion of the relationship of the literary and the sociological, and his example of the course that linked sociology to literary work, "Balzac and Sociology" to be something that was required in the human

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 45.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 69.

⁷⁵⁹ See, Beilharz, Peter. "Another Bauman: The Anthropological Imagination." In *Bauman's Challenge: Sociological Issues for the 21st Century*. p. 63.

sciences.⁷⁶⁰ Paul Taylor finds a unity between Bauman and Mills by arguing that they are both concerned with the style and morality of social theory.⁷⁶¹ In Bauman's case, the merging of texts into a prose style, concerns conversation with these texts, alongside a conversation that treats the reader as an ethical co-actor; the reader who participates in the story told, and who shares in the process of discovery without the imprint of a discipline; the very limitation that is presented by scientific speech.

Kieran Flanagan describes what happens when theory implies a metaphysical challenge, rather than a simple repetition, for thinkers who think outside of these guiding assumptions of the "discipline." Flanagan writes: "Bauman has never been part of the sociological establishment in the United Kingdom. Conceiving Bauman as having a ghostly presence in the discipline, Blackshaw (2006: 293) rightly asserts: 'All great sociologists stand apart from their time. They are not afraid of leaving the past and operating in some version of the present that is altogether their own. Bauman is that kind of sociologist'.⁷⁶² He concludes that Bauman's sociology "is too good for the discursive formation of sociology. His answer to why this should be so appears earlier

⁷⁶⁰ Peter L. Berger claims, "another insight I acquired from the beginning of my studies – that good sociology has a kinship with good novels from which one can learn a lot about society." Berger is claiming that the excitement of sociology (that can be overcome with disenchantment) can be acquired from literature. Berger, *The Adventures of an Accidental Sociologist: How to Explain the World Without Becoming A Bore*, p. 13.

⁷⁶¹ Taylor, "Totalitarian Bureaucracy and Bauman's Sociological Imagination." In *Bauman's Challenge: Sociological Issues for the 21st Century*. "What distinguishes Bauman and Mills from their less imaginative counterparts is their willingness to engage with the problems of theorizing the lived experience of 'liquid modernity's' uncertain flux rather than to hide disciplinary insecurities behind a wall of falsely confident empirical methods." p. 155.

⁷⁶² See, Flanagan, Kieran, "Bauman's Implicit Theology," in *Bauman's Challenge: Sociological Issues for the 21st Century*, p. 104.

where he suggest that far from dealing with reality and real lives, Bauman is concerned with the ‘*fantasy of human lives imagined* (Blackshaw 2006:304-5)’.⁷⁶³

Flanagan shows how Bauman betrays an “implicit theology” because of the way he “owns” his writings.⁷⁶⁴ Flanagan speaks of an “ambiguity in his [Bauman’s] writings”: how Bauman seeks to express the conditions of “liquid modernity,” with its sense of contingency and fear of the unknown, with his specific style of writing.⁷⁶⁵

Flanagan argues that Bauman’s attitude to writing and the moral responsibility of the sociologist is tainted by a “theology, or spiritual reflection.” He claims that: “In *The Art of life* (2008) a realization dawns that what he is seeking is beyond what sociology alone can illuminate.”⁷⁶⁶

Plato recognized in Socrates that thinking, inquiry, questioning, engages us in human speech (and writing) as we activate ourselves as moral beings. Theory is also a conversation with oneself (much like philosophy) pointing always to its roots in the silent dialogue between me and myself. As Hannah Arendt, like Gadamer, made quite clear, the speaking of the soul with itself, as Plato describes it, is a precondition of all thinking.⁷⁶⁷ Bauman constitutes himself as a person (and theorist) engaging in a dialogue with himself, “non- technically.”

Liquid Modernity asks that we rethink how we describe the world we experience. Bauman establishes that the conflict between method and truth concerns conceptual style. He speaks of the dualist consciousness of the theorist that needs to be

⁷⁶³ Ibid. p. 104.

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 105, p. 118.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 118.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 121.

⁷⁶⁷ See, Arendt’s discussion, “Some Questions of Moral Responsibility,” in *Responsibility and Judgment*.

overcome; where the language of sociology “neutralizes speech” and generates a “false sociology.” He says, “The remoteness and unreachability of systemic structure, coupled with the unstructured fluid state of the immediate setting of life-politics, change that condition in a radical way and call for a rethinking of old concepts that used to frame its narrative.”⁷⁶⁸ What he means is that we need to rethink the scientific narrative of the human sciences.

Bauman seeks a style of analysis (theorizing) that theorizes the conditions of modernity. His searching for a new vocabulary, both implicitly and explicitly, is a critique of modern classical social theory: it is a critique of scientific speaking. Bauman, in my view, is one of our most perceptive theorists and writers because of this sensitivity to the language of theory. Disentangling his analysis from needless methodological debate, his work is theoretically and conceptually rich and thoughtful. Knowing the limits of a view of language that abstracts the theorist as a subject of speaking, he knows too that, in the past, concepts and words, overwhelmed by a codified diction and abstraction, often “do not convey our meanings to ourselves and to others.”⁷⁶⁹

Gadamer would agree. We understand that Bauman recognizes the falsity of perceiving language as the analytic tool by which we create theory. Bauman is a pivotal figure insofar as his work exemplifies an approach to social theory that in many ways conforms to Gadamer’s ideas. By this we mean that his conceptual expression is not analytically driven, but conceptually driven in light of his power of writing as metaphorically driven. Bauman has been sensitive to questions posed by Gadamer, and,

⁷⁶⁸ Bauman, “Forward: On Being Light and Liquid,” in *Liquid Modernity*, p. 9.

