



Andrew Fuyarchuk
Yorkville University, Fredericton, Canada
ORCID: 0000-0002-3681-1396
e-mail: andrew.fuyarchuk@mail.utoronto.ca

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Revitalizing Western Metaphysics with Hermeneutics: Reading Gadamer in Light of Fundamental Themes in Chung-ying Cheng

I. Introduction

When Being is identified with an unchanging realm transcendent to beings, then the conditions are in place for a rift between the thinking subject and object.¹ According to Chung-ying Cheng, the polarization of mind and body, reason and emotions, knower and known has been an ineradicable feature of the history of western thought. He explains that even movements such as logical positivism, pragmatism, phenomenology and hermeneutics that have aimed to overthrow metaphysics have re-instigated the dichotomies.² He argues that deconstructions by

¹ I am relying on the authority of Heidegger's interpretation of subject-object dichotomy, Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth", in: Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings: from Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1977), 133–188. My sincere thanks to the following reviewers for their comments and recommendations: Professors Bin Song, Phil Rose, and Mansi Handa.

² Chung-ying Cheng, "Onto-Hermeneutical Vision and the Analytic Discourse: Interpretation and Reconstruction in Chinese Philosophy", in: *Two Roads to Wisdom? Chinese and Analytic Philosophical Traditions*, ed. Bo Mou (Peru: Open Court Publishing Company, 2001), 96.

Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida and Rorty bear the imprint of western technology and science.³ In response, he positions the *Yijing*'s immanentist metaphysics in a creative, transformative and ameliorative relationship with western philosophy; specifically the legacy of 17th century Cartesianism. This creative deployment of his insights aims to show how foundations need not amount to foundationalism. For this reason, the renaissance of Neo-Confucianism by way of Cheng ought to be heeded by philosophers concerned with the future of metaphysics in Western society.

Through the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, the International Society of Chinese Philosophy, international conferences, and teaching, Cheng has been building East-West cross-cultural understandings for roughly forty-six years.⁴ While he has identified Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy as having the strongest affinities with Neo-Confucian dialectic of constancy in change,⁵ this has not been extended to Gadamer. In general, Cheng does not recognize how Gadamer's hermeneutics goes beyond a temporally mediated and thus linguistic interpretation of texts, history, art and philosophy.⁶ On-cho Ng is an exception. He initiated a rapprochement between Gadamer and Cheng that argues for an ontological foundation in hermeneutics, without however giving due regard to the question of human ethos or human disposition toward beings.⁷ He has also retracted this endeavor. For the most part, scholars believe that in contrast to Cheng, who gives primacy of place to the trans-historical foundations in determining the truth of an interpretation, Gadamer's "historically-effected consciousness" ensures that those foundations are eclipsed.⁸

³ Chung-ying Cheng, "On Entering the 21st Century: My Philosophical Vision and My Philosophical Practice", in: *The Imperative of Understanding: Chinese Philosophy, Comparative Philosophy, and Onto-Generative Hermeneutics*, ed. On-cho Ng (New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 2008), 15.

⁴ Consulting Eric Nelson, "Chung-ying Cheng: Creativity, Onto-Generative Hermeneutics, and the *Yijing*", *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 43/1-2 (March-June 2016): 125.

⁵ Chung-ying Cheng. "Categories of Creativity in Whitehead and neo-Confucianism", *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 6/3 (1979): 251-274.

⁶ Cheng, "On Entering the 21st Century", 18.

⁷ On-cho Ng, "Negotiating the Boundary between Hermeneutics and Philosophy in Early Ch-ing Ch'eng-Chu Confucianism: Li Kuangti's (1642-1718) Study of the Doctrine of the Mean (*Chung-ying*) and Great Learning (*Ta-hsuen*)", in: *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts and Hermeneutics*, ed. Kai-wing Chow et. al. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 165-193.

⁸ On-Cho Ng, "Toward a Hermeneutic Turn in Chinese Philosophy: Western Theory, Confucian Tradition, and Cheng Chung-ying's Onto-Hermeneutics", *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 6/4 (2007): 387. Hyun Höchsmann, "Foreseeing

However, there is another side to Gadamer's hermeneutics than history – the numerological cosmology of the Pythagorean Plato mirrored in the microcosmic scale of life. When this side of his hermeneutics is clarified with due regard to contemporary scholarship on Gadamer, then the role of Being in his hermeneutics falls within the scope of Cheng's immanentist metaphysics of the *Yijing* tradition. This in turn is a catalyst for re-interpreting Western metaphysics and self-understanding. Toward that end, first, the affinities between Gadamer the Pythagorean Platonist and Cheng the Neo-Confucian on Being and human existence are outlined. Second, the extent to which reasoning of American continental Gadamer scholars Daniel Tate and James Risser is influenced by the logic of the western mind is scrutinized. A selective representation of their writing about Gadamer exhibits a tendency to privilege one prong of his dialectic. This indicates reticence toward dwelling or lingering in the middle of contesting forces, which for both Cheng and Gadamer is a catalyst for harmonizing those forces. The final step builds on arguments by Gadamer scholars such as Jean Grondin, Walter Lammi and Andrzej Wierciński. In contrast to the American continentalists, they call on dispositional recollection of a prior ground of existence discernable in the tradition of philosophy. For this reason, they stand behind transhistorical foundations in hermeneutics. This moves their thought toward the middle within the tension of existence and thereby enables them to enact a dialectical theory of Being in their interpretation of Gadamer that resonates with Cheng on human nature and creativity. At the same time, by limiting recollection to an historical tradition that recovers either a Greek philosophical or Christian theological worldview rather than the eternal cycles of nature they overlook how, for Gadamer, language includes a reciprocity of rhythm that has a share in the self-unfolding structure characteristic of all living beings.

II. Cheng and Gadamer

Cheng constructively ameliorates the moral, psychological, political, and epistemological consequences of the western subject-object dichotomy with an immanentist metaphysics. Contra the western logic of either/or in which opposites exclude each other, he employs "the inclusive logic of 'both/and'." This derives, in part, from the Chinese language. According to Jesse Flemming, that language is not constrained by a grammar that contracts meaning into an abstract definition or concept. Instead,

a Fusion of Horizons – Gadamer, Quine, and Chung-ying Cheng", *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 34/1 (March 2007): 229.

modern spoken Mandarin uses phrases that invite an inter-relationality of meanings.⁹ In this way, the knower cannot be anchored in a position over and against a given object. Any pretense toward a “god’s eye point of view” is removed. In its place, the knower and the thing known are continually transformed. This follows from the primacy of place Cheng gives to comprehensive observation (*guan*). It consists of both attentiveness to “germinating seeds or nodes of change,” but also feeling response and reciprocity.¹⁰ Being attentive and watchful includes relationality.

Cheng’s mending the divide in western culture also depends on his notion of the human person. According to Cheng’s Neo-Confucian renewal of the *yin-yang* cosmology,¹¹ human nature, including understanding and interpretation, participates fully in the cosmic order defined by Heaven and Earth. The human person is the locus for their harmonization, which is expressed in political, moral and social action. As a result of feeling the tension in existence, we cannot avoid feeling the demand to harmonize those forces within a given situation. This is the thought that underlines Cheng’s assertion: “There is a potential unity of man and heaven via human nature, and through this potential unity and hence through development of one’s nature (and hence development of natures of others and things) one can attain the highest form of development to harmony of all things.”¹² Clearly, there are implications of existing rationally within the ontological order of reality for “environmental hermeneutics” that are beyond the scope of this paper.¹³ Suffice it to say that in contrast to the binary logic of the Western mind that pits reason against the emotions, the Neo-Confucian unity of heart-mind/feeling-comprehensive observation is the channel through which the overarching structure of reality is fulfilled in every facet of life.¹⁴ In contrast to Western dualism of Being and non-being that justifies an irrational rage against nature and reduced it to standing reserve; by assuming that natural and human events are inseparable and mutually

⁹ Jesse Flemming, “The Onto-Hermeneutics of Guan”, in: *The Imperative of Understanding: Chinese Philosophy, Comparative Philosophy, and Onto-Generative Hermeneutics*, ed. On-cho Ng (New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 2008), 76–77.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 90–91.

