

EMANATION AS SELF-PRESENTATION:
THE ONTOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF
GADAMER'S HERMENEUTICS

M. BROOKE BALLANCE

**Emanation as Self-Presentation:
The Ontological Foundations of Gadamer's Hermeneutics
by**

© M. Brooke Ballance

A thesis submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Masters in Philosophy

Department of Philosophy/Faculty of Arts
Memorial University of Newfoundland

March 2008

St. John's

Newfoundland

Abstract

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is an explicit exegesis of his ontological commitment to a reformed interpretation of the concept of emanation. This reformed interpretation is grounded in Gadamer's assertion that emanation is an immanent rather than transcendent activity. Based on this interpretation, Gadamer argues that emanation is self-presentation. Understood as the essentially disclosive nature of being, Gadamer contends that self-presentation is the activity whereby being manifests itself as truth. Hermeneutics, or the activity of coming-to-an understanding, is for Gadamer the self-presentation of being as truth. Here, self-presentation becomes the activity of language, where language is the complete mediation of the manifestation of being as truth.

In the introduction, I outline the basic structure of my thesis and introduce the principle arguments that expose the ontological foundations of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. The thesis concludes with an overview of the work and includes a brief comparison between Gadamer's ontology of emanation and Charles S. Peirce's ontology of communication that I hope to develop in future work.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Memorial University of Newfoundland and the Department of Philosophy for providing me with financial and scholarly assistance. I am especially grateful to Dr. James Bradley for his support, encouragement, and helpful advice while supervising my work.

I am eternally indebted to my parents, James and Elizabeth Ballance, as well as my sister Victoria, for their unconditional love and support. Writing this thesis has been an intensely enjoyable and painful experience, which was made a little less painful and a lot more enjoyable thanks to my extraordinary friends and family.

M. Brooke Ballance
March 2008

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter I – The Ontological Foundations of Gadamer’s Hermeneutics	9
1.1 Emanation.....	9
1.2 The Work of Art.....	11
1.3 Gadamer’s Ontological Account of Truth.....	16
1.4 The Spectator	20
1.5 Re-cognition as Presentation.....	22
1.6 Conclusion to Chapter I: Presentation as Increase	24
Chapter II – Hermeneutics as the Interpretation of Being.....	28
2.1 Hermeneutics as First Philosophy	28
2.2 Reading as Performance.....	29
2.3 Hermeneutics in Action	30
2.4 Prejudice as Application.....	32
2.5 Hermeneutics and History	34
2.6 Dialogue as Self-Presentation.....	37
2.7 Conclusion to Chapter II.....	42
Chapter III - Conclusion	45
3.1 Overview	45
3.2 Future Work.....	48
Bibliography of Works Consulted.....	52

Introduction

The roles of prejudice, tradition, and authority in Gadamer are frequently taken as the point of departure in most studies of his philosophical hermeneutics. In perhaps the most widely recognised critique of Gadamer's work, Jürgen Habermas criticizes Gadamer's insistence upon the rehabilitation of prejudice and authority on the grounds that in doing so he overlooks the power of reflectivity¹. Others, like Emilio Betti, have argued that Gadamer's hermeneutics diminishes objectivity². It is my contention that while such criticisms are worthy of investigation, they speak to merely peripheral concerns. I shall argue that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is first and foremost an exegesis of his *ontological* commitment to an interpretation and reformulation of Neoplatonic and Platonic/Aristotelian philosophy.

To this end, it is important to note that in this thesis, truth is understood not as a matter of the relation between linguistic structures and facts, but as a state of the real.³ The real is the activity of the disclosure or manifestation of truth through the activity of revelation. Further, the real is understood as a matter of 'being', where being is used in the active or dynamical sense. That is, being is treated throughout as the activity of the actualisation, realisation, or determination of anything that is. The term being thus refers to that which has been actualized or determined, and also to that which is in the process of actualisation or determination – that which is manifesting itself. In this context, truth,

¹ For a complete introduction to the 'debate' see 'A Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*', and 'The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality', both of which can be found in *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur* (Albany: State University of New York Press) 213-72.

² See 'Hermeneutics as the General Methodology of the *Geisteswissenschaften*', which also appears in *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*, 159-97.

³ An excellent rendering of truth as a state of the real can be found in Richard Campbell, *Truth and Historicity* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997) 56-60.

goodness, and beauty are the essential predicates of being, understood as the activity of disclosure.

In this context, it is my contention that throughout *Truth and Method*⁴, Gadamer's hermeneutics is explicitly driven by his reformed interpretation of the concept of emanation. This reformed interpretation is grounded in Gadamer's contention that emanation is self-presentation, understood as the essentially disclosive nature of being. As such, emanation is to be understood as an essentially immanent rather than transcendent activity. In very general terms, self-presentation is the arrival or presence of being through increase. Self-presentation also marks the arrival of truth. Indeed, self-presentation is the manifestation of being *as* truth. Hermeneutics, or the activity of coming to an understanding, is for Gadamer the self-presentation of being as truth. Here, self-presentation becomes the activity of language, where language is the complete mediation of the manifestation of being as truth⁵.

Recognising the connection between self-presentation as both the cause and manifestation of being as truth is essential to understanding Gadamer's hermeneutics. As I shall show, it forms the explicit foundation of his hermeneutical project. Whether he is discussing a work or art, a performance or the act of understanding itself, the underlying concern that always guides his analysis is how, or in what way, being appears or manifests itself. Although perhaps a novel claim (I am not aware of any similar ones in Gadamer scholarship) it is this concern more than any other that forms the fundament of

⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2004). All quotations from the text will be from this translation unless otherwise stated.

⁵ *Complete* mediation refers to the absolute presence of being in its characterization as truth. Language, or self-presentation, is the *complete* or *total* manifestation of being as truth insofar as being itself (and not a copy) becomes present via its medium.

his hermeneutics.⁶ In the following paragraphs, I will briefly introduce the principal arguments that expose the ontological structure of Gadamer's hermeneutics discussed in my thesis.

Chapter I

The roots of Gadamer's assertion that self-presentation is both the cause and manifestation of being as truth are firmly planted in his analysis of the work of art. Here, Gadamer claims that the relation between an original work of art and its picture can be expressed such that, "...the content of the picture is ontologically defined as an emanation of the original."⁷ In short, the picture comes into being by presenting the original within it – the original emanates from the picture. Gadamer's account of emanation however represents a radical departure from the traditional account insofar as he insists that it is not merely the picture that comes into being as a result of the activity, but rather the *original itself* that comes into being or achieves presentation insofar as it is present *through* the picture. Thus, "... it is only through the picture (Bild) that the original (Urbild) becomes the original."⁸ Self-presentation thus fundamentally subverts the traditional account of emanation insofar as it discards the idea of a transcendent and *unaffected* One. The result is a conception of emanation (self-presentation) whereby the product or issue of the activity of emanation comes into being only insofar as it brings the *original* into being at the selfsame time. Indeed, the original and the picture are equal

⁶ Others have certainly recognised Plato's influence on Gadamer. See, for example, Catherine H. Zuckert's *Postmodern Platos*. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996) 70-103. I am not however aware of any work that recognises the fundamental importance of Gadamer's reformulation of emanation as self-presentation.

⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 135.

⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 136.

partners in self-presentation since each 'shares in the being of the other'.⁹

The self-presentation or manifestation of being marks an increase in being. Here, being increases through the ontological interdependence of the original and picture. Thus the presentation or appearance of the original inside the picture is not the result of the original conferring its own perfection or activity on the picture. On the contrary, the being of the original is entirely dependent upon its interaction with the picture, just as the being of the picture is dependent on its ability to present the original. For Gadamer, an increase in being thus refers to the coming-into-being of both the original and the picture through their mutual interdependence. Increase is therefore understood not as the coming-into-being of two separate entities, i.e., the original and the picture, since neither has being without the other. Rather, being increases through the original and the picture sharing in the being of the other.

Based on the notion of being as self-presentation, Gadamer proposes that truth is itself an ontological event in that truth is the immanent self-presentation of being. Beginning with a discussion about the relationship between a play and its performance, Gadamer suggests that a play achieves presentation through its performance. What is more, the spectator or audience achieves presentation through their engagement with the performance. That is to say, through their participation with the performance, the being of the spectator comes-into-being: it is an event of self-presentation. Here, the being of the spectator comes to presentation and confronts the spectator in a way not possible before his engagement with the performance.

⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 146.

This confrontation or presentation of the spectator's being manifests itself as truth. Gadamer likens the presentation of being as the manifestation of truth to recognition or *re*-cognition. Once again analysing the relationship between an original and a picture, Gadamer argues that recognition is more than simply recognising what has already been represented (or what we are already familiar with). Recognition implies rather that something new comes into presentation by way of our recognition of the original through its presentation in the picture. Ultimately, this leads Gadamer to the conclusion that the self-presentation of being as truth always results in an *increase* in knowledge. Thus, in the same way that being increases through self-presentation, truth, in its characterisation as the manifestation of being, is experienced as an increase in knowledge.

Chapter II

The second chapter explains how Gadamer incorporates his account of self-presentation as the manifestation of being as truth into his hermeneutics. As Gadamer himself claims, his hermeneutics is more than the art or method of understanding texts. Rather, his hermeneutics is concerned with the universal mode of being of understanding itself. Understanding is thus first and foremost an ontological event. Indeed, Gadamer argues that understanding is the universal human experience of the self-presentation of being, and as such, this experience constitutes our primary encounter with the world.

As the human experience of the self-presentation of being, understanding follows the same formula of being as increase through presentation. Commencing with a discussion of the nature of texts, Gadamer maintains that the being of a text comes to

presentation through the activity of reading, where coming-to an understanding is the goal. Like the being of the original work of art, the being of the text is not present until it becomes present within understanding. That is to say, the being of the text is dependent upon understanding as an event of self-presentation.

As a uniquely human activity, any event of understanding involves the participation or engagement of the reader with the text itself. Gadamer refers to this engagement as the application of the being of the reader to the being of the text. Here, the application of the being of the reader with the being of the text is itself an event of self-presentation. Indeed, both the being of the reader and the being of the text are brought to presentation through their mutual engagement. It is here that Gadamer contends that the pre-judgements or prejudices of the reader are integral to the coming-into-being of both the reader and the text. In fact, it is the prejudices of the reader that achieve presentation through their application with the being of the text. Likewise, the prejudices of the text achieve presentation insofar as the text and the reader come to share in the being of the other through self-presentation. The relationship between the reader and the text thus follows the **same ontological** structure as original and picture. Coming-to-an understanding marks an increase in being because both the being of the reader and the being of the text achieve presentation through their mutual interdependence.

Based on the model of the coming-into-being of the reader and the text through their mutual engagement, Gadamer ultimately characterises understanding as the activity whereby the present comes to presentation through its encounter with past. This encounter holds both ontological and epistemic significance insofar as the coming-into-

being of the one through the other manifests itself as truth.

Gadamer's final analysis of self-presentation culminates in his assertion that as the complete mediation of being as truth, language is the activity of self-presentation. Since language is a universal feature of human experience, Gadamer forestalls any potential difficulties of 'non-participation' or engagement by making presentation a condition of language. Language is the experience of the self-presentation of being, and, as language users, our participation is automatic.

Availing himself of Plato's concept of the beautiful as that which shines on and reveals the good through its effulgence, Gadamer argues that language is analogous to the beautiful insofar as it presents being in its character as the manifestation of truth¹⁰. Language is self-presentation, and being as truth comes to presentation through language. This does not mean however that being as truth is ultimately separate from the activity of self-presentation. Although self-presentation is a causal or dynamic principle, being as truth is nonetheless an immanent rather than transcendent feature of the activity. As Gadamer says, "What presents itself in this way is not different from itself in presenting itself. It is not one thing for itself and another for others, nor is it something that exists through something else."¹¹ That is to say, in coming-to-presentation, being as truth are fully present in the activity itself – it is not 'beyond' the activity.

This insistence on the presence of being as truth through the activity of self-presentation fully accords with Gadamer's interpretation of Plato's description of the

¹⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 481, "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*."

¹¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 481.

good in the *Philebus*. Here, the good is judged to be the *unity* of beauty, proportion, and truth.¹²(65a) According to Gadamer's interpretation, the good is not only the *cause* of this triunity, but also fully present *as* beauty, proportion and truth¹³. The good appears inside the three and is clearly evident as beauty, proportion and truth insofar as it shines forth through them. In a similar manner, being and truth shine forth through self-presentation and are clearly evident as distinct, yet immanently relatable products of its activity.

¹² John M. Cooper and D.S. Hutchison, eds., *Plato: Complete Works* (Indiana: Hackett, 1997) 454.

¹³ See Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy* 115-17.

Chapter I – The Ontological Foundations of Gadamer’s Hermeneutics

1.1 Emanation

According to R.T. Wallis’ account of the activity of emanation, Neoplatonic philosophy is based on the hierarchical conception of three unified levels of reality, namely: the One, Intelligence, and Soul (One, Nous and Psyche)¹⁴. Defined as that which affects, or, that which unifies the many, the One is without cause or limit, and is absolutely discrete and unaffected. In short, the One is absolutely transcendent insofar as it neither affects, nor is it in turn affected by each successive level of reality. Furthermore, since it is absolutely transcendent, no predicate can be ascribed to it without simultaneously limiting its essential nature. This is another way of saying that the One is beyond comparison. When we predicate an attribute to any object, we are comparing it to another object, either real or imagined, and either asserting or denying that it possesses those attributes in common with the other object. Positively asserting commonality limits the One by taking away its freedom to be beyond comparison. As such, the One cannot be defined, save through negation:

From this follows the negative theology, that words can tell us only what the One is not, never what is. A corollary is that the denial of a particular predicate to the One does not entail affirmation of its opposite; thus to deny that the One is in motion is not to affirm it is at rest, but to set it on a level where the motion-rest opposition does not apply¹⁵

¹⁴ R.T. Wallis, *Neo-Platonism*, 2nd ed. (Indiana: Hackett, 1972) 2.

¹⁵ Wallis 58.

Soul and Intelligence reside inside the One (as do form and matter), and as such, they are not immediately distinguishable. To say that something is 'in', or that it resides within, something implies dependency. Thus, Soul, Intelligence, form and matter, are dependent and less perfect than the One, since their existence is dependent upon it. Now according to the fundamental principle of Neoplatonism, entities that have achieved perfection give off an external image of their internal activity¹⁶. They do so not out of any lack or need, but as a consequence of their perfection. The process whereby an external image is created is called emanation. The activity of emanation is akin to that of a fire – the One radiates successive levels without experiencing any deficit to its potency. That is to say, the One is not in any way affected by its activity, or, its potency is not diminished as a result of its activity. Emanation is thus an inexhaustible unfolding of reality, where Nous or intelligence is the first product, which in turn gives rise to Soul, which is an imperfect copy of intelligence, which gives rise to matter, which resides within form, and so on.