⁷⁶⁹ Bauman, *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?* p. 2.

has sought to disentangle himself from a modernist conception of what the human sciences (and their conception of theory) should be. Citlali Rovirosa-Madrado has reached a similar assessment:

Distancing from modernity does not necessarily mean giving up on utopia, in the sense of hopefulness. Drawing on the work of the French philosopher Emanuel Levinas, and his crucial notion of *being for the other*, Bauman allows room for suggesting that *otherness* could play a part in the sense of hope – though he never fully seems to subscribe to Levinas’s yearnings.⁷⁷⁰

Bauman’s later writings concern the *ethical nature of theory* and its interconnectedness to the status of writing – that is, with the ethical status of the theorist who expresses himself in his writings. What we see is evident, for example, in Bauman’s *Postmodernity and Its Discontents* (1997), and *Liquid Modernity* (2000) is deep commitment to a hermeneutic approach to social inquiry. Bauman is not a philosopher; he does not have the hope we find in Gadamer. What they do share, however, is an unbounded sense of humanity and the ethical responsibility that shapes their idea of the practice of theory.

Bauman’s critique of the ethics of writing challenges the self-representation of the sociologist who treats speech and language as part of their science. When Gadamer claims that the whole of ethics is rhetoric, he is concerned with letting what is true appear in our speech without technical hindrance. Bauman’s work engages the ethical dimension of writing because it treats the reconstitution of sociology in light of the claims that there is no *ideal model* of writing in sociology.

⁷⁷⁰ Bauman, Zygmunt. *Living on Borrowed Time: Conversations with Citlali Rovirosa-Madrado*. London: Polity, 2010. p. 9.

Bauman sees writing as the space of prose that is opened in a way in which the true can no longer simply be established through the logic of science, but now only through the careful adjudication of one's role as an *ethical interpreter*.

Bauman's essay *Afterthought*, in *Liquid Modernity*, can be read hermeneutically. Bauman attempts to describe the mission of sociology in terms of literary practice. In other words, in terms of art. Bauman equates sociology with the need to de-naturalize language in order to give it *the import of the poet or writer*.

However, he does not abandon sociology to literature:

What follows is that sociology is needed today more than ever before. The job in which sociologists are experts, the job of restoring to view the lost link between objective affliction and subjective experience, has become more vital and indispensable than ever, while less likely than ever to be performed by the spokesperson and practitioners of other fields of expertise has become utterly improbable. If all experts deal with practice problems and all experts knowledge is focused on their resolution, sociology is one branch of expert knowledge for which the practical problem it struggles to resolve is enlightenment aimed at human understanding.⁷⁷¹

Keith Tester describes Bauman as one of our most *deliberate sociological stylists*.⁷⁷² Style, as Gadamer reminds us, derives from the art of writing and the stylus, or slate pencil. Bauman understands the relationship of his prose to being true (to his topic/content): to the truth of being and being true, as does Gadamer, which enables him to think of theory as an expression of the truth in its capacity as speech. Is this a literary-based conception of truth and representation that is inspired by the reconstruction of humanist speech? Bauman's later works are hermeneutic in style and

⁷⁷¹ Bauman, "Afterthoughts: On Writing and Writing Sociology," in *Liquid Modernity*, p. 211.

⁷⁷² Tester, Keith. *The Social Thought of Zygmunt Bauman*. London: Palgrave, 2004. p. 12.

unimpeded by methodological constraints. When philosophy seeks a return to its metaphysical origins, and when sociologists call upon philosophy to in some way ground or compliment to their practice (Giddens, Winch, etc.), we note a call for a transformation in the conception of theory.

What does Bauman's intervention in terms of style mean? Tester argues that Bauman's work is sociology with a literary edge. He notes: "Bauman's sociology draws for inspiration and stimulation on literature as much as he draws on what is conventionally identified as sociology."⁷⁷³

Bauman skillfully speaks to social problems with a fluency that offers no arbitrating rule (external measure) by which to even measure the power of his words. Sociology requires an artistic sensibility to complete the logic of analysis to make its saying work, but also, to overcome the loss of its affirmative (and therapeutic) component in our communal dialogue.

Tester reiterates the point: "critical theory, which in Bauman's understanding, clearly links with literature, is then critical of this world in that it attends to the processes through which this world closes down on human possibilities, and it opens our other worlds in that it shows that things do not have to be like this since what seems to be natural is, in fact, entirely cultural".⁷⁷⁴ In other words, Bauman's writings can be seen as a model of theory shaped by hermeneutical consciousness and recovery of truth in the nature of theory.

"False sociology" (Bauman's term) echoes Gadamer's concept of methodological alienation. He writes, "the meaning of postmodern art is the

⁷⁷³ Ibid. p. 14.