¹¹ They are forces of nature (female, shade and male, light) discernible in the structure of society, government, architecture, biology, and metaphysics. Chung-ying Cheng, “On Harmony as Transformation: Paradigms from the I-Ching”, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 16/2 (June 1989): 140.

¹² Chung-ying Cheng, “Confucian Onto-Hermeneutics: Morality and Ontology”, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 27/1 (March 2000): 51. For Cheng’s view of the unity of human beings and nature and the cosmos see Höchsmann, “Foreseeing a Fusion of Horizons”: 140.

¹³ See Nelson, “Chung-ying Cheng: Creativity, Onto-Generative Hermeneutics, and the *Yijing*”, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 43/1–2 (March–June 2016): Note 33, 134.

¹⁴ On-cho Ng, “Toward a Hermeneutic Turn in Chinese Philosophy”: 388–392.

shaping aspects;¹⁵ by thinking of the self between heaven and earth; onto-generative hermeneuts feel the need to remove the contradiction between competing forces and, thereby, creatively transform discord and conflict in the world into harmonious relations.¹⁶

Before comparing Gadamer to Cheng, it is important to answer an objection from Richard Palmer. He argues that in *Truth and Method*, hermeneutics is based largely on Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity. Palmer limits Plato to Part III and associates him with light, intelligibility, the beautiful, the good and the true rather than with Gadamer's way of interpreting art, history, and philosophy. However, we cannot be sure that this is the last word on the question. It is telling that Palmer does not refer to Plato's ontology in Part III except indirectly since it is implicated in notions of the Beautiful and the Good.¹⁷ To my knowledge, Christopher Dawson was among the first to address the question of Plato's ontology in relation to *Truth and Method* Part I. He writes:

The intention of the conceptual analysis under consideration is, for all that, concerned not with the theory of art, but with ontology. The critique of traditional aesthetics, which it has in view for the moment, is only a passage for it towards acquiring a horizon that jointly encloses both art and history.¹⁸

According to Dawson, Gadamer's aesthetics, as well as his appropriation of the tradition in *Truth and Method*, ought to be interpreted considering Plato's ontology of the Good and the Beautiful in Part III. The beautiful in Plato is characterized by a transformation into structure and thus self-presentation prefigured in Gadamer's study of natural processes of which play is a variation, in Part I. Taking up what has been concluded about the One and the many, this entails that the contradiction between thought and language, subject and object, copy and original is removed in the course of following the topic that announces itself in a unity of thought and Being (thereby transforming copy into mirror relation, i.e., double mimesis).¹⁹ This is a synopsis of the transformative

¹⁵ Roger T. Ames, "The Great Commentary (*Dazhuan*) and Chinese natural cosmology", *International Communication of Chinese Culture* 2/1 (2015): 1.

¹⁶ Cheng, "Confucian Onto-Hermeneutics": 51.

¹⁷ Richard Palmer, "Gadamer's Late 'Turn': From Heideggerian Ontology to a Philosophical Hermeneutics based on Anthropology", in: *The Imperative of Understanding: Chinese Philosophy, Comparative Philosophy, and Onto-Generative Hermeneutics*, ed. On-cho Ng (New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 2008), 29, 40.

¹⁸ Christopher Dawson, "Gadamer's Ontology: an Examination of Hans-Georg Gadamer's Concept of Being in Relation to Heidegger, Plato and Hegel" (Ph.D. diss., University of Lugano, 1996), 23. DOI: 10.17863/CAM.6696.

¹⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, transl. revised 2nd ed. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 121, 457, 481.

experience of truth that maps onto the dialectic of contesting forces turning into one another (conversion).

Dawson discloses another important insight. He explains that the experience of truth in art and in the appropriation of the tradition "is responsible for orienting us within the world of significance we inhabit."²⁰ The integration of the Pythagorean metaphysical order into the experience of art and dialogue with a tradition presupposes culture. Indeed, Gadamer's account of *Bildung* is replete with references to harmony, proportion, form and expansive radii of inquiry comparable to the aim of Plato's education for the guardians.²¹ The very unity of Gadamer's *magnum opus* depends on a concept of self-formation that foresees the beginning in the end. *Truth and Method* is not an exception to the rule but, instead, attests to the extent to which Gadamer's Platonic ontology, although in synchronicity with Confucian dialectic of harmonization informs his method of interpretation.

Having established that Plato's ontology accounts for the unity of Truth and Method, the comparison between Gadamer and Cheng can proceed based on (1) dialectical theory of Being and (2) disposition or ethos. With respect to the first, Cheng defines the Neo-Confucian doctrine of harmonization: "For any two distinctive coexisting or succeeding forces, processes, or entities, if there is mutual complementation and mutual support between the two, so that each depends on the other for strength, actuality, productivity, and value, then we can say that these two form one harmonious whole and an organic unity."²² In this theory of Being, contesting forces blend into one another and become mutually supportive while retaining their difference. This insight into the nature of reality is not unique to the Neo-Confucian tradition as understood by Cheng. He views both Confucianism and Daoism as an extension and development of the *Yijing*.²³ Hence, there are grounds for consulting *Laozi*, part 42 for a numerological articulation of Cheng's doctrine, which is important for building common ground with Gadamer.

The Tao produced One,
One produced Two,

²⁰ Dawson, "Gadamer's Ontology", 23.

²¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 9–16. See also Gadamer, "Plato and the Poets", in: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, transl. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 54.

²² Chung-ying Cheng, "Toward Constructing a Dialectics of Harmonization: Harmony and Conflict in Chinese Philosophy", *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 33/s1 (December 2006), 27.

²³ Cheng, "On Entering the 21st Century", 23.

Two produced Three,
Three produced All things.²⁴

There are disputes about the interpretation of the passage that cannot be addressed.²⁵ Flemming argues that Gadamer and Cheng's way of thinking about language converges on Tao. He explains that, for Cheng, Tao refers to the "background silence" which makes all forms of communication possible. Similarly, for Gadamer the "infinite unsaid" makes it possible for language to have meaning.²⁶ This is a viable interpretation. But the passage from Laozi goes a step further in that Tao is also a universal interplay of opposites that unfolds in history, culture, and human practices (generation of the world). In this case, the arithmetical formulation of Tao articulates the complementarity between distinctly different elements in Cheng's doctrine of harmonization. Indeed, it is for this reason, the contrast and complementarity of the one and the many that he considers Whitehead a western philosopher most akin to his own philosophy. The One and the many is also fundamental to Gadamer.²⁷

Elsewhere, I explain how the One and the many inform and clarify Gadamer's philosophy.²⁸ They are derived from Plato's "unwritten doctrine,"²⁹ which is prefigured in Heraclitus and discussed below. Like Tao and contra the Western tradition of metaphysics as Platonism advocated by Heidegger, Gadamer's Platonic theory is numerological without being abstract and thus preserves the motility inherent to the self-unfolding one in Taoism: Although not a number, One logically entails

²⁴ Gu zu-zhao, "The Global Contributions of Ancient Chinese Philosophy-Aesthetics", *Journal of Literature and Art Studies* 6/6 (June 2016): 658.