In Gadamer's analysis of the ontology of the work of art, which we shall turn to in a moment, Gadamer borrows the Neoplatonic concept of emanation, but modifies it in several ways. In Gadamer's interpretation, the concept of the One is articulated in terms of the good, which, unlike the One of traditional Neoplatonism, is inherently *relatable* to the 'products' or manifestation of the activity of emanation. Gadamer's good, unlike the

¹⁶ Wallis 61.

One, resides "...in everything and shines forth from it."¹⁷ In sum, the good is fully *present* in the product of emanation such that it becomes visible through it.

1.2 The Work of Art

Although sometimes ignored in Gadamer scholarship, Gadamer's analysis of the work of art, "...has to do not with a theory of art but with ontology."¹⁸ To this end, Gadamer begins his analysis by inquiring into the ontological status of a work of art. He achieves this by way of a comparison between a picture (*Bild*, image) and a copy (*abbild*) of an original work of art. The question he is asking us is: How is an original (*Ur-bild*) an original?

In his discussion of the plastic arts, Gadamer draws a distinction between the modes of being of a copy (*abbild*) and a picture (*Bild*). In each case, what Gadamer terms the original (*Ur-bild*), to which the copy and picture refer, is very different. A copy, he argues, does not refer to an original, but rather to a *representation* of an original. This representation is a picture, and thus a copy refers to a representation of a picture. A picture, on the other hand, refers *directly* to an original. Thus a picture of a forest refers directly to the forest, whereas a copy of a picture of a forest refers to a picture of a forest, which refers to a forest. In this sense, what the copy and picture refer to, are not so much different as they are differently removed.

Drawing on this difference, Gadamer explains that a copy exists solely through its ability to stand in place of the picture through its appearance *as* the picture. Thus, a copy mimics the picture by striving to *be* the picture, and identifies itself as a representation of

¹⁷ Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy* 116.

¹⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 132.

another. Gadamer calls this the function of the copy, where, "...The measure of its success is that one recognises the original in the copy."¹⁹ The copy disappears once this recognition is accomplished, as it is no longer useful. The original, however, remains. A copy's ontological status is thus parallel to its function. It is a means to an end, where the end signifies its destruction. Conversely, a picture is able to maintain a distinct ontological existence from its original by presenting the original within it, while at the same time remaining autonomous from the original, "So the relation of the picture to the original is basically quite different than in the case of a copy. *It is no longer a one-sided relationship.*"²⁰ It is no longer a one-sided relationship because the presentation of the original through the picture constitutes an independent mode of existence. Thus, the picture is not dependent upon the original for its continued existence. Indeed, "...Every such presentation is an ontological event and occupies the same ontological level as what is represented."²¹ Furthermore, the picture is not limited to any one particular form of presentation to achieve its autonomy. The picture can present itself from an infinite stock of possibilities and is thus capable of unlimited presentations of being. When a method of presentation is chosen, then being belongs to each individual presentation. As Gadamer phrases it, "...the content of the picture is ontologically defined as an emanation of the original."²²

An important aspect of the above claim is that while the content of the picture has its own ontological status independently of the picture, the original does not experience a

¹⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 133.

²⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 135.

²¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 135.

²² Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 135.

decrease in being as a result of emanation. What must be sorted out here is how, or in what way, the being of the original is at once similar and dissimilar from the being of the picture.

Following Gadamer's conclusion that the picture is ontologically defined as an emanation of the original, we ought to be able to conclude that being has increased as a result of emanation. What we do not know is whether or not the being of the original has increased, or whether or not being has increased as a result of the picture coming to be through presentation, or both. In other words, does the increase in being belong exclusively to the picture or to the original?

Gadamer does not consider the coming-into-being of the picture of prime importance with regards to the increase of being. Rather, the ability of the original to achieve an increase in being through the presentation of the picture acts as the sole condition for being's increase or decrease, "For if the original One is not diminished by the outflow of the many from it, this means that being increases."²³ Thus, even though we have said that the picture is brought into being by the original, being here refers primarily to the original. Perhaps the correct way of looking at this is to suggest that it is not possible for the picture to come into being if it is necessary that the original's being is lost in doing so. If this is correct, then it seems clear that Gadamer is not talking about the creation of a separate 'being', but simply the diffusion of that which was already there. Indeed, the distinction between original and picture seems to disappear once being is presented. Each presentation is a presentation of the original, such that we are

²³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 136.

constantly presented with the original through the picture. Joel Weinsheimer describes this process as "...a kind of backward origination by which the original comes to exist ex post facto."²⁴ While this certainly describes an important element of the process, it does not go far enough in stressing the interdependency between the original and the picture. It is true that the original *becomes* an original upon presentation, but it is equally true that the picture *becomes* a picture when it presents the original. A landscape becomes 'picturesque' when it is pictured, and thus neither possesses ontological status without the other. Presentation belongs to the original, and the presentation of the original belongs to the picture. Their independence is derived from their indissoluble dependency upon presentation.

The interdependency between the being of the original and the picture provides an important distinction between Gadamer's account of emanation and that offered by Neoplatonism. For Gadamer, emanation is not the activity of a perfect, independent being that produces as a result of its own perfection. Rather, emanation is the activity whereby *both* the original and the picture are brought into being. An original becomes an original only insofar as it 'shines forth' through the picture. The picture likewise becomes a picture insofar as the original is visible through it. Although distinct from one another, both original and picture are nonetheless ontologically interdependent. Furthermore, the picture is neither more nor less important than the original, but rather, "... in its own being, shares in what it represents."²⁵ Gadamer's concept of emanation is

²⁴ Joel Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985) 22.

²⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 146.

thus a clear departure from the Neoplatonic idea of an unaffected and completely transcendent entity emanating separate levels of reality. For Gadamer, emanation is an immanent rather than a transcendent activity insofar as both the original and the picture *share* in the manifestation of the being of the other. Furthermore, both occupy the same claim to being. That is to say, both original and picture are equal partners in the manifestation of being.

Gadamer provides more insight into his reformulation of the Neoplatonic account of emanation in his discussion of Plato's good in 'The Dialectic of the Good in the *Philebus*'²⁶. Here, Gadamer argues that Plato's good ought to be interpreted as, that which, "...does not exist somewhere apart from itself and in itself, somewhere "beyond".²⁷ Rather, the good is evident and clearly visible within everything that manifests goodness. Further, the good is not a singular entity beyond comparison and activity, but rather a dynamic, tripartite unity of three interdependent concepts. The good appears, or resides *within* beauty, proportion, and truth²⁸. That is to say, the good is the *unity* of beauty, proportion and truth, as well as its *cause*. Thus, "It is explicitly conceived...as having *three* aspects (*syntrisi*) [in three together]). The dynamis (power) of the good has taken refuge in the *physis* (nature) of the beautiful..."²⁹ There is a clear parallel between this statement and Gadamer's exegesis of the ontology of the work of art. In the same way that the good 'takes refuge' and becomes visible through the beautiful, the original resides and becomes manifest through the picture – "...it is there in

²⁶ Chapter IV in *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy* 104 - 25.

²⁷ Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good...* 115.

²⁸ *Philebus* 65a

²⁹ Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy* 115.

the picture itself.”³⁰ Similarly, it is the nature of the picture *to* allow the original to become visible through it. Inside the picture, the original is not an external copy or ‘image’ of itself, but rather its complete presence.

1.3 Gadamer’s Ontological Account of Truth

In the previous section, we saw that emanation was the activity whereby the original came to be present within the picture. In this section we will see how the truth of all works of art comes to presentation through their performance. A work of art is truly present only when it is performed, and the truth of a work of art belongs to its presentation.