⁷⁷⁴ Tester, *The Social Thought of Zygmunt Bauman*, p. 21.

deconstruction of meaning; more exactly, revealing the secret of meaning, the secret which modern theoretical practice tried hard to hide or belie, that meaning ‘exists’ solely in the process of interpretation (as Gadamer argues) and critique, and dies together with it.”⁷⁷⁵ The traditional distinction between *explanation and understanding*, as Bauman notes, is at an end, and is now replaced by the motifs of hermeneutical *understanding and responsibility*.⁷⁷⁶

Bauman brings sociology and aesthetic activity (literature), into proximity. Sociology is now identified with art and specifically the art of writing, but also with the Platonic/ Socratic way of speech guided by seeking words that can give genuine truth. Our commonality is of great concern to sociology. Bauman thinks sociology is the power of disclosing the “possibility of living together differently.”⁷⁷⁷ Bauman’s critical stance can be better understood in terms of Gadamer’s own contribution to the critique of method. The speculative language of theory illuminates the naturalized world by taking us out of the everyday perception through the very play of language itself. Theory concerns the way we can wrench ourselves out of ourselves and into new possibilities of discourse. Bauman’s sociological prose retreats from metaphysics to lead us to the poetic expression. Why? Gadamer, we recall, explains that the “poets, especially, are the one’s who make use of the flexibility of the linguistic gamut beyond

⁷⁷⁵ Bauman, Zygmunt. “The Meaning of Art and the Art of Meaning.” In *Postmodernity and Its Discontents*. London: Blackwell, p. 107

⁷⁷⁶ Bauman, “Afterthoughts: On Writing and Writing Sociology,” p. 213.

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p. 213.

rules, beyond conventions, and who know how to bring the unsaid to speak within the possibilities that language itself offers.”⁷⁷⁸

The truth of theory lies in a style of showing, in the flexibility of the theorist, who is not encumbered by verification but in a style of validity that comes forth in what we can say with our words. This conception of validity is the capacity of speech to allow us to perceive the truth of what is said, not explained by the proposition. We agree because we can, as Gadamer puts it, “We participate in coming to agreement with one another in the foreignness of language and it is in this play and development of language, with others, that we develop concepts. The binding power of theory, then, is true speaking, and not, as we have long assumed, the thematization of the scientific *logos* in the human sciences – frequently denoted by the term “objectivity”. Gadamer says “Hermeneutic reflection discloses conditions of truth in the sciences that do not derive from the logic of scientific discovery but are prior to it.” Joel Weinsheimer summarizes the thesis this way: “method is a response to the alienation of self and world and, also an attempt to overcome it”.⁷⁷⁹ This mirror effect has been of critical importance to the approach this work has taken toward the question of the human sciences and social theory. Language “has something ambiguous about it, like an oracle. But this is precisely where hermeneutic truth lies.”⁷⁸⁰

Is hermeneutics epistemological?

⁷⁷⁸ Gadamer, “Boundaries of Language,” in *Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics*, pp. 12-13.

⁷⁷⁹ Weinsheimer, Joel C. *Gadamer’s Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985. p.15.

⁷⁸⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 488.

This question is very close to the way we must avoid simply reading Gadamer's work as a theory of language. Vattimo repeats the question: "Is hermeneutics itself epistemological that is, argumentative, or is it hermeneutic and poetic?"⁷⁸¹ Gadamer's answer is this: "The problem is not that everyday prose threatens to infiltrate the language of the concept, but that the logic of the propositions takes us in the wrong direction."⁷⁸²

Truth involves accepting something like the ineffability of life in the play of language. The word is not simply something against something else, object, or word. Günter Figal notes: "Speaking is not simply understood because it displays something, but rather that in speaking 'the said' is held together 'with an infinity of what is not said in one unified meaning.' Thus, every speech means more than it explicitly says. The speculative character of language is present in the "whole of being."⁷⁸³ According to Figal, "with this response the meaning is no longer equivalent to the linguistic self-showing of the thing, but rather is determined as the horizon of speaking. Thus, every word, writes Gadamer, "carries with it the unsaid"; every speech "brings a totality of meaning into play with out being able to express it totally," and thereby shows it "living virtuality" [TM 458]."⁷⁸⁴

⁷⁸¹ Vattimo, Gianni. "The Truth of Hermeneutics, Appendix 1." In *Beyond Interpretation: The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997. p. 103.

⁷⁸² Gadamer, "Philosophy and Poetry," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, p. 137.

⁷⁸³ Figal, Günter, "Doing of the Thing Itself," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, p. 120.

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p. 118.

Language “has something ambiguous about it, like an oracle. But this is precisely where hermeneutic truth lies”.⁷⁸⁵ Truth begins when we see that the subject who speaks is not an object. How we understand something is not simply about information, or the content speech, but about the interpretive insight that allows us to really see what is. To see in this way, as the Greeks knew, was to theorize. Truth, in theory, then cannot be simply a matter of verifiability, since every proposition, as we have learned from Gadamer, involves a question that lives within our very temporality and finds its roots in the past and present.