²⁵ I rely Xunwu Chen's concise summary of Tao in, "A Rethinking of Confucian Rationality", *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 25/4 (December 1998): 105–107. For analysis of the commonalities and controversies among different interpretations based on various sources see Franklin Perkins, "The Laozi and the Cosmogonic Turn in Classical Chinese Philosophy", *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 11/2 (2016): 185–205.

²⁶ Flemming, "The Onto-Hermeneutics of Guan," 82.

²⁷ Whitehead's discovery of the One and many in Plato predates Gadamer's discovery of the same; an insight he attributes to Jacob Klein.

²⁸ Andrew Fuyarchuk, "Gadamer's Linguistic Turn Revisited in Dialogue with Chung-ying Cheng's Onto-Generative Hermeneutics", *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* (June 2019). <https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-6253.12354>. Also forthcoming by author, "Gadamer and the Nature of Language: Hermeneutics and Chinese Aesthetics in the Tradition of the *Yijing*", *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*.

²⁹ Gadamer mentions the doctrine in the conclusion to his 1942 "Plato's Educational State" and develops it in 1968, "Plato's Unwritten Doctrine." Both are published in *Dialogue and Dialectic*, transl. P. Christopher Smith. Gadamer credits Jacob Klein for alerting him to the doctrine in the 1930's. For a concise statement of the doctrine see Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Plato (1976)", in: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Heidegger Ways*, transl. John Stanley Smith (Albany: State University of New York, 1994), 83–84.

Many or two, which is also three (One in many) and simultaneously one (many in One by reason of an inversion).³⁰ Thus understood, the monism of traditional metaphysics beyond passive sense impressions is presupposed. However, if thought never transcended this non-relation, then Being could not reveal itself in beings without self-negation. There is thus a positive force within the annulment of separation that harbors a potential for unity;³¹ a logical contrast that includes mutual support in which human nature has a share.

With respect to human nature, as mentioned above, Cheng believes that humans participate fully in the unity of Heaven and Earth through creative acts of harmonization. For this to transpire, mind or thinking must be an element of Being. Cheng explains, "I believe that we can construct some plausible framework of such a sort, such that the mind would emerge from organic matter, values would emerge from the mind, and organic matter would emerge from the process-reality of the ultimate."³² Cheng is alluding to Whitehead and bio-chemistry, but the theological insinuation is not warranted in this context. Cheng aims to embed thinking, knowledge and the human person in a concept of nature where the barriers between the internal mind and external reality have been removed. Toward that end, he envisions the person within the cosmos. Yet he also leaves the relation of mind to nature as understood by science undefined. The same cannot be said of Gadamer.

Contra modern science whose mathematical theories separate thought from reality and thereby justify technological rampage against nature, Gadamer aims to introduce a limit by way of the Greek unity of thought and Being. The first steps have already been taken. The Newtonian worldview cannot account for discoveries of electro-dynamics and biochemistry ("living, growing nature").³³ This shortcoming, he suggests, has made science aware of its own historical conditions. This is evident in Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. There are, therefore, historical conditions available to us with which to surpass the influence of Newtonian-Cartesian mechanization of the world picture. There are historical conditions available for us to recreate that are

³⁰ Compare to Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Hegel's 'Inverted World'", in: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, transl. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 44. Thereat he refers to the inversion of Plato's two-fold world that stands behind the transformation of a copy into a mirror of Being.

³¹ A force of electricity distinguishes within itself a positive and negative. "Thus the truth of the play of forces is the unitary lawfulness of reality, the law of appearance." *Ibidem*, 43

³² Cheng, "On Entering the 21st Century", 15–16.

³³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Natural Science and the Concept of Nature", in: Gadamer, *The Beginning of Knowledge*, 110.

not completely obscured by classical mechanics. Werner Heisenberg's comparison of modern physics and ancient science attests to this. He writes, "We may remark that modern physics is in some way extremely near to the doctrines of Heraclitos. If we replace the word 'fire' by the word 'energy' we can almost repeat his statements word for word from our modern point of view. Energy is in fact the substance from which all elementary particles, all atoms and therefore all things are made, and energy is that which moves."³⁴ Gadamer alters us to the same affinity in the first two essays in *The Beginning of Knowledge*. They are both about the Heraclitean "Lightening steers all." The early Greek intuition about reality that for Gadamer resurfaced in the 19th century as a criticism of substance metaphysics, e.g., in biochemistry and electrodynamics, suggests that the historical conditions for reviving the unity of thought and reality has returned.

Not unlike the pre-Socratic unity discernable in Heraclitos and Plato's dialectic of One and many, quantum theory weaves together the stream of conscious experience with descriptions of the physical world.³⁵ However, the theory is also limited. Mathematical descriptions cannot represent transformation in modes of perception required to cement the unity of mind and nature in the world. Gadamer returns to the early Greeks in this regard and discovers that in contrast to the moderns, they were not aware of "self-consciousness," i.e., god's eye point of view, but rather were concerned with "consciousness of" reality.³⁶ The latter was disclosed to them in a "new kind of objectivity" (objective-subjectivity) says Richard Palmer, through "aesthetic vision"³⁷ or "intuitive form of unity."³⁸ Both are comparable to Cheng's notion of comprehensive observation (*guan*). These modes of perception are attentive and alert to a holistic sense of reality, a sense of the "All" discernable in the early Greeks for Gadamer. Like comprehensive observation that includes feeling-response and reciprocity (*ganying*), "aesthetic vision" is not only noetic precisely because the aesthetic presupposes an auditory disposition toward beings typical of the Greek oral culture (in contrast to the modern world that has replaced the ear with an eye, says Marshall McLuhan). This means that this sort of vision includes relationality, recep-

³⁴ Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science*, transl. Paul Davies (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 30.

³⁵ I am consulting Henry R. Stapp, *Mindful Universe: Quantum Mechanics and the Participating Observer*, 2nd edition (Heidelberg: Springer, 2011), 2.

³⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Heraclitus Studies", in: Gadamer, *The Beginning of Knowledge*, 14.

³⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 104, Note 174.

³⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the Divine in Early Greek Thought", in: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutics, Religion and Ethics*, transl. Joel Weinscheimer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 43.

tivity, and emotional responses. The auditory relation is the linguistic aspect of being-with-one-another and is thus comparable to feeling-response in comprehensive observation.

There is thus a way of being-in-the-world about which the early Greeks and Chinese philosophers were aware to which quantum mechanics points the way, i.e., understanding of the self-in-nature. However, that is not to say that the Newtonian-Cartesian perspective or mode of perception ought to be abandoned. For Gadamer, Newtonian and Kantian categories are still relevant. For starters, they continue to accurately describe the macroscale of reality or familiar things of common sense. Those categories, e.g., of cause and effect, continue to make sense of experiments and results. They ought not to be abandoned simply because the ionic microscale of the same reality has been discovered within the possibilities afforded by our instruments of measurement. Since consciousness is affected by history, language bears the imprint of the past, which is classical mechanics. Hence, Gadamer does not relinquish the instrumental use of language. Indeed, the separation of knower from known primes us to embrace the emergent nature of things no less than the separation of Being from beings enables the mother of all becoming, Plato's Receptacle. Distance draws near and this is a catalyst for change. Accordingly, the Newtonian-Kantian categories and language we use to understand the world will be modified by being re-interpreted from the mode of perception in synchronicity with the early Greeks and Heraclitus who understood that fire steers all. The important qualification is that the medium for the transmission of fire or electrodynamic impulses is a wave, which might introduce another orientation into the puzzle.³⁹

There are thus affinities between Cheng and Gadamer the Pythagorean-Platonist as regards their theories of Being and human existence. Gadamer writes of Plato, "He sought to reveal the interweaving connections which bind the spheres of soul, the city state and the universe as a whole."⁴⁰ Just as harmony resounds in Gadamer's account of ethics (*Philebus*), aesthetics (*Phaedrus*), politics (*Republic*) and cosmology (*Timaeus*) so too does the theme of harmony recur in Neo-Confucianism. For the latter, the universe is a dynamic process that generates harmony in which living creatures, family, state, and society are enveloped. Human existence does not, however, stand apart from these realms. On

³⁹ Indeed, this modification of Newtonian-Kantian categories is already underway due to the influence of the computer on the mind. Causal, syllogistic, linear, sequential reasoning typical of what McLuhan dubs the Gutenberg era is currently being displaced by lateral thinking, correlations, pattern recognition, and analogy.