Essential elements of the performance of a work of art are the actors, musicians, painters, audiences, and also the reader. Since the truth of a work of art depends upon its coming-into-presentation through performance, it follows that artists and audiences are essential elements within this process. To what extent, then, do the artist and audience contribute to the truth of a work of art? Gadamer answers this question by analysing the performance and reception of a work of art in terms of ‘play’. ‘Play’, like that of a game of hide-and-go-seek, fulfills itself in the complete surrender of the subjectivity of the participants to the game itself. Indeed, the “...players are not the subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation (*Darstellung*) through the players.”³¹ Play, expressed as a happening without any pre-ordained goal or purpose, thus overtakes and controls the players. Our conscious attitudes toward the game disappear when we are truly engaged

³⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 146.

³¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 103.

in play. Thus, the activity obviates individuality inasmuch as the activity is indeed the true subject.

In the case of play that is intended for another, as in a play that is intended for the reception of an audience, the role of the players takes on a different meaning. Play must now embrace the position of the spectator or audience, for whom the play is performed. Here, the players represent their role for the audience.³² Gadamer calls this process a 'transformation into structure', for here play takes on the character of a work that exhibits its own autonomy. A play achieves autonomy when the players, (and here Gadamer includes the artists as well as the creator of the work of art), leave all traces of themselves behind. This means that the actor playing the role of Hamlet is no longer an actor playing the role of Hamlet, nor does the audience take him to be such. This transformation completely obliterates any method traditionally used to distinguish actor from role or reality from fiction. Indeed, all such considerations are irrelevant to the play. Because it is a 'transformation', whatever existed previously is no longer present. This transformation, according to Gadamer, is the 'true nature of play'.

The most important consequence of play transformed into structure is that the play becomes its own measure of truth, "It no longer permits of any comparison with reality as the secret measure of its verisimilitude."³³ The play is an autonomous and self-sufficient entity that need not, indeed *cannot*, turn to the world outside the play for guidance into the truth encountered here. Truth asserts itself through our encounter with it, and herein lays its real nature. The reason why Gadamer defines truth solely in terms

³² Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 109.

³³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 112.

of its ability to assert itself upon us is because there is simply nothing more obvious than such a phenomenon. From the standpoint of play transformed into structure, our experience with the work represents our encounter with the truth of the work that forces itself upon us, "The world of the work of art, in which play expresses itself fully in the unity of its course, is in fact a wholly transformed world. In and through it everyone recognises that this is how things are."³⁴ This recognition is the universal experience of the true. In the following paragraphs we will see how such an encounter is brought about.

Gadamer identifies the experience of the true with recognition. Recognition has two elements: firstly, recognition involves the sensation of experiencing something again, and secondly, by experiencing something again, we know more than what we did before our experience. Gadamer calls this the 'joy of recognition', insofar as what was known previously is not merely known again, but rather known better, "As recognised, it is grasped in its essence, detached from its accidental aspects."³⁵ These 'accidental aspects' include the particular being of the actor, playwright, or audience member. Since these elements do not represent the true being of the work, they are merely 'accidental': so much so, indeed that neither actor, playwright or audience member exist as such during the experience of recognition. What comes into existence is an original and autonomous work, completely removed from particular concerns. What is represented and recognised here has *more* being than the thing represented. That is to say, the representation of a play or musical score has more being than the play or musical score

³⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 112.

³⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 114.

itself. Here we can see the parallels between Gadamer's discussion of original and copy. Copies strive to imitate the original by resembling the picture. Once this resemblance is achieved, the copy disappears – it no longer exists. What continues to exist, or rather, what exists in its place, is the picture. The picture presents the original, and in doing so, achieves its own autonomous being. We can recognise the original through the picture, as there is some resemblance here, but more importantly, we are presented with something *more*. We are presented with a lasting and new 'original' via the picture. The same holds for Gadamer's analysis of the true. When we are presented with an artistic performance, the subjective elements of the artist or performer's nature disappears behind the presentation in the same way that a copy disappears behind the original. What comes into being is the work itself, which we recognise from the original, but which nonetheless stands apart from it as an independent being. Thus, we do not merely recognise the original through the performance, we *re*-cognise it anew.

Gadamer emphasises the importance of performance in the experience of the true in the same way that he emphasises presentation in his analysis of the ontology of the picture. Performance, like play, is not different from presentation, but rather represents stages on the way toward achieving presentation. Artistic works come into being only when they are performed, "A drama really exists only when it is played, and ultimately music must resound."³⁶

³⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 115.

1.4 The Spectator

Now that we know the basic ontological structure of Gadamer's account of truth as manifestation or presentation, we must take a closer look at the role of the spectator in presentation. Our analysis of the spectator will illuminate Gadamer's thesis that hermeneutics is the simultaneous activity of understanding and becoming engaged by the *being* of the text. The overarching theme here is that the truth, being, individuality and recognition of the being of the text are nowhere present save through the act of coming to an understanding. In order to reach this position, Gadamer must explain how the participation of the spectator and the presentation of the work of art each affect one another.

Witnessing a work of art is akin to forgetting oneself. Ekstasis – or the condition of 'being outside oneself' – does not however imply that in 'forgetting ourselves' we are no longer present. Rather it suggests that we are present in a unique way. Gadamer calls this condition "...the possibility of being wholly with something else."³⁷ It is a possibility of being *wholly* with something else to the extent that through our self-forgetfulness we can completely apply ourselves to the situation. In the context of a stage performance, we are literally 'giving ourselves' over to the production. Giving ourselves is not a disinterested or selfish act. Rather, the play itself arouses our concern and induces our self-forgetfulness through its ability to affect us. Gadamer contrasts genuine submission to that which issues as a result of curiosity. Here, the spectator is merely captivated by the foreignness of the situation, and thus gives himself over to satiate his

³⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 122.

curiosity. Genuine submission however stems from a total concern for the work itself. We are concerned with the work because it speaks to us, affects us. Most importantly, because it affects us, we are changed as a result of our encounter. Specifically, we enter into total mediation with the work itself:

Neither the being that the creating artist is for himself – call it his biography – nor that of whoever is performing the work, nor that of the spectator watching the play, has any legitimacy of its own in the face of the being of the artwork itself³⁸

This experience creates ‘absolute distance’ between the world the spectator encounters in the artwork and the world he encounters outside the work of art. Absolute distance allows the spectator to withdraw fully from his own world and thereby completely enter into the world of the work of art. Yet, what he encounters here, or what is presented here, is the spectator’s own being. The spectator encounters his own being here because it is presented to him. Literally, his being is there present in and through the encounter, “For it is the truth of our own world – the religious and moral world in which we live – that is presented before us and in which we recognise ourselves.”³⁹ Here again presentation is parsed in terms of an activity that allows for the appearance of being. Furthermore, the appearance of being through presentation is identified as truth.

Phenomenologically, truth is experienced as an effect – it asserts itself upon us. The content of the assertion, or *what* we experience, is the absolute presence of being (*parousia*). And, as the above paragraph demonstrates, this experience is clearly *our* experience. We encounter truth, and we are affected by what we encounter. Through the

³⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 124.

³⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 124.

work of art we recognise ourselves, and, in recognising ourselves, we know more than we did prior to the encounter. What Gadamer means by an increase in being through the ability of the picture to represent the original in presentation is relatively straightforward. Yet it is much more difficult to understand what he means by an increase in knowledge on the part of the spectator who experiences this presentation. How does knowledge increase with the presentation of being, and what exactly is it knowledge of? Is it, for example, knowledge of the truth of the work of art - or do we gain knowledge of ourselves?