Theory, then, is not simply about abstract theoretical relations, but rather involves the speculative and metaphorical movement of words where the “speculative statement points to the entirety of truth, without being this entirety or stating it.”⁷⁸⁶ Hermeneutics articulates, as it were, the Parmenidean non-distinction inherent to the beginning of thinking, and recurrent to all thinking (“there is no first word”), that argument and the poetic word co-exist; poetic truth begins and returns, as it were, to the truth of the word. “Everything that goes under the name of language, says Gadamer, refers beyond that which achieves the status of the proposition.”⁷⁸⁷ Once more we are into the matter of how words convey their specific validity, and Gadamer’s claim that to speak of truth, of the truth of the word, we are speaking in a special way, like the poetic word, which is not a statement, the word can speak in an authentic way, the word in this sense means “a word that speaks, a telling word,” that he, attaches to what he considers an eminent text, in a way that the word is convincing and really there. This is

⁷⁸⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 488.

⁷⁸⁶ Gadamer, *Hegel’s Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, p. 96.

⁷⁸⁷ Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, p. 25.

the words claim to validity.⁷⁸⁸ A validity that here implies the way the word links with a collective meaning and implies a social relationship and not simply an arbitrary formulation, because a word is not just an individual word.

“One question *Truth and Method* raises is what would it mean to say that understanding itself is essentially metaphorical?”⁷⁸⁹ Gadamer explains: “Transference from one sphere to another has not only a logical function; rather corresponding to it is the fundamental metaphoricity of language.”⁷⁹⁰ Weinsheimer notes that metaphor is important to understanding, not that they are identical, but that they offer the power to expand the range of our thinking. Metaphors are not transparent, as we know, in the realms of the poetic and poetic truth in language, they too require understanding and interpretation.

We should not make the mistake of thinking that this “metaphoricity of language” means that language consists in metaphors. But in what way does this argument offer an understanding of language in the human sciences? Metaphor, as in the poem, is an enabling event that inspires us to think differently, to think beyond our horizons; it also shows us the power of descriptive words that are not simply reducible to something else. Such moments of transformation happen in linguistic encounters, enabling interpreters to alter themselves not because they have new information but because, in the totality of things, they have a new horizon of understanding: is this not what we expect of theory?

⁷⁸⁸ Gadamer, “On the Truth of the Word,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p. 137.

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 181.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 181. [*Truth and Method*, 407].

Gadamer's next argument concerns how we sustain ourselves in the identity and difference that the metaphor invites? He asks: "How is it possible to think identity and difference together?"⁷⁹¹ How can we enter another world and understand something that is other and yet understand the other in a way that enlarges our understanding? Metaphor, he claims, is the explanation, this power of language allows for us to be both the same and different without contradiction. Without contradiction because the "hermeneutic as joins at one and the same time both "is" and "is not", and "in this as", Gadamer writes, "lies the whole riddle."⁷⁹² Insofar, as we find support in Weinsheimer's argument it becomes apparent that language is doing more in theory than we might want, but this is, in fact, the very enabling possibility of speech.

Poetic speech and lyric discourse is speculative. The way the word or concept can bring about a sense of completeness becomes in this way a special illustration of the hermeneutic "facts" as a power and property of speech itself; poetry illustrates this power of speech as it participates in the truth of the universal, as Gadamer says.

The poetic experience illustrates how speech establishes us in a relationship to something beyond ourselves, to a generality of speech that equally means for others. The living horizon of culture is where our true being and our effort to speak theory enable us but does not limit our theoretical life. In the final analysis, theory involves us in what we know in relation to ourselves. Nowhere, says Gadamer, is deception so near to us; the human sciences carry this ethical responsibility explicitly – in all speech – involving our self-knowledge that might fail us or mean so much when it succeeds for

⁷⁹¹ Weinsheimer, Joel. "Gadamer's Metaphorical Hermeneutics." In *Gadamer and Hermeneutics*. Edited by Hugh J. Silverman. London: Routledge, 1991. p. 201.

⁷⁹² Ibid. p. 301. Weinsheimer translation from, *Hans-Georg Gadamer, Kleine Schriften 2: Interpretationen*, Second Edition. Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1979. p. 22.

us. Theory then is an ethical act driven by truth that brings forth a new understanding (horizon) that can impact our well-being. Our questions lie in our very being and truth, not in method, as Gadamer says: “there is no proposition that can be comprehended solely from the content that it presents.”⁷⁹³

Self-knowledge is at play in the human sciences. Our ethical and lyrical utterances concern self-illumination but also self-alienation; this paradox finds an analogy in the dubious position of the sophist as an educator that concerned Plato (*Protagoras*). The human sciences engage in questionability of their disciplinary world-view as a science because their truth is their questionability. Propositions, in Gadamer’s view, reside in questions therefore theory concerns our ability to access the world as a question; in fact, the questionability of the human sciences shapes their identity. This questionability is not a matter of scientific protocols and their application, nor about various theoretical perspectives, rather it concerns the deeper framework of their theorizing.

We do not escape the living flow of speech and metaphor in the process of theory, yet we can alienate ourselves, and in doing so lose new insight about the world. We exist in our traditions of speech; therefore the horizon of our existence will be the shared source of our discovery and recovery of truth, specifically as we recognize the limits of the scientific ideal of “objectivity” and “exteriority” – the limits of the discourse of modernity. Gadamer says: “Speech never [...] is just the subsumption of the individual under universal concepts. In the use of words what is given to the sense is not presented as an individual example of a universal, but is itself made present in

⁷⁹³ Gadamer, “What is Truth?” in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, p. 42.

what is said – just as the idea of the beautiful is present in what is beautiful”.⁷⁹⁴ In conversation, as well as theory, what is experienced is not the “inner life” of a speaker, but an encounter with what is spoken.