⁴⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Between Nature and Art", in: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Enigma of Health: The Art of Healing in a Scientific Age*, transl. Jason Gaiger and Nicholas Walker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 84.

the contrary, for both Cheng and Gadamer the self is a medium within the tension filled electro-dynamic field formed by oppositions of Being and becoming, subject and object. For this very reason, Gadamer cannot avoid the demand heard also by Cheng to resolve differences in creative acts of interpretation and thereby remake history in the image of eternity.⁴¹

III. Gadamer's Dialectic

Both Cheng and Gadamer aim to overcome "Cartesianism" from within and out of the tension in existence created by binary oppositions such as that between One and many.⁴² This is expressed by Gadamer as follows: "Someone understands what cognition, knowing, insight is only when he also understands how it can be that one and one are two and how the two is one."⁴³ It is not clear that the American continental philosophers, philosophers who eschew metaphysics and view him as a post-metaphysical thinker, measure up to this rendition of cognition where knowing and insight repeat in a different register the Neo-Confucian dialectic of harmonization. In fact, while Daniel Tate and James Risser recognize the significance of Plato's dialectic to hermeneutics, they also overlook "how" one and one is two and two is one. As a result, they overstep the middle in which to creatively harmonize contraries and interpret the dialectic from one of two sides (ultimately dispositions), which is reductionist and renews the subject-object dichotomy. This attests to the limits of the western mind, or the extent to which it is influenced by the logic of non-contradiction. Tracking that influence in their interpretations clarifies Gadamer's philosophy and its affinities with Cheng's onto-generative hermeneutics.

In "Renewing the Question of Beauty: Gadamer on Plato's Idea of the Beautiful" (2015) Tate applies Gadamer's Platonic ontology to aesthetics on the basis of three dialogues that he maps onto three dimensions of the beautiful; *Phaedrus*-radiance, *Symposium*-transcendence, *Philebus*-measure. By tracing out the structural features of beauty in these works

⁴¹ Historical consciousness is a falling away from the origins Gadamer discerns in Aristotle. "For him the moral and historical life of mankind remains related to the order represented pre-eminently by the cosmos. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 521.

⁴² The transformation into structure presupposes aesthetic consciousness while also neutralizing it in a different attitude toward language.

⁴³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Plato's Unwritten Dialectic", in: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 135. See also, *ibidem*, 94 where through the voice of Plato Gadamer poses the problem of thinking in opposites while and differentiating concepts.

he aims to reposition aesthetics in relation to truth,⁴⁴ i.e., he undertakes to enact Dawson's theory about the significance of Plato's ontology to understanding Gadamer's theory of art and history. Tate writes, "By returning to Plato Gadamer intends to recover an ontological understanding of the beautiful that remembers its original union with both being and the true."⁴⁵ The basis for the union of being, beauty and truth is that they exhibit dialectic of the one and the many. However, there is evidence that while Tate acknowledges their interplay, he also misinterprets it. For example, he acknowledges the distinction and separation of the one from the many, writing "the beautiful is always co-present in those beautiful things from which it must be distinguished, but never separated"⁴⁶ and; "The idea of the beautiful is a different kind of one than the other ideas."⁴⁷ In this case, he is giving voice to Gadamer's position. After asking whether Plato replaces the separation hypothesis with participation Gadamer asks, "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 even from the start?"⁴⁸ The conditions are in place with which to account for the merging of opposites that retain their distinctiveness from one another.

However, rather than retain the separation thesis, Tate effaces the distinction between separation and participation. After citing the *Symposium* and arguing that beauty transcends laws, bodies, poetry and so on, yet is present in them (with the support of Drew Hylund) he asserts that "this does not mean that beauty is a changeless object of noetic vision."⁴⁹ It does not occur to Tate how beauty might be both an unchanging object of intellection as well as manifest in phenomenon. Correlatively, he effaces the ontological difference by construing truth solely in terms of appearances, i.e., appearing-non-appearing. While this is consistent with Heidegger's concept of truth as *aletheia* it is inconsistent with both the representational function of language and related correspondence theory of truth that stands in a constructive relationship with "participation" for both Gadamer and Plato. Along the same lines, Tate con-

⁴⁴ Daniel L. Tate, "Renewing the Question of Beauty: Gadamer on Plato's Idea of the Beautiful", *Epoché* 20/1 (Fall 2015): 22.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 22.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 28.

⁴⁷ Tate, "Renewing the Question of Beauty": 28. See also Tate, "Erotics of Hermeneutics: Nehamas and Gadamer, Beauty and Art", *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* 2/1 (2015): 17.

⁴⁸ Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, transl. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 9–10, 115–116.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, 28.

cludes that "'the good,' which is at the same time 'the beautiful,' does not exist somewhere apart for itself and in itself, somewhere 'beyond.' Instead it exists in everything that we recognize as a beautiful mixture."⁵⁰ In short, Tate exhibits reticence toward the way in which the noetic vision of beauty as a changeless object stands in a mutually supportive relation to many things that manifest Beauty. This suggests that he abandons the middle and interprets one side of the dialectic in terms of the other.

Risser's interpretation of Gadamer is multifaceted. The subsequent section develops aspects of his research that contribute to a Confucian-Gadamer rapprochement that reconfigures Western metaphysics and self-understanding. At this point, elements that stand in the way of the latter are emphasized. In *The Life of Understanding* and an earlier essay, "Gadamer's Plato and the Task of Philosophy,"⁵¹ Risser consults Plato's image of weaving in the *Statesman* for an explanation about "how to reveal, in speech, things as they are."⁵² The first kind of measure is Pythagorean and fit for theoretical studies.⁵³ He concludes that this kind of measurement has no relation to praxis or virtue, which the second kind does. In contrast to theoretical studies, practical arts such as statesmanship have an end in view and are thus fitted to ethical life.

At first glance this seems about right. A theoretically exact science cannot be a measure by which to reveal things as they are because it is "against life." This is consistent with Gadamer's line of reasoning in "the hermeneutical relevance of Aristotle."⁵⁴ In keeping with the latter, P. Christopher Smith is emphatic about distinguishing Gadamer's hermeneutic approach from a "logical-methodological approach" to interpretation,⁵⁵ because the former includes context and the latter does not. Risser's reading of the weave in the *Statesman* being a metaphor for

⁵⁰ Ibidem, 33.

⁵¹ James Risser, *The Life of Understanding: A Contemporary Hermeneutics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012). Risser, "Gadamer's Plato and the Task of Philosophy", in: *Gadamer verstehen/ Understanding Gadamer*, ed. Mirko Wischke and Michael Hofer (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003).

⁵² "Clearly, we should divide the art of measurement into two on the principle enunciated by dividing it at this point. One section will comprise all arts of measuring number, length, depth and breadth, or velocity of objects by relative standards. The other section comprises arts concerned with due measure, due occasion, due time, due performance, and all such standards as have removed their abode from the extremes and are now settled about the mean" (*Statesman*, 284e). See also Gadamer's interpretation of the imagery of the weave, "The Artwork in Word and Image", in: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, ed. Richard Palmer (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 205–206.