1.5 Re-cognition as Presentation

The key to understanding recognition and presentation in terms of an increase in knowledge and the truth of being lies in Gadamer's argument that neither being nor the truth of being are given prior to presentation. Rather, presentation brings being and truth into existence through each event of presentation. The experience of encountering ourselves through presentation means that we are present in this encounter and nowhere else. More importantly, it means that we recognize ourselves in this encounter, and as a result, we find knowledge of ourselves here. But Gadamer does not stop here. It is not merely the case that as a result of our mediation with the work of art that we encounter knowledge of ourselves by being presented with ourselves. Gadamer makes the further claim that this is actually an *increase* in knowledge. That is to say, we know *more* about ourselves here.

There appears to be a problem. For example, if I recognise the letter 'H' on a piece of paper, I do not know anything more about the letter 'H' than I did before I

looked at the paper. If I recognise myself through a work of art however, then Gadamer claims that I know more about myself simply as a consequence of recognising myself. Responding that I am present in the work of art is not a sufficient explanation for this increase, as the 'H' is also present on the piece of paper. That is to say, both the 'H' and I are present in the act of recognition, and thus presence cannot account for an increase in knowledge. The only difference in this scenario can be found in the statement that I am present *nowhere else* save through the act of recognition. No such claim is made upon the recognition of the letter 'H'. While it is true that I recognise the letter on the paper, it is equally true that I could have recognised this letter on thousands of different pieces of paper. When we recognise ourselves, however, then we recognise ourselves as present *only* through the work of art. Here a new difficulty arises. If we recognise ourselves through the work of art, then in what way is this experience really recognition? Is it not the case that we must already know something before we can recognise it?

If given a choice between describing recognition as the act of identifying previously known phenomena or describing it as the act of coming to know previously known phenomena *better*, Gadamer would choose neither. Recognition actually includes and exceeds both descriptions. When we recognise, we recognise the presence of that which we were previously familiar in a *new* way. Recognition comprises the dual process of identification (recognising something for what it is) and knowledge (recognizing something anew). We know *further* insofar as we know at all, "Like all

knowing, philosophical knowing is identification of something as what it is and has the structure of recognition, or “knowing again.”⁴⁰

Like most of Gadamer’s analyses, his account of recognition is argued on ontological grounds. Comparing the ontological differences among signs (*Zeichen*), symbols, and pictures, he concludes that only pictures retain the content of what they represent by also bringing that which they represent into being. A picture does not simply represent what is identifiable; it represents it in such a way that what is identifiable is recognised anew. As a consequence, we know more about the representation than we did prior to recognition. Gadamer reaches this conclusion by analysing the mode of being of signs, symbols, and pictures. A sign’s mode of being, he argues, consists in its ability to reference or indicate something absent. What is absent becomes present through the sign. For example, a weather vane references wind direction, and in doing so, wind direction is what is meant by such a sign. Like all signs, the weather vane itself is entirely forgotten once it has served its function. Signs cannot provide us with the ontological background necessary for explaining recognition as increase, since recognition of sign reference does not provide us with any new information.

1.6 Conclusion to Chapter I: Presentation as Increase

Symbols also fail this test. Unlike a sign, a symbol represents what is already present by replacing it. A crucifix is a symbol of the Christian community because there is an inherent connection between the symbol and the symbolized. Thus, the crucifix

⁴⁰ Gadamer, Chapter VI of *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980) 127.

represents presence rather than an absence. Indeed, the symbol is revered to the extent that Christianity is taken to be present in the crucifix.⁴¹ The crucifix acts as a substitute for Christianity, as all symbols do, by presenting itself as its representation. By taking the place of Christianity however, the symbol is unable to provide us with any new information about Christianity. Rather, "...One must be familiar with them in the same way as one must be familiar with a sign, if one is to understand what they refer to. Hence, they do not mean an increase in being for what is represented."⁴²

Pictures alone provide a model for an ontologically dependent account of knowledge as increase because pictures act neither as pure references, nor as substitutions, for knowledge. As we have seen, the picture is an emanation of the original. This meant that the picture achieved an independent ontological existence through its presentation of the original. Thus, both the original and the picture are present through the activity of emanation. Since the being of the original is dependent upon the picture for presentation, and the picture must present the original in order to achieve autonomous being, the being of the original, and the picture are dependent upon one another. This dependency does not resolve itself in the annihilation of either one or the other because both come *into* being as a consequence of such a dependency. The original *is* present through the picture, and the picture *is* present through its presentation of the original.

By presenting the original, the picture acts in a similar manner to the symbol. The original and the picture are 'substitutes' for one another inasmuch as each represents

⁴¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 147.

⁴² Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 147.

the presence of the other. A picture is not however *purely* interchangeable with the original. Rather, the picture possesses being that goes beyond its representation of the original. Pictures represent qualities that do not belong to the original because they are not simply 'copies' of the original. As such, the picture does not disappear once the original is recognised as present inside it. Indeed, the picture presents its own being apart from the original. In this sense, we recognise the picture as an emanation of the original, which is to say, we recognise both original and picture. Being has increased because neither the picture nor the original disappear - both are present.

The analysis of the picture as an emanation of the original provides the basis for Gadamer's contention that recognition is more than simply recognising what has already been represented. Recognition implies rather that something new comes into presentation by way of our recognition of the original through its presentation in the picture. That is to say, we recognise a representation to the extent that we recognise it as present within an independent presentation of being. Knowledge increases because not only is the representation *re-presented*, (which would amount to neither an increase or decrease in being but rather neutrality), but the original is presented anew. This means that we encounter or are presented with something entirely unexpected and original without losing sight of the familiar.

When we experience ourselves through a stage performance we too are presented with both the familiar and the novel. That is, we recognise ourselves through the play inasmuch as we are presented with a new picture of ourselves through the performance.

Further, to the extent that we are present, it is impossible to ignore our relationship to the play:

We must admit that the world of artistic tradition – the splendid contemporaneousness that we gain through art within many human worlds – is more than a mere object of our free acceptance or rejection. Is it not true that when a work of art has seized us it no longer leaves us freedom to push it away from us once again and to accept or reject it on our own terms?⁴³

⁴³ Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California P, 2004) 4.

Chapter II – Hermeneutics as the Interpretation of Being

2.1 Hermeneutics as First Philosophy

Following the example set by the experience of the work of art as the manifestation of being as truth in art Part I of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer proceeds to incorporate this analysis into what he terms a 'philosophical hermeneutics'. As opposed to traditional hermeneutical studies, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is concerned with the universal mode of being of understanding itself. That is to say, hermeneutics does not concern itself with any particular discipline, art, or science, but rather embraces any and all experience of human understanding. For Gadamer, understanding is the human experience of the self-presentation of being, and as such, this experience constitutes our primary encounter with the world. Indeed, understanding is essentially contemporaneous with the self-presentation of world. An account of the understanding of the world that focused on biological or physical explanations for phenomena would not be at odds with Gadamer's hermeneutics. As long as such accounts acknowledge that our primary experience of the world is understood neither biologically nor physically, but rather in terms of the ontological structure of understanding as presentation, then hermeneutics is the mediation of this experience independently of any discipline. Thus, the tacit assumption that Gadamer's ontological conception of truth is not that of modern science is pure illusion. Hermeneutics is not an adversary of science, nor indeed of any discipline seeking a systematic account of being, because hermeneutics is fundamentally prior to and present within all understanding. If being is self-presentation, and humans

experience the self-presentation of being through understanding, then hermeneutics is the study of being qua being.