To reconstruct our conceptions of rationality, Gadamer invites us to look at the “discourse development of thought” (dialogue) to clarify the limits of rationality, as well as the limits of our techno-scientific worldview. Hermeneutic understanding, therefore, changes our vision of theory in the modern world as well as the ways in which we reside in our world as speaking beings.

Speech, as we have seen, conveys us toward the other (and as Gadamer makes clear the recurring experience of speech is the real experience of the dialectic through the tensions of dialogue). Our dialogues are contingent on a double encounter with the other and with ourselves as an encounter with language; language remains “inadequate” to pure conceptual work but it is the very power necessary to express ourselves with concepts.

Concepts “call to one another” in the movement of seeing and thinking (*energeia*), they are not “externally” created or constituted by an “infinite, on-looking mind”. Gadamer’s remark: “dialectic must retrieve itself in hermeneutics” that was not just a critique of the weaknesses of Hegel, but a complex acknowledgement to both Plato and Hegel, that conceptual speech is dialectical and speculative.

Conversation happens with our sense that some one else stands before us to who we address ourselves. Conversation as two very essential features: first conversation resides in something we have to say, that commits us to the domain of

⁷⁹⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second Revised Edition], pp. 445-446.

rhetoric, second, that conversation is built on the ethical dimension of these dialogues. Theory too is a two-way address, a conversation; where we address someone where we to be addressed; these are the same (speaking to the other and listening to the other). In a *dia-logic* relationship we address one another in the same space that theory happens, as Plato argues, that we strive for knowledge, and not just simply the possession of knowledge, but always as part of understanding ourselves. Gadamer says that there is no true single idea, and, accordingly, that isolating an idea means missing the truth. All means of knowing are ambiguous that is why a statement does not guarantee proper understanding of meaning, rather, as Gadamer says, we need to convert the concept back into the valid word. The truth of a word, the living word, exists in shared conversation, for there is no truth of a single idea, when speech is concerned with “isolating an idea [it] always means missing the truth.”⁷⁹⁵

Weinsheimer summarizes Gadamer’s thesis effectively when he says:

“Gadamer conception of method is a response to the alienation of self and world and, [but] also an attempt to overcome it”.⁷⁹⁶ Language mirrors the human sciences and social theory. Language “has something ambiguous about it, like an oracle. But this is precisely where hermeneutic truth lies”.⁷⁹⁷ Because of the “inner self-forgetfulness of language” we are open to the possibility of interpretation. Speaking, then, has “little to do with a mere explication and assertion of our prejudices; on the contrary, it risks

⁷⁹⁵ “The Idea of Hegel’s Logic”, Hans-Georg Gadamer, in *Hegel’s Dialectic, Five Hermeneutical Essays*, Yale University Press, Newhaven & London, 1974. p. 80.

⁷⁹⁶ Weinsheimer, *Gadamer’s Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method*, p. 15.

⁷⁹⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 488.

prejudices – it exposes oneself to one’s own doubts as well as to the rejoinder of the other.”⁷⁹⁸

If concepts do not speak, as we find at times in the alienated conceptual discourse of the human sciences, we are not only presented with the hermeneutic problem of translation but with the question how does this discourse relate to a shared conversational world? Anchoring ourselves in our modern world, being at home both in theory and social life, is a key concern. The simultaneity is striking. Theory mimics reality. The key point is that modern science in general “accommodates it[s] own account of its fundamental character”, this means they use “method” as the framework for “constituting the very objectivity of [their] objects.”

Truth lies in ambiguity of the word, which lies in all presentation. The sophist and the philosopher share the gesture of language in the same way, yet they dispute how they speak truthfully (as in Plato’s *Gorgias*). Socrates could not defeat the sophist because there are no totalizing grounds upon which this could be done in speech. The speaking of the word, the speaking of language, being in language: does what has always supported us need to be grounded? ⁷⁹⁹

My thesis, applying Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy, argues that the human sciences are rhetorical in nature. The human sciences embody the ideal of theory as words that generate abstract conceptual expressions that reveal concrete situations in the logic of the flow of concepts that allow words to resonate their intended meaning. This is not sociology without concepts it is a sociology of dialogical speech. Theory, in

⁷⁹⁸ Gadamer, “Text and Interpretation,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of Later Writings*, p. 216.

⁷⁹⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. Forward to the Second Edition, xxxvii.

this regard, seen as the philosophic legacy of the Greeks, now appears to shape the human sciences, in a post-metaphysical setting, that is neither truly metaphysical nor truly ontological. The post-war period of the human sciences, with their struggle for self-identity as well as their differing logics of theoretical discovery, made increasingly visible a truth that we cannot really say in institutional speech, while at the same time making truth saying the key to their understanding. Here we engage with, and drawn upon, Gianni Vattimo's perceptive ideas, in his essay, "Truth and Rhetoric in Hermeneutic Ontology", to support our argument.