⁵³ See Risser, "Gadamer's Plato and the Task of Philosophy", 71.

⁵⁴ See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 309.

⁵⁵ P. Christopher Smith, "H.G. Gadamer's Heideggerian Interpretation of Plato", *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 12/3 (October 1981): 219.

dialectical thinking agrees with Gadamer's explanation of the hermeneutical relevance of Aristotle in *Truth and Method*, and Smith's overall assessment of Gadamer's approach to hermeneutics. For this reason, it makes sense to separate the two kinds of measure from one another and allot the art of weaving to the second kind of measure alone.

Nevertheless, there are two reasons to question Risser's decision about the insignificance of the mathematically exact sciences to ruling. The first pertains to the credibility of the speaker in Plato's dialogue, and the second to the consequences of Risser's thesis for discourse. Stanley Rosen, whom Risser cites in support of his interpretation of the *Statesman*, writes of that dialogue:

There can be no doubt that the late dialogues of Plato are more difficult in content and style than their predecessors. The displacement of Socrates from his role as principal interlocutor by a series of strangers from Elea, Locri, and Athens, respectively, is accompanied by an increased ponderousness of language, greater proliferation of technical detail, and the consequent diminution of the erotic playfulness and Attic urbanity that mark the earlier dialogues. The initial predominance of sunlight and lucidity, even in the conversations that take place at night such as the *Symposium* and *Republic*, and notwithstanding the continuous irony of the main speaker, is replaced by chiaroscuro and baroque ornamentation on the one hand and the substitution of professorial discourse for dramatic dialogue on the other.⁵⁶

For Gadamer, works that grow out of the inner state of the soul in *logos (ratio)* are playful, jocular and replete with irony. Thrasymachus is a tight-wound drum in the *Republic*, Protagoras over-confident and full of himself in the dialogue that bears his name. The Eleatic Stranger in the *Statesman* is a bore. His thinking is not imbued with the substance of his character, which is in keeping with his apolitical field of expertise. Indeed, the aptly named anonymous Stranger is the problem for hermeneutics because he disregards himself from a situation over which he purports to preside as judge. Rosen thus points out that the late dialogues, especially the *Statesman*, are intended to demonstrate "the inappropriateness of *diaeresis* to the study of human affairs,"⁵⁷ that there is no extended example of how to employ dialectic in that dialogue,⁵⁸ and that the speakers classify human beings with pigs, which he says is as an example of theoretical madness.⁵⁹ The only time *eros* is mentioned

⁵⁶ Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Statesman: The Web of Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 2.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 3.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 10.

(307e6), the Stranger asserts that it is inappropriate for a peaceful nature.⁶⁰ The upshot is that the speech Risser relies on to understand the weave is spoken by someone who is not themselves, i.e., the anonymous, faceless Stranger who cannot for that reason be relied upon to give a full account of how the Pythagorean theoretical numbers are woven into the art of ruling.

The consequence of denying the importance of mathematics to ruling is on a continuum with the consequences for discourse. Risser attributes to Gadamer the belief that “discourse is structurally incapable of coming to unity.” He explains, “every speaking subjects what it speaks about to determination, to an ‘as-what,’ which is never identical to the thing spoken about, and this means that speaking takes up its object of concern through an *already* [italics mine] constituted division within interpretation that cannot be made whole.”⁶¹ What is this already constituted division within interpretation? It refers to the subject-matter slipping away whenever we speak about it. This is not necessarily the case if the unity toward which speakers strive is a possibility they remember. In order for this to hold, the unity or end must be distinguished from propositions or the ontic surface of beings by interpreting them from the side of “listening consciousness” that Walter Brogan indicates when he argues for the unitary effect of resonance.⁶² From that stance, unity is a possibility recollected in the course of speaking about something. When Risser states that dialectic is structurally incapable of coming to unity, he is effectively equating this prior unity with the realm of what can be divided, which is why he says that the latter is “already.” That is to say, he takes an already constituted division within interpretation as primary rather than being a facet of a prior and ontologically distinct ground that makes division possible in the first place. Consequently, he reasons above that interpretation cannot be made whole. This may well be, but dropping the language of part and whole does not mean that they are not constitutive of language and, instead, might well indicate that “the whole” is a whole of meaning intelligible to another than visual standpoint. On account then of presupposing that the whole must be a form seen, he is inclined to run what is in fact the ontologically prior one together with the ontic surface of many beings, and on that basis interpret any pretense toward

⁶⁰ Ibidem, 3–4.

⁶¹ Risser, *The Life of Understanding*, 22.

⁶² Unpublished lecture. Walter Brogan, “Basic Concepts of Hermeneutics: Gadamer on Tradition and Community”, NASPH Conference, Goucher College (Baltimore, Maryland, U.S. September 14–17, 2017), 2.

knowledge of the whole to be comparable to the closure represented by Hegel's absolute against which he defines his own position.⁶³

This selective sample of American continental Gadamer scholarship suggests that the western philosophers are reluctant to think in the middle of things or between opposing forces. Even in the midst of arguing for a dialectical understanding of Being, they privilege one pole of the dialectic, and thereby re-enact the objectification of the "other" by a subject that stands over and against an object. Tate's interpretation of Gadamer's Platonic dialectical ontology of the One and the many exaggerates "participation" to the point of eclipsing the grounds for "separation" of opposites. Risser denies the relevance of a metaphysics of transcendence in Gadamer's thought, i.e., separation, and is thereby inclined to confuse a vision of the whole with a part. Neither Tate nor Risser's interpretations of Gadamer align with a dialectical interplay of opposites and this is due to a reluctance to dwell in the quintessential middle. This is clear when Risser reasons as follows: "To be in the middle of things is to be caught up in the weakness of the *logos*."⁶⁴ For Risser, *logos* is weak because we cannot grasp the meaning we are after. In order therefore to affect the "force of intelligibility" that generates discourse it is best to avoid the "middle of things," i.e., refrain from thinking opposites together (unity) and prioritize one side of the dialectic alone. This argument could be extended to Antoine Pageau-St-Hilaire who reasons that in contrast to Leo Strauss, since the theoretical life is bounded or limited by the political for Gadamer, Gadamer must therefore hold that philosophy cannot become unpolitical.⁶⁵ Not unlike Tate and Risser, Pageau-St-Hilaire might not recognize how Gadamer's philosophy is grounded within both the political and non-political realms or how both and neither one are true.

In order to revitalize the ontological structure of Gadamer's hermeneutics it is fitting to re-visit Plato's weave and explain out how to weave the first kind of measure in the *Statesman*, the theoretical-Pythagorean mathematical measure into the art of ruling. Gadamer urges just this

⁶³ To be clear, the explanation for Risser's unqualified denial of unity of the understanding in discourse is the tendency to privilege one side of the dialectic over the other. However, in contrast to Brogan and Tate whose dominant mode of reasoning is one of tarrying, withing, whiling, dwelling "letting be," participation and commensurate with them fluidity between individuals and others, Risser asserts a visual mode of cognition from the outset. The belief that knowledge is acquired by sight alone mistakes impressions-seen with meaning-heard and thereby denies the unitary effect of a dialogue. Stated differently, as a result of mistaking the meaning of Being for beings and thereby denying the possibility of hearkening to a prior sense of unity in the course of a conversation, Risser insists that we can only grasp aspects of an idea or whole of meaning.

⁶⁴ Risser, *The Life of Understanding*, 92.