2.2 Reading as Performance

In his discussion of the mode of being of the work of art, Gadamer argues that the being of the original becomes present through the picture. As the human experience of the self-presentation of being, understanding follows the same formula of being as increase through presentation. In analysing the relationship between understanding and the mode of being of a text, Gadamer concludes that, like music and plays, its mode of being lies in its performance. Unlike music and plays however, this performance possesses an indistinguishable connection with the mind:

The written word, and what partakes of it - literature - is the intelligibility of mind transferred to the most alien medium. Nothing is so purely the trace of the mind as writing, but nothing is so dependent on the understanding mind either⁴⁴

As the 'trace' of mind, writing is dependent upon the understanding mind to the extent that the understanding mind reveals this trace. Understanding is therefore a productive act, of which reading is its performance. Like the being of the original work of art, the being of the text is not present until it is presented within understanding. Here, the text becomes an original insofar as the understanding mind presents it as such. The text and the understanding mind are thus in the same relationship to one another as the original and the picture. The text requires the understanding mind in order to achieve presentation, where the understanding mind presents the text as an original and

⁴⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 156.

independent manifestation of being. This presentation marks a genuine increase in being because the text is presented anew as an emanation of the original.

2.3 Hermeneutics in Action

While keeping to the basic structure outlined above, Gadamer provides an account of the activity whereby texts come to presentation by focusing on the relationship between the reader and the text. This activity represents the hermeneutic experience to perfection and is intended to serve as a model for any and all experiences of coming-to-an understanding.

Hermeneutics is the experience of coming-to-an understanding, and coming-to-an understanding is a universal feature of human experience. Moreover, it is an experience that demands our participation. That is, if we wish to understand we do not have the option of choosing to withdraw from a hermeneutical situation. Using Aristotle's theory of moral knowledge as a model, Gadamer relates the hermeneutical situation to that of the ethical⁴⁵. Specifically, he argues that the way in which we come to understand anything is similar to the way in which we make ethical decisions. Coming-to-an understanding is akin to forming an ethical decision insofar as both situations require the application of previous knowledge to the immediate situation. For example, in trying to understand a text, we are forced to use whatever knowledge we already possess in order to 'figure out' or understand what has been written. Our ethical decisions likewise reflect previously obtained knowledge insofar as they are founded upon past ethical decisions. Since both situations reference previously acquired

⁴⁵ See *Truth and Method* 310-21.

knowledge, Gadamer argues that we are fated to understand every immediate textual or ethical situation according to previously acquired knowledge. According to Gadamer, the problem with understanding textual and ethical decisions in such a way is that we never in fact understand the *immediate* situation at all. On the contrary, we understand the immediate situation as an instance of a previous one such that the present situation becomes an instance of trying to understand a text. The problem with forming an ethical judgment based upon previously acquired knowledge is that we can never know in advance of our particular hermeneutical situation how we ought to proceed, since each hermeneutical situation presents a new demand upon the understanding mind. Hermeneutics, like moral knowledge, is therefore not a *techné*: it is a *praxis*. That is to say, we cannot follow a formula for coming to an understanding that would be universally applicable in all situations. Past hermeneutical experiences may acquaint us with some of the tools that will help us come to an understanding, but it is always the *present* hermeneutical situation in which we find ourselves that ultimately determines how we ought to proceed.

Since we never enter into a hermeneutical situation knowing beforehand all the elements necessary to come to an understanding, hermeneutics faces a unique difficulty. Gadamer calls this difficulty the problem of application. This difficulty involves the application of a universal to a particular situation, and is similar to the difficulty encountered in Aristotelian ethics.⁴⁶ Here, the goal of moral knowledge is the development of a moral character. Possessing a moral character enables one to make

⁴⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 310.

morally correct decisions and thereby perform morally correct actions. For Aristotle, the acquisition of a moral character is dependent upon the activities we pursue. Man is both the product and cause of moral behaviour, and as such, "...man becomes what he is through what he does and how he behaves – i.e., he behaves in a certain way because of what he has become."⁴⁷ Moral knowledge is neither a means nor an end toward the development of moral behaviour; rather, moral knowledge and behaviour are simultaneous with one another.

2.4 Prejudice as Application

Gadamer solves the difficulty of hermeneutic application by stating that, "...application is neither a subsequent nor merely an occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding, but codetermines it as a whole from the very beginning."⁴⁸ When we attempt to come to an understanding, whatever prejudices or opinions we held prior to the event determine, and are determined by, our understanding.⁴⁹ That is to say, the application of pre-judgements within a hermeneutical event *is* a hermeneutical event. Insofar as we come to understand a text or a work of art, we come to understand and are presented with the prejudices and opinions that determined its understanding. Indeed, the presentation of our prejudices and opinions are a part of the being of the work of art, such that the work itself comes-into-being through them, and is in turn represented by them.

⁴⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 311.

⁴⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 321.

⁴⁹ Gadamer's use of the term 'prejudice' refers to pre-judgements – that is, judgements made *prior* to an event of understanding. For a more detailed account of prejudice within Gadamer's hermeneutics, see *Truth and Method* 271 – 78, and also 'Reply to my Critics' found in *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*, 273 - 94.

In coming-to-an understanding, the application of reason is subsidiary to the application of prejudice. We may freely employ or withdraw the use of our reason in reaching an understanding, but the application of prejudice is non-negotiable. Prejudices are derived from the family we are born into, the community we live in, the education we receive and the country we live in.⁵⁰ As such, prejudices are a truly universal phenomenon. Reason is also a universal phenomenon. Unlike prejudices however, “Reason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms – i.e., it is not its own master but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates.”⁵¹ In short, reason is dependent upon the inherent prejudices within traditions for its activity. Rather than limiting its scope and function, acknowledging reason’s dependence upon prejudice legitimates its role in reaching an understanding, and, ultimately, its role in the continual presentation of being.

Indeed, Gadamer argues that any hermeneutical method espousing the independence of reason over prejudice and tradition inevitably precludes the presentation of the being of the text. Presentation is always thwarted under such methodologies because the being of the text is *completely* dependent upon the prejudices of the reader, such that neither the text nor the reader’s prejudices achieve further presentation. For example, if I attempted to come to an understanding regarding Plato’s *Timaeus* in complete separation from my own particular prejudices about the creation of the universe – to pretend to begin with a completely blank slate in other words – I would not have understood the text as much as I would have memorized its contents. This would not be

⁵⁰ Gadamer refers to this collectively as ‘tradition’.

⁵¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 277.

an increase in being but rather the proliferation of what was already present. On the other hand, if I were to focus solely on my own prejudices, then the being of the text would be completely ignored and I would have achieved nothing more than a proliferation of my prejudices. Understanding involves the presentation of the foreign prejudices within the text through their representation within the prejudices of the reader. Texts, like works of art, assert their own claims to truth independently of the reader. However, these claims are not manifest until they are presented, which is to say *present*, in the prejudices of the reader. Likewise, the prejudices of the reader are not manifest until they present the prejudices of the text. The relationship between prejudice and text thus follows the same ontological structure as original and picture. Coming-to-an understanding marks an increase in being insofar as neither the text nor the reader experiences a decrease in being as a result of the activity. That is to say, neither the text nor the reader are replaced by the being of the other, rather, each asserts independence through the other.