The place of social knowing, especially in a procedural discipline like sociology, turns away from application and self-understanding, seeking identity in methods that in turn raises the question of truth into view. With the unfolding of the logic of modernity, truth had been subordinated to "science", with an apparent exit of truth; the human sciences came to affirm the power of a long human legacy of truth saying: of the power of rhetoric. Such an exit from truth, if it did occur, (as was intended by the human sciences) in time provoked its own recovery. This is key to Gadamer's thesis. When Blum asks how do we change our relationship to the "language of sociology" (theory)? Gadamer answers: We recognize that the space of cognition in the human sciences concerns our being open to the truth of the word.

My concluding argument is that poetics, the relation of speaking and writing, is key to understanding the larger picture of what happens in the human sciences. What a theory can say, not simply whether it is true or false, is what matters for the theorist. Discourse is shared in what is said such that it can produce understanding through

concepts that do not take away from the unfolding voice of speech that provides a telling truth.

Conclusion

I had called my approach to sociology “humanistic.” I would now question whether this was a felicitous adjective, though I would not quarrel with the basic intention. I had intended two meanings: One was to stress the contribution of sociology to a *humane* society, based on its debunking of the myths legitimating cruelty and oppression. I suppose that this came out of the Enlightenment roots of the discipline. But more relevant was the second meaning, sociology as one of the “humanities” (or *Geisteswissenschaften*), closely related to history and philosophy but also to the institution of the literary imagination.⁸⁰⁰
Peter L. Berger.

The guiding thread of this thesis has been the question of (social) theory. What it means to consider theory from a non-metaphysical position – a hermeneutic position. We argue that theory is a question not only of truth performance, of authentic dialogue, but that theory concerns truth as the process of discovery – a poetics – for the theorist. There is one major conclusion that can be drawn: “*scientific methods*” *do not guarantee truth.*

The distinguishing feature of social theory is not that of managing methodological procedures or arrangements of thinking that would distinguish its scientific attitude and its systematic formalism. Our aim, in each chapter, has been to argue that it is Gadamer's hermeneutics that provides a key to correcting the norms of the scientific viewpoint and arguing that, especially in the human sciences, theorizing rests upon the nature of argumentative discourse (theory and concept formation). In

⁸⁰⁰ Berger, *Adventures of An Accidental Sociologist: How to Explain the World Without Becoming a Bore*, pp. 25-26.

light of Gadamer's conception of language this places conceptual thinking in proximity to the finite being of the word.

I have argued at length that in authoring ourselves as theorists we cannot simply be arranging concepts, but rather our authoring concerns, as it does for Plato, an authoring process in which one can be authentic, and, as Gadamer argues, such an authenticity requires recognizing that social life is lived in proximity to our poetic, ethical and lyrical speech. Dennis Schmidt reminds us that hermeneutic theory is concerned to identify that we are not objective beings able to conceptualize ourselves in the dominant framework of science, rather we are ethical beings involved in an "ethical struggle to put oneself in words."⁸⁰¹ All understanding, Gadamer reminds us, concerns our intrinsic linguistic condition wherein it is the vague representations of meaning "that bear us along and get brought word by word to articulation and so become communicable." Bringing rhetoric and understanding together "One can talk about everything, and everything one says has to be able to be understood. Here rhetoric and hermeneutics have a very close relationship. The skilled mastery of such abilities in speaking and understanding is demonstrated to the utmost in written usage in the writing of speeches and in the understanding of what is written. Hermeneutics may be precisely defined as the art of bringing what is said or written to speech again."⁸⁰²

I shall end by reminding the reader that we detected in many social theorists an awareness of this paradox of theory in the human sciences. Bauman, our key example, for example, speaks of a *conceptual artificiality* that can absorb the theorist's

⁸⁰¹ Ibid. p. 131.

⁸⁰² Gadamer, "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy," in *Reason in the Age of Science*, p. 119.

authoring of theory when there is a loss of the poetic dimension. Alvin Gouldner, C. W. Mills, Alan Blum, Berger, and others, had addressed this concern in their writings. Bauman's formulation of a "false sociology," I have argued, is a summation of these arguments that captures the problem of the scientific understanding of the human sciences, in terms close to Gadamer's phrase *methodological alienation*. Theorizing, dominated by methodological conceptualization, Bauman says, has something *false* in its standpoint, it does not so much push the theorist toward loss and alien speech, but presents this loss as another version of the theorist's concrete ethical struggle with words.

Gadamer's hermeneutics contributes fundamentally to an understanding of modern life and modern theory. It shows our paradoxical predicament by demonstrating why alien discourse is imposed, and self-imposed, upon the theorist. Plato understood that when we create arguments we express ourselves in the happening of genuine questioning (as in a dialogue) that comes forth in what Gadamer describes as a *dialectical ethics*. Bauman in turn agrees by speaking of *auto-poiesis* (self-creation) in theory. We create ourselves in our styles of speech and writing in a "self-awareness, understanding, and *responsibility* for its forms."⁸⁰³

Our lyrical and ethical struggle therefore composes us in the manner of the way we speak, and this struggle is the ground of the human sciences. The human sciences are shaped in the universality of speech. To listen for the truth, for truth to be visible, I must let myself be told something by it (speech); in other words, I must too, seek a way of speaking that allows me to genuinely theorize with others. Our thesis argues that in

⁸⁰³ Bauman, "Afterthoughts: On Writing and Writing Sociology," in *Liquid Modernity*, p. 213.

the end, like Gadamer, as we recover an authentic theoretical speech we recognized the true nature of the human sciences.