⁶⁵ Antoine Pageau-St-Hilaire, "Philosophy and Politics in Gadamer's Interpretation of Plato's *Republic*", *Etica and Political/Ethics and Politics* 21/3 (2019): 172, 178.

undertaking several times.⁶⁶ It will be addressed in the next section. Suffice it to say that orienting one's life by Tao requires precisely what Western thinkers repeatedly overstep; namely, a capacity to live in relation to the harmony of all things, i.e., the spatial middle, the qualitative mean or lingual medium.⁶⁷ When Gadamer claims that the task for philosophy is to both remove and think a contradiction he presupposes just this very idea – that understanding dwells in the middle between contesting forces in language. Thus understood, Gadamer is closer to Cheng's understanding of onto-generative hermeneutics than he is to western accounts of his thought.

IV. Onto-Dialogical Hermeneutics: Ethos

Cheng's onto-generative hermeneutics stands behind this elaboration of Gadamer's dialectic of harmonization and an understanding of the self that extends into both history and nature. Without Cheng's insights into the practical implications of the *Yijing's* open cosmology for western thought, the significance of Gadamer's Pythagorean-Platonic ontology for human practice would be difficult to ascertain. Gadamer is cryptic about it. For example, he explains that the "fitting" in the *Statesman* refers to the "mixture" of the limited and unlimited in the *Philebus* because both concern "the middle between the extremes." At this point, he refers to Aristotle's ethics, which is the locus for the mixture. At the same time, Gadamer asserts that the "political-utopian and cosmic-universal" (about which Aristotle is silent) stand behind *ethos*.⁶⁸ The political-utopian refers to the *Republic* and the cosmic-universal to the *Timaeus*. Both the ideal state and Plato's cosmology stand behind the mixture of the limited and unlimited in the ethics of the *Philebus*. There is then a kind of ethos prior to harmonization of the political with the cosmological scale of reality exemplified in the art of weaving Heaven and Earth together. Overlooking this ethos prefigured in the early Greek cult experience of the di-

⁶⁶ See Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics", in: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader*, 66; Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Proofs of Immortality in Plato's *Phaedo*", in: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 23; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, 172. See also, Gadamer, "Plato's Unwritten Dialectic", in: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 135.

⁶⁷ I am consulting Cheng, "Onto-Hermeneutical Vision and the Analytic Discourse", 135 on the notions of a spatial and qualitative middle. For Gadamer, the turn to language for interpretation involves understanding in the middle as a medium in which understanding and the senses are re-oriented toward a temporal rather than spatial horizon of meaning, which in turn entails re-ordering of spatial relations.

⁶⁸ Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, 123.

vine seems to be typical of Western thought were it not for paths charted by Grondin, Risser, Wierciński and Lammi that are oriented toward recollecting a pre-historical sense of rhythm – the very rhythm or shaking movement that makes the right mixture in the *Philebus* possible.

In “Nihilistic or Metaphysical Consequences of Hermeneutics,”⁶⁹ Grondin’s project to recover metaphysics with hermeneutics starts with an analysis of “an experience of truth” that includes two prongs. He thus reiterates at another level of analysis than Beauty (Tate) or Plato’s weave (Risser), that all things strive for harmony. On the one hand, contra the conviction that prejudices disable truth as correspondence, Grondin locates truth in an anticipation/projection of historical consciousness that is “controlled” by the thing itself and thereby corroborated or falsified. This is how he makes sense of a “bad” or “good” prejudice. On the other hand, contra Gadamer’s alleged historicism, Grondin explains that the truth of things corresponds to something “like a timeless truth.” His example is the non-historically relative essence (as he claims) of Picasso’s *Guernica*. According to Grondin, it exemplifies the “new definition of the classical.” Taken together, truth thus resides in both the fore-structure of understanding and things themselves. When the two sides fit together forming a unity of thought and Being, a “truth experience” transpires that Grondin recognizes in Greek metaphysics. He concludes his article by quoting Gadamer that hermeneutics “leads us back, if we want to conform to the thing itself, in the dimension of problems of classical metaphysics.”

Grondin’s account of a “truth experience” for Gadamer intersects with the conviction that understanding in language is formed by both history and Being. Importantly, a turn toward language as the medium for understanding entangles human understanding in principles that pull in different directions – futurity of projection in a phenomenological horizon of time (history) and things that announce themselves (in language) from the side of emergent nature/life. However, even though he refers the reader to Gadamer’s last book *Hermeneutische Entwürfe* (2000) for guidelines about how the experience of art transcends history, it is not clear to Grondin how the fore-structure of understanding or anticipation is transformed when it is “controlled” by the essence of things. To answer this question, it is best to turn to Gadamer’s commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus*.

The demiurge in the *Timaeus* does not “make” or “work” to reveal the inner law of necessity. Instead, the demiurge envisions the perfect

⁶⁹ Jean Grondin, “Nihilistic or Metaphysical Consequences of Hermeneutics?”, in: *Consequences of Hermeneutics: Fifty Years After Gadamer’s Truth and Method*, ed. Jeff Malpas and Santiago Zabala (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 190–201.

proportion of the heavens (constancy of beauty) in phenomena that image it,⁷⁰ which I would liken to the ideal form of things in phenomenon that Paul Friedländer attributes to Plato's "theory of ideas." On account of this "aesthetic vision," "intuitive form of unity" or comprehensive observation of the whole in a part, the demiurge is compared to a nurse or midwife who through the relational power of language (being-with-one-another) accommodates the other for their own sake, or as other. Gadamer highlights that in the *Timaeus* this accommodation appears to us as charm and persuasion. In the living language this charm is audible in rhythm, resonance and vibration between speakers' voices and enlivens their minds to think by following the topic-question at hand (tact or groping effect). In a nutshell, when Grondin mentions a return via anticipation he intuits the recollection of an origin, which then becomes (from the side of a "listening" rather than "reading consciousness") the beginning for re-interpreting the given topic. Anticipation within history that recalls this trans-historical unity of Being and thought signals a change in human ethos that enables a re-interpretation of beings in terms of Being, i.e., in terms of proportions that appear to us in the temporal flow of language that has a share in the moving order of organisms (self-unfolding number).

In "Gadamer's Hidden Doctrine," Risser builds on Grondin's deferring to Greek metaphysics for understanding the unity of thought and Being.⁷¹ In the course of explaining "the sudden" or event of understanding as the transformation of One into many and many into one, Risser consults Heraclitus on the passage of day into night, on the periodic cycles of nature that are self-unfolding from out of the very tension or difference between them. This is effectively the move that positions language in nature, i.e., the belonging implied in hearing,⁷² above all through the back and forth movement of a dialogue self-similar to the rhythms of nature. Through this side of language, the nature of things announces itself in history to us as the language of things. Stated differently and in the words of Mircea Eliade, the hermeneut "reproduces on the human scale the system of rhythmic and reciprocal conditioning influences that characterizes and constitutes a world that, in short, defines any universe."⁷³ The task of hermeneutics is comparable to what Plato's demiurge accomplishes (transformation of disorder into order

⁷⁰ I am consulting Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Idea and Reality in Plato's *Timaeus*", in: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 156–193.

⁷¹ James Risser, "Gadamer's Hidden Doctrine: On the Simplicity and Humility of Philosophy", in: *Consequences of Hermeneutics*, 5–24.

⁷² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 478.

⁷³ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, transl. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1959), 173.

from within and out of chaos). Having said that, Risser blurs the distinction between belonging to history and belonging to nature by reasserting the primacy of the former. As a result, the source of immortality, the infinite unsaid, is never clarified. Rather than recognize that the rhythm of language is ontologically distinct from the influence of history, he asserts that the event of Being does not dissolve difference, identity always includes otherness, that we cannot transcend finite possibilities of understanding. He restricts the "interplay" of past and present to the phenomenological horizon of time. Would he but shed the historicity theme, and recognize the significance of a descent along a vertical axis advocated by Grondin, Risser might well come to terms with the ontological dimension he taps into with his analysis of "the sudden" by way of the rhythms of nature in Heraclitus.