2.5 Hermeneutics and History

In the chapter entitled 'Hermeneutics in Action', we saw that application is neither prior nor subsequent to hermeneutic understanding. Following this, we saw how Gadamer reconciled the tension between the notion of the familiar and the foreign through the activity of coming-to-an understanding. We noted, for example, that the distinction between the 'familiar' prejudices of our own tradition and the 'foreign' prejudices of a text were simultaneously brought to light through coming-to-an understanding. Thus, neither our own prejudices nor those of the text were seen to be truly transparent, save through the act of hermeneutical understanding itself. Rather, the

prejudices of the reader and the text come into being insofar as they are independently represented through the presentation of the other. As has already been discussed, presentation marks an increase in being, accompanied by a simultaneous encounter with truth. Thus, the presentation of a text through hermeneutical understanding marks an encounter with a text's claim to truth. Likewise, we experience the claims expressed by our own prejudices, inasmuch as they too are presented.

The underlying structure of coming to an understanding is thus supported by the presentation of two seemingly disparate prejudices, namely that of the reader and that of the text. Neither prejudice claims authority over the other, for both are equally constitutive elements in the process of coming-to-an understanding. This conclusion leads Gadamer to declare that:

The true historical object is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other, a relationship that constitutes both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding. A hermeneutics adequate to the subject matter would have to demonstrate the reality and efficacy of history within understanding itself⁵²

Understanding is an historic *event* to the extent that we experience the past's claim to truth through presentation. The past is *present* in the act of understanding. In this way, and in this way alone, does the being of the past express true reality. Although Gadamer often refers to the 'being of the *text*', he simply means that the being of the text represents the prejudices of the past expressed through the work. When we attempt to come to an understanding, we are thus presented with these prejudices. This presentation

⁵² Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 299.

is experienced as an encounter with their truth. We are, as Gadamer often says, the addressees of truth. The past addresses us, and we are called upon to respond. The possibility of allowing the past to address us while we attempt to inure ourselves to its 'otherness' would be to speak into an abyss: there would be no one there to receive the claim.

Inasmuch as our encounter with the past allows us to receive its claim to truth, it also forces the re-consideration of a 'familiar' prejudice. Gadamer calls this a 'provocation', for our encounter with a separate or conflicting claim to truth *provokes* us into questioning an already existent claim. As such, we are presented with, and indeed encounter the present to the extent that we encounter the past, "Understanding proves itself to be a kind of effect and knows itself as such."⁵³ That is, historical understanding is the phenomenon whereby the present is affected by its encounter with the past. This 'effect' holds ontological significance because both past and present come into presentation. It holds epistemic significance because we encounter the past's claim to truth as well as our own. Understanding 'knows itself' as an effect to the extent that the effect is expressive of this dual presentation. To be presented is to be effective.

Gadamer calls the awareness of such *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*, or the consciousness of being affected by history⁵⁴. His concern is not primarily the promotion or study of the awareness of the effect, but rather the productive consequences of the phenomenon. Ultimately, understanding is the experience of the self-presentation of prejudice. This experience marks a positive increase in being because we are confronted

⁵³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 336.

⁵⁴ Alternatively, 'historically effected consciousness'.

with two independent claims to truth. That is to say, we encounter two separate prejudices as a result of the presentation of both. What is more, we experience this presentation not as a resolution, but as an opportunity for further presentation. Since neither prejudice disappears (both are present) a new demand is placed upon the understanding mind. Nothing has been resolved. On the contrary, we are presented with a new experience that demands our attention. Thus, inasmuch as being increases, the potential for further presentation occurs alongside it. Understanding is therefore an unlimited, self-generating activity.

2.6 Dialogue as Self-Presentation

Hermeneutics, the activity of coming-to-an understanding, is the experience of the self-presentation of being through increase. Moreover, it is a self-generating activity insofar as presentation is experienced as the simultaneous inducement for further presentation. This inducement is not a secondary but a *primary* characteristic of the experience. Indeed, we could never be in a position to understand while remaining aloof to the demands placed before us. Engagement or participation is thus the fundament upon which understanding rests.

It is to this last concern that Gadamer turns his attention in the final pages of *Truth and Method*. Here, Gadamer argues that presentation is ultimately the inexhaustible work of language. Since language is a universal feature of human existence, in which all human beings naturally participate, Gadamer is able to forestall any potential difficulties of 'non-participation' or engagement by making presentation a condition of language. Language is the experience of the self-presentation of being, and,

as language users, our participation is automatic. Before he can draw this conclusion, Gadamer must of course explain why language is the self-presentation of being.

Language is the complete mediation of being as truth because *language is the activity of self-presentation*. Availing himself of Plato's analogy between the beautiful and the good, Gadamer explains that like the beautiful, the mode of being of language lies in its activity. This activity is explained using the metaphor of light. Thus, the activity of the beautiful is parsed in terms of its ability to 'shine' or illuminate – it has the mode of being of light.⁵⁵ Although the mode of being of the beautiful is entirely contingent upon its activity, which is to say, where it is not active it is not present, its activity is a matter of revelation: the beautiful cannot shine where it does not also reveal. Thus, the beautiful shines or is active insofar as it illuminates that upon which it shines.

Following Plato, Gadamer states that the activity of the beautiful is always directed toward the revelation of the good. Unlike Plato, Gadamer refuses to accept the conclusion that this revelation is not the appearance of the good itself. As Gadamer says, "Where Plato appeals to the evidentness of the beautiful, he does not need to insist on the contrast between the "thing itself" and its copy."⁵⁶ The point Gadamer is making here is that the good, which appears through the radiance of the beautiful, is not an inferior or lesser copy of the good. Indeed, "...it is itself that appears."⁵⁷ Here Gadamer is once again appealing to the same logic used to express the relationship between the original and the picture. From this lesson we have learned that since both original and picture

⁵⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 477.

⁵⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 482.

⁵⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 481-82.

appear through presentation, it makes no difference whether we refer to the being of the original or the being of the picture – both are implied insofar as both are simultaneously presented. This conclusion follows from the consideration that the picture does not completely dissolve itself by presenting the original, but rather maintains its own independent existence apart from the original. From this insight, Gadamer proposes that the appearance of the good through the activity of the beautiful is not a mere *copy* of the good, but rather the presence of the good itself.

Gadamer relates his analysis of the self-presentation of beauty and goodness to the appearance of being as truth. Language is the activity of self-presentation because it presents the truth of being to human beings. Gadamer chooses to discuss the presentation of being as truth in terms of the activity of language because the experience of language is by far the most suitable to the phenomenon. Indeed, Gadamer's entire argument is founded upon the claim that we experience language as the presentation of being as truth. In this respect, as we shall see, truth, goodness and beauty are for Gadamer inseparable characteristics of being as disclosure; all presentation happens within language, and all presentation is experienced through language.

By language, Gadamer does not mean any particular vernacular, dialect, syntax, or indeed any study of language rules, usage, or structure. Language rather includes and exceeds all common senses of the word. It includes all senses of the word insofar as language for Gadamer includes any form of human communication. It exceeds all common senses of the word insofar as language, by its very nature, *reveals everything that is mediated through it*. All presentation occurs within and through language.