By way of conclusion I will flesh out further my understanding of the significance of Gadamer's ideas to the human sciences. First, truth, in Gadamer's view, lies in what it means to say something. Hermeneutic experience, therefore, is a corrective to the objectification of knowledge. While the poem is exemplary of the nature of truth speaking, theory cannot simply be poetry. Gadamer asks, does not the truth of the human sciences lie more in a poem rather than in its adoption of methodology? He means that the human sciences communicate when they are not bound to an unquestioned methodological presumption about their speech.

Truth and Method, originally published in 1960, posed a question to the human sciences. Basically, that truth in the human sciences, as we have seen, concerns the possibility of eloquent exchanges that are directed to the call of the other, while how we communicate with this call concerns an ongoing dialogue with ourselves. Theory, however, had tended to isolate us and not bring us together in the being of communal speech. Our conversations, our theorizing, limited in the human sciences as a consequence of our metaphysical heritage, where rooted in a conception of theorizing as a need for the overcoming of rhetoric, and not, the other way round, that true theorizing actually rests upon it and is best exemplified by rhetoric. Gadamer felt the norm of truth, especially in the human sciences, was closer to the wisdom of the ancients and their concepts of *prudentia* and *eloquentia*.⁸⁰⁴

⁸⁰⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, [First Edition], pp. 20-21.

Jacques Derrida spoke of his friendship with Gadamer in “Rams” – an essay devoted to the poet Paul Celan. Derrida asks: “Will I be able to bear witness, in a just and faithful fashion, to my admiration for Hans-Georg Gadamer?”⁸⁰⁵ Derrida’s question concerns the voice of the poet, the concept of friendship, discovered in the proximity of our theoretical dialogue with an ethics of otherness, reflected in what is held in reserve and what it revealed/concealed in the poetic word. Our interminable interior dialogue is what comes to being in human relationships and dialogue, not in models of argument, our thematic content is organized by the voice that goes out to meet the other, rooted lyrically and ethically in the voice we struggle to speak. We are divided and brought together by speaking.

Poetry, as we have argued, awakens us to the commonality of understanding, in this way it acts to resist the restraint of obedience and conformity in our words, it shows us that the norms of argumentation and truth possibilities of what we can say rest on the priority of the spoken word over and above any metaphysical grounding. A text, Gadamer notes, is to be understood as a hermeneutic concept, which means a text poses the question of what it means to say. The correspondence between what is spoken and written sheds light on the way in which theory is embedded in conversation. Gadamer writes: “extending the concept of the text to include what is spoken in oral discourse is hermeneutically well grounded. For in every case, whether the text is spoken or written, the understanding of it remains dependent upon communicative conditions that, as such, reach beyond the merely codified meaning content of what is said.”⁸⁰⁶

⁸⁰⁵ Derrida, “Rams,” in *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, p. 135.

⁸⁰⁶ Gadamer, “Text and Interpretation,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p. 171.

Interpretation follows from our understanding of something, but understanding might not be an interpretation. Rather it is because we live in speech that we can understand.⁸⁰⁷ The interpreter of a text, like the interpreter of a conversation “tries to impart what he or she means, and that includes the other with whom one shares presuppositions and upon whose understanding one relies.” We live in webs of discussion with the other. “The other takes what is said as it is intended, that is, understands it because he fills out and concretizes what is said and because he does not take what is said in its abstract, literal meaning.”⁸⁰⁸

Hence the classical debate between the spoken and the written takes on a new form in Gadamer. By describing his commitment to speech over the word we understand his view of theory as one type of utterance among others that occur in language. “In a living conversation one tries to reach understanding through the give and take of discussion, “which means one searches for those words [...] that one thinks will get through to the other.”⁸⁰⁹

Gadamer says, “... a ‘virtual’ horizon of interpretation and understanding must be opened in writing the text itself, a horizon that the eventual reader has to fill out. Writing is more than fixing something spoken in writing. To be sure, everything that is fixed in writing refers back to what was originally said, but it must also and equally as much look forward. Everything that is said is always already directed toward reaching understanding, and this necessarily includes the other”⁸¹⁰.

⁸⁰⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], pp. 385-386.

⁸⁰⁸ Gadamer, “Text and Interpretation,” p. 172

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid. p.172.

⁸¹⁰ Ibid. p.173.