That toward which Risser is reticent, is embraced by Lammi. He argues that Gadamer's recovery of the event of understanding is inspired by Walter Otto and "the German-Hungarian" Karl Kerényi's (among others) account of the Greek cult experience of the divine.⁷⁴ According to Lammi, recollection is not simply a cognitive act of remembering what we know but includes the slipping away of ordinary consciousness and rebirth through proper motion, song and dance into an elevated communion with all beings. This experience of truth as Grondin calls it, is an image (or referred to by) Plato's arithmos paradigm. Granted, Lammi does not attend sufficiently to mathematical proportions as a paradigmatic model of the cosmos ascertained by Tate in Gadamer's aesthetics. However, if "polemics always presupposes something in common,"⁷⁵ then Lammi's interpretation includes what it "forgets." The same could be said of Wierciński and his focus on Christian theology.

Wierciński anchors Gadamer's hermeneutics in the Christian doctrine of the incarnation, Word made Flesh in the Gospel of John and Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity. This seems justified. Gadamer explains in *Truth and Method*, "Language and Verbum" that in contrast to Plato who separates thought from language, the Incarnation shows how thought comes to language. This does not, however, overturn the portrait of Plato the Pythagorean advanced in this paper. P. Christopher Smith argues that, at the time of writing *Truth and Method*, Gadamer's view of Plato was overly determined by Heidegger.⁷⁶ But Gadamer leads us to believe otherwise. He asserts, "This structure of the *logos* and the *verbum*, as recognized by Platonic and Augustinian dialectic, is simply

⁷⁴ Lammi, *Gadamer and the Question of the Divine*, 28. See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 117.

⁷⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 104, Note 174.

⁷⁶ Smith, "H.G. Gadamer's Heideggerian Interpretation of Plato".

the reflection of its logical contents."⁷⁷ In this case, Plato's negation of the living language (with the theory of ideas) stands in a positive relationship to its affirmation in the same way that Plato's late dialogues on dialectic of ideas, e.g. *Parmenides*, stand in a positive relationship to the early dialogues on the life of Socrates. Plato and Christianity although opposites also complement one another and hence, Gadamer locates the Pythagorean and Platonic concept of measure in Christian moral philosophy.⁷⁸ The Christian doctrine of the Incarnation is radical departure from Greek thought, but at the same time Christian moral philosophy is prefigured in Plato's mixture of limited and unlimited. The salient point is concisely stated by Kenneth Dorter while trying to reconcile Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus with Zhu Xi: "in order to combine different philosophies, a synthesis has to leave aside the incompatible elements that distinguish them from one another, so a synthesis involves rejection as well as inclusion."⁷⁹

By relying solely on the Word of God to interpret the warp and woof of Gadamer's hermeneutics, Wierciński overlooks the other prong of Gadamer's dialectic, manifest in the order of nature that animates the interpretation of a tradition handed down in writing. Nevertheless, Wierciński's manner of reasoning also attests to this argument in a positive way. He makes statements that acknowledge both the metaphysical and historical dimensions of language. He writes, "For Gadamer, the universality of hermeneutics is grounded in historical consciousness, in language, historicity, and the understanding of philosophy as hermeneutics. The universality of hermeneutics is the universality of a linguistically mediated experience, the ontological disclosure of Being."⁸⁰ Whence the universality and the ontological disclosure of Being? In "The Language of Metaphysics" Gadamer challenges Heidegger's sense of the self as coming to presence and self-preserving.⁸¹ This is one sense of the self that runs alongside and thus is transformed by Gadamer when he writes, it is senseless to pit ourselves against nature.⁸² Rather than assert

⁷⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 474.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, 37. Plato's numerological metaphysics is a formalization of the Word made Flesh. Logos-mythos, true science and "the gift of the gods"/divine dispensation narrative.

⁷⁹ Dorter, Kenneth, "Metaphysics and Morality in Neo-Confucianism and Greece: Zhu Xi, Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus", *Dao* 8/3 (2009): 256.

⁸⁰ Andrzej Wierciński, *Existential Hermeneutics: Understanding as the Mode of Being in the World* (LIT Verlag GmbH & Co. KG Wien, Zweigniederlassung Zürich: 2019), 10.

⁸¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Language of Metaphysics", in: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Heidegger's Ways*, transl. John W. Stanley (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 77.

⁸² *Ibidem*.

ourselves out of the circuit of life (like a god) as he says of Heidegger, Gadamer aims to step into the circuit of life and, like any living organism, e.g., vegetable, to secure and persist in that infinite cycle/Being. The return to the early Greek experience of the fundamental character of the world depends on us, on our capacity to reverse metaphysical subjectivism and reinterpret it from the side of life, the “metaphysical-aesthetic point of view.”⁸³ Wierciński alludes to this when he refers to the original language of concealed possibilities, to keeping watch over releasing inner forces that make the event of understanding possible⁸⁴ and; when he argues that hermeneutics mediates between the finite and the infinite, between the human and the divine.⁸⁵ In both cases, he is thinking from the side of language that has a share in the rhythm and reciprocity of nature and that compels a reinterpretation of beings in history. We are being-in-nature and history. The movement between them ensures foundations without foundationalism. Without God or any other religious doctrine.

V. Conclusion

Gadamer scholarship is varied and diverse, but also exhibits a tendency toward one position or another. Tate sides with participation of One in many rather than their separation and Risser sides with separation (separates metaphysics from life) rather than with participation or weaving of the Pythagorean number doctrine into practical philosophy. Grondin discerns the trans-historical grounds of hermeneutics in the essence of truth yet leaves aside how a transformation in ethos through recollection enables a truth experience. Wierciński grasps the unity of one and many in terms of a Christian doctrine without due regard to how Gadamer’s dialectic explains his way of organizing the history of philosophy and in particular the relation of the Greeks to theology. There is a tendency toward positions that overlooks, tacitly or explicitly denies conditions that contradict an interpretation even though that is precisely what Gadamer expects. For him, contradiction is the inner life of the real because we are beings-in-nature within history. The effects of the 17th century science on our consciousness have resulted in a neglect of nature,

⁸³ Martin Heidegger, “Language in the Poem”, in: Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, transl. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1971), 160.

⁸⁴ Wierciński, *Existential Hermeneutics*, 8.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, 63.

which is why Lammi reminds us that Gadamer identified his own project with Platonic recollection.⁸⁶

Whereas, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger abandons the question of how to bring the concept of life back into biology, Gadamer continues the quest, although in terms of a concept of nature in which human beings participate through the dialectical structure of language. I have credited Plato with the inspiration for this move. To limit the thought to Gadamer's Pythagorean Plato in the *Sophist* 242c, the early Greeks cult experience of the divine, or Heraclitos would be narrow-minded. After recalling that confidence in science had been shattered after World War I, Gadamer writes, "In this situation it is hardly surprising that a completely second-rate book of the times had a truly profound effect on me: Theodore Lessing's *Europe and Asia* (1926) book, based on the wisdom of the East, put the totality of European accomplishment-oriented thinking in question."⁸⁷ He then notes that Lessing was assassinated by German nationalists. Could Gadamer have resumed the arc of Lessing's idea to save the west from itself? i.e., from the destructive consequences of mechanization for nature. In "From Word to Concept," he refers to the destiny of humanity hanging in the balance, predicts a fusing of Eastern and Western cultures,⁸⁸ and highlights the influx of Asian students into American universities and who are not giving up their own "inherited ways of life and religious beliefs."⁸⁹ He considers it philosophically worthwhile to mention that the order of the family in China survived the best efforts of the Communists to destroy it.⁹⁰ Gadamer is not a Neo-Confucian. Nevertheless, he may well have recognized in classical Chinese philosophy his own interpretation of Plato's ontology and its implications for transforming western self-understanding. That is to say, a Platonic-Pythagorean ontology that is prefigured in the pre-Socratics such as in Anaximander's paying penance to one another that Gadamer indicates is in accordance with "the Asiatic model."⁹¹

Just as Cheng re-iterates Mencius and situates the person within the nexus of mutually contrasting and complementary principles/forces

⁸⁶ Walter Lammi, *Gadamer and the Question of the Divine*, Note 130, 149. Citing Gadamer, "Destruktion and Deconstruction", in: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, transl. Diane P. Michelfelder, Richard E. Palmer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 110.

⁸⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Autobiographical Reflections", in: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader*, 6.

⁸⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "From Word to Concept", in: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader*, 111.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, 118.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, 119.

⁹¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Natural Science and the Concept of Nature", in: Gadamer, *The Beginning of Knowledge*, 103.

that unify the human with the Tao,⁹² so too does Gadamer position understanding in the middle of language; specifically, in the intermediary realm of rhythm between self and world. Vincent Shen conveys the resonance between humanity and a dynamic ontology of natural principles with Zhuangzi's example of the Butcher Ding. The play of his knife is similar to the rhythms and keeping time "to the Ching-shou music." The butcher is an artist who follows and is thereby perfected by nature's rhythms that animate all things. Freedom arises within the intervals of the dance.⁹³ The butcher's experience of his art could be compared to Gadamer's ontology of play. In either case, understanding is centered in neither the subjectivity of the subject nor in the world but in both, in order to bring about a unitary effect through the to and fro movements that are self-similar to the movement between day and night, male and female, Heaven and Earth, *yin* and *yang*. The dialectic of harmonization that Cheng discerns in classical Chinese philosophy is affirmed rather than derailed by Gadamer's turn to language. Language, or rather a dialogue that forges friendship, fellowship in human solidarity reflects the order of things. While Gadamer is aware of how the phonetic alphabet, abstract nouns, and neuter in western languages are responsible for the separation of thought from Being that distinguishes Indo-European from Chinese classical philosophy, he is also keen about the opposite. He explains, "In my *Platos dialektische Ethic* I worked out to what extent this investigation of reality as it is present in the *logos* provides access to the truth about what is, and how it serves in uncovering the true order of the cosmos."⁹⁴ It is not clear just how reality, in the sense of a dialectic of harmonization, is present in the *logos*. He explains that phonemes hold everything together that consonants separate and that this illustrates "the transposition of the Pythagorean idea of harmony to the sphere of *logos*."⁹⁵ Presumably, the separation makes possible the holding together such that they are mutually supporting in the generation of meaning. Therefore, Gadamer gives priority to the spoken language, to conversation in his interpretation of a written text. The inner ear discerns unity within opposed elements.⁹⁶

⁹² Cheng, "Towards Constructing a Dialectics of Harmonization": 29–30.

⁹³ Vincent Shen, "Metaphors, Narratives, and Existence", in: *The Imperative of Understanding: Chinese Philosophy, Comparative Philosophy, and Onto-Generative Hermeneutics*, ed. On-cho Ng (New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 2008), 53–54.

⁹⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Amicus Plato Magis Amica Veritas", in: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 198. This also shifts the discussion of unity of *logos* from rhythm to tone of voice or state of mind.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, 204.

⁹⁶ I am referring to *Logos* as a gathering that composes opposed elements into one without suppressing their mutual opposition. Wierciński, *Existential Hermeneutics*,

I have had recourse to reciprocity of rhythm in language that is self-similar, rather than analogous to nature. According to Gadamer, nature means the loss and regaining of equilibrium “and the search for a new point of stability.”⁹⁷ Gadamer leaves no doubt that the cycle is common to the movement between waking and sleeping, illness and recovery, “the self-sustaining rhythm of our bodily life”⁹⁸ and thus on par with the periodicities of nature to which Alfred North Whitehead adds, “including those belonging to the bodies of organisms, such as the beating of the heart, inspiration and expiration in breathing, and the menstrual cycle, is ‘an observed fact of nature’ as evidenced ‘by experience’.”⁹⁹ The conviction that language separates us from animal communication is a fact, but at the same time, as Polanyi says, we share with animals a “plunging reorientation” that revitalizes explicit knowledge.¹⁰⁰ Neither he nor Gadamer would be adverse to the idea that like song, the need for speech is a dominant aspect of human biology the explanation for which is “made up” by Lewis Thomas: “The rhythmic sounds might be the recapitulation of something else – an earliest memory, a score for the transformation of inanimate, random matter in chaos into the improbable, ordered dance of living forms.”¹⁰¹ With these words, Thomas creates bridges into the role that Gadamer allots to hermeneuts; namely, the creative transformation of disorder in history to order, beauty, harmony, solidarity and fellowship. Kateřina Gajdošová recognizes this as well. After comparing early Greek cosmology with cosmologies from the Warring States texts, she concludes, “Naming (language and speech) appears as a key device, thanks to which an individual can assume an active role in universal becoming.”¹⁰² There is a moral imperative to philosophical hermeneutics

64. Quoted from John Sallis, *The Gathering of Reason* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1980), 12.

⁹⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Bodily Experience and Objectification”, in: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Enigma of Health*, 78.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, 79.

⁹⁹ Adam C. Scarfe, “The Question of the Objective Basis of Whitehead’s Theory of the Rhythm of Education: Homeostasis Research and Chronobiology”, *Interchange* 47 (2016): 330.

¹⁰⁰ Polanyi, *The Study of Man*, 18. See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 193, 229 and 267 Note 28 on this idea couched in terms of a germinal decision, concept of life in which whole and part merge (Schleiermacher) to augment the meaning of Being (Platonic emanation).

¹⁰¹ Lewis Thomas, *The Lives of a Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 24.

¹⁰² Kateřina Gajdošová, “The Turn Towards Philosophy in the Earliest Cosmologies: A Comparative Study of Selected Excavated Warring States-Period Manuscripts and Pre-Socratic Fragments”, in: *Philologica* 4, ed. Olga Lomová and Lukáš Zádřava (Charles University: Karolinum Press, 2017), 60.

that Gadamer hears in *phronesis* and the call of conscience,¹⁰³ but which stems from our place in nature; the order of the open cosmos articulated in commentaries on the Chinese classic, revived by Cheng in dialogue with Gadamer and western metaphysics.

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Summary

The western tradition of metaphysics has been criticized by Chung-ying Cheng on the grounds that it does not have any fruitful bearing on practice. This judgment, however, depends on a concept of metaphysics that Gadamer overturns with a Pythagorean-Platonic ontology. When this side of his philosophy is developed in tandem with Cheng's onto-generative hermeneutics, in particular its doctrine of harmonization, new possibilities for self-understanding in relation to the grounds of existence are charted: The event of Being emerges from the reciprocity of rhythm in a dialogue self-similar to the rhythms of nature grasped by Cheng in terms of *yin* and *yang*. This argument is developed by critically examining and building upon contemporary Gadamer scholarship that both attests to the limits of western thought while also forming conditions that consolidate a cross-fertilization between Cheng and Gadamer on the trans-historical foundations of hermeneutics.

Keywords: Gadamer, Chung-ying Cheng, Plato, hermeneutics, metaphysics