Indeed, everything that can be understood is understood through language. Thus, “The hermeneutical problem concerns not the correct mastery of language but coming to a proper understanding about the subject matter, which takes place in the medium of language.”⁵⁸

As the medium whereby all understanding occurs, language is clearly different from any particular intellectual investigation or scientific pursuit of knowledge. Language does not concern itself with any particular study or object, but rather equally embraces all subjects and considerations. The form in which this mediation takes place is through conversation within a dialogue. Here we experience and encounter the opinions, preferences and prejudices of our fellow discussants in such a way that we are compelled to assent to the truth of their claims. This experience is brought about in the same way that all truth encounters are brought about. We experience the prejudices and opinions of our fellow discussants as the achievement of self-presentation. Our discussant’s prejudices, as well as our own, are experienced as claims to truth because they *become* claims to truth. Listening to another’s opinion, expressing our own, and perhaps listening to our own opinion expressed through the words of another affords us the opportunity of experiencing them in a unique way. Like the presentation of the original within the picture, our prejudices and opinions achieve their own independence through the counterclaims and objections of the discussants within the dialogue. Ultimately, we are attempting to reach an understanding through dialogue in the same way that we attempt to reach an understanding through reading a text. This is not achieved by suspending our

⁵⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 387.

own prejudices or by passively receiving the prejudices of the other. Rather, all opinions are directly engaged and thus available for presentation.

Since all opinions within a dialogue are available for presentation, everyone within the dialogue is subject to the experience of receiving one another's claim as an event of truth. Events of truth are, as we have seen, best understood as the experience of being addressed. Insofar as we are addressed, we are forced to acknowledge that a claim has been made. Whether or not we choose to accept or reject the claim is always secondary to the immediate experience of being addressed. In a dialogue, we are, as Gadamer says, "...drawn into an event of truth and arrive, as it were, too late, if we want to know what we are supposed to believe."⁵⁹ Dialogues thus offer us the experience of receiving, without prejudice, claims that we would have otherwise been inclined to ignore. We are compelled to accept, for example, the claim that the sun recedes into the horizon because there is something evidently true about this experience. Our experiences of the claims to truth encountered through dialogue are also experienced in the same manner. What we eventually choose to accept or reject outside the dialogue is not the *experience* of truth. Rather, truth is encountered solely through its experience, which is made possible by our ability to engage in conversation. Here, the possibility of experiencing the truth of all opinion and prejudice is given equal opportunity of presentation, and as such, is the source of all past, present and future possibilities of presentation.

⁵⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 484.

2.7 Conclusion to Chapter II

Gadamer's proposal that language is the medium in which coming to an understanding occurs was derived by noting the connection between the experience of self-presentation as an event of truth and the ability of language to facilitate this experience. If being is self-presentation and self-presentation is encountered as an experience of truth, language is the total mediation of this phenomenon because our experience of language mirrors our experience of self-presentation. That is to say, we cannot separate the definitive features of self-presentation from what we experience through language.

This inability to separate what we experience through language from the experience of self-presentation is similar to the transformation of play into structure. Our subjective opinions and concerns are dissolved within the presentation of a play in the same way that our subjective opinions and concerns are dissolved through dialogue. Here, we no longer believe or disbelieve what we experience within the dialogue because such concerns are not the experience of self-presentation. When the dialogue is over, and the actors and audience members have left the theatre, we return to the familiarity of our private opinions and prejudices mostly alone. We can recall the transformative experience of the play in our minds, just as we can recall our experiences within the dialogue. We do not live our lives entirely within a dialogue anymore than we do a play. We do, however, live most of our lives through language, which is the medium through which dialogue is performed. Thus, coming-to-an understanding, or coming to presentation always remains a real possibility for us. Moreover, we recognise dialogue as

a real possibility of coming-to-an understanding insofar as we can recall our experiences there. The potential for coming-to-an understanding and experiencing presentation thus resides within language because dialogue occurs within language.

The relevance of comparing the beautiful to language and the experience of understanding to the experience of the good can now be properly appreciated. Language, like the beautiful, contains the possibility of revelation within itself only to the extent that this possibility is actualized through the experience of coming to presentation. Language is not itself presentation, nor is the beautiful itself revelation. The beautiful reveals or ‘shines’ because the good is present at the moment of revelation. This means that the good resides within the beautiful such that it becomes visible through it. The activity of the beautiful, its effulgence, is made possible by the arrival of the good. Similarly, language, like the beautiful, *can* bring being as truth to presentation, but this potentiality is not realized until it becomes an actual experience. It becomes an actual experience when we allow ourselves to enter into dialogue. Language mediates this experience, but it is the good itself that we encounter and is thereby revealed to us. What the good ‘is’, or rather, what it is that we have understood here, is the experience of the confrontation and transformation itself.

In an interview with Riccardo Dottori, Gadamer expresses our encounter with the good as akin to our encounter with the sun:

(...) which is just a metaphor for saying that one can't look directly at the good just as one can't look directly at the sun – even though everything becomes good by means of the good just as everything is illuminated by means of the sun⁶⁰

Although we cannot look directly at the sun, this does not mean that we do not *experience* and thus know it through its manifestation. The sun is not any *less* present simply because its presence is dependent upon our experience of its manifestation. Similarly, the truth encountered through coming-to-an understanding is not any less present because it is encountered through experience.

⁶⁰ Gadamer, *A Century of Philosophy: A Conversation with Riccardo Dottori*, trans. Rod Coltman and Sigrid Koepke (New York: Continuum, 2006) 31-32.

Chapter III - Conclusion

3.1 Overview

Beginning with the assertion that self-presentation is the manifestation of being as truth, Gadamer imbeds and applies this premise within his hermeneutical theory. More than a method of understanding texts, Gadamer's hermeneutics attempts to expose the essentially ontological nature of all human understanding. In doing so, Gadamer argues that understanding follows the same ontological structure of self-presentation as the activity or manifestation of being as truth. Gadamer relates the activity of self-presentation as the manifestation of being as truth to the activity of emanation. Like the activity of emanation, self-presentation is the activity whereby being increases. Applying this formula to the being of a work of art, to the spectator, to the reader, and finally, to the human activity of coming-to-an-understanding, Gadamer concludes that self-presentation is essentially the inexhaustible work of language. Language is the universal medium of self-presentation, and the manifestation of being as truth is possible through the activity of language (self-presentation).

In its character as the self-presentation of being as truth, Gadamer likens language to the activity of the beautiful. Like the beautiful, language or self-presentation has the mode of being of light. Here, light is understood as that which discloses or illuminates that upon which it shines. Language or self-presentation is thus essentially the *activity* that reveals being as truth. The activity of revelation is not however a transcendent event. Rather, the manifestation of being as truth is co-equal with language or self-presentation.

That is to say, the presence or arrival of being as truth is not separate from the activity of self-presentation.

This analysis parallels Gadamer's exposition of emanation as the activity whereby the content of the picture is understood as an emanation of the original. Here, the presentation or appearance of the original through the picture is not the result of an over-abundance of being. Indeed, the original does not manifest any being whatsoever until it achieves presentation. As such, the coming-into-being of the picture is not the result of the original conferring its being upon it. Rather, both the original and the picture come into being through the *act* of self-presentation; they appear only where they are also presented. Since the presence or appearance of being is not influenced by anything exterior to the activity of self-presentation, emanation can only be described as an essentially immanent activity.

Gadamer's insistence on the essentially immanent nature of the activity of emanation stems from his refusal to accept the traditional account of emanation as the activity of the unaffected or transcendent One. Nonetheless, Gadamer's theory of self-presentation is clearly modeled on an emanative interpretation of being as active disclosure or manifestation. As such, Gadamer's account of emanation as the immanent activity of self-presentation is perhaps indicative of an attempt to re-appropriate or re-define the activity. This interpretation of Gadamer certainly seems to be supported by his reading of the nature of Plato's good in *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*. As Gadamer states, "If the good is accepted as the cause of any mixture being good...the famous "beyond all being" (*epeikena tes ousias*) takes