The “text” does not exclude the reader but rather includes the reader as a participant. The “text” resides in what Gadamer terms a virtual horizon; the text speaks, as it were, when it becomes a hermeneutic task not when the emphasis is on explanation rather than understanding. Understanding is the self-presentation of the text (words and concepts). The literary and the poetic texts, for example, are introduced to show why theory does not simply reside in a “scientific” viewpoint. Theory, then, signifies objects as much as literature may; the question is what are the differences and what can be learned from these correspondences? Derrida says this about the question:

“The problem,” for Gadamer, “is not that we do not understand the other person but that *we don’t understand ourselves*.”⁸¹¹ Methodological thinking is the disenchanter and resistance that is self-imposed on the truth of speech. Speech cannot be demarcated by a method and method cannot conceal this fact. The continuous tension of theory can then be summed up in the following remark: “By writing philosophy as drama, Plato calls on every reader to engage actively in the search for truth. By writing it as anti-tragic drama, he warns the reader that only certain elements of him are appropriate to this search”.⁸¹²

We may once again recall the significance of art at this point. Contemporary art, Gadamer notes, “is really a kind of speech.”⁸¹³ Art speaks to the view by bringing something to understanding that is new. In this way it emulates a dialogue, or poetic utterance that comes to address us. In Gadamer’s opinion, art asks a question of us. He

⁸¹¹ Gadamer, “Hermeneutics and the Ontological Difference,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, p. 371.

⁸¹² Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, p. 134.

⁸¹³ Gadamer, “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, p. 12

remarks: “In fact, the process of poeticizing is divided into two phases: into the project that has already occurred where language holds sway, and another project that allows the new poetic creation to come forth from the first project.”⁸¹⁴ Argumentation, rooted in conversation, is not simply art (yet the Socratic-Platonic dialogue Gadamer brings to the fore raises the art of questioning to a conscious art), it is the *presentational moment* when the subject is speech and begins to speak about what is to come. This possibility of speech, he says, is already *something other than us*. Speech is both discovery and “unconcealment”; the power of the voice to offer to us new understanding, new concepts that speak to us by inviting us into the ongoing dialogue of the theorist.

As Heidegger puts it, it is not that we can say “I” but that we are able to *say*, at all.⁸¹⁵ Whether viewers or participants we are all active within a dialogue. That is why theory has its roots in the participatory flow of ordinary speech. “False sociology” (Bauman’s term), is when we do not fully belong to ourselves in the words that we speak. This means that we lose something in our speech concerning the ethical and lyrical comportment found in a dialogic mutual becoming.

Plato’s dialogues, display such a becoming, especially in *Pheadrus* and *Phelibus*, which Gadamer had focused on in his early writings. Plato’s dialogues are complex displays of theory, of argumentative discourse, and the self-discovery of the *logoi*, they are not simply a representation or *mimesis*, a copy of something, a repeating of ideas, but *they mean the being of the thing spoken about*. They represent a performed act, utterances not simply as correctness, objectivity, but rather an exactitude concerning the revelatory capacity of the word.

⁸¹⁴ Ibid. p. 109.

⁸¹⁵ Heidegger, *Holderlin’s Hymn “The Ister,”* pp. 90-91.

Similarly, what we learn from the work of art is that it “speaks itself.” While language calls all beings “home,” the work of art signifies an increase in being, in our being at home in our saying. It is an increase in Being that occurs as “presentation (*Darstellung*) [or] as the mode of being of the work of art.” Our, “self-presentation is the true nature of play – and hence the work of art also.”⁸¹⁶ Play not only functions as a critique of subjectivism but also shows how we become other and thereby encounter something substantial beyond ourselves in the play of word: “The players are not the subjects of play: instead, play merely reaches presentation [*Darstellung*] through the players.”⁸¹⁷ Such an exhibition of something interconnects to what is already known, inside an encounter made up of the strange and familiar. The transformation occurs within what remains to be known. Gadamer describes this as the capacity to “become another person.”⁸¹⁸ This is only possible when speech creates shared understanding.

In addition, artistic creation, says Gadamer, challenges each of us to listen to the language in which the work of art speaks, as we seek to make it our own. Listening to the speech of the other, we are in the play of understanding that occurs in dialogue. Our “speaking” on the page, therefore, is also where we discover the experience of truth without method.⁸¹⁹ For we have not obstructed our speech by adopting a methodologically arranged framework around what we say. Bauman describes the

⁸¹⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [Second, Revised Edition], p. 116.

⁸¹⁷ Ibid. p. 92.

⁸¹⁸ Ibid, p. 111.

⁸¹⁹ Gadamer, “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, p. 43.

doing and writing sociology aims, “at disclosing the possibility of living together differently.”⁸²⁰

In this thesis I reflect on Gadamer’s standpoint that the human sciences are not a question of arbitrating methodological disputes. It is more fundamental. Living in the music of language, we hear the poet’s word and, as we have argued, we hear the poet in the theorist’s word; for both, after a fashion, illustrate why we remain open to the norm of truth that truly identifies what the human sciences are. We disclose the possibilities of theory in a lyrical and ethical sharing toward the other. Not in objectifying the other. The changing reality of modern life is, in fact, also the changing reality of the human sciences, for as they engage in the matter of theorizing modern life they also question the metaphysical roots of theory. They also point us back to the Greeks and the struggle over the identity of *theoria*. The human sciences’ desire to theorize modern life generates not only a space for discovery but also creates the space where we rehearse the original Greek concerns, as we step into a new world beyond instrumental rationality and into the realm of effective modes of description and discovery, as we replace objective and impersonal truth with a mode of ethical discourse that reinvigorates a non-scientistic ideal of theory, one that returns theory back to speech, giving voice to concepts.

⁸²⁰ Bauman, “Afterthoughts: On Writing and Writing Sociology,” p. 215.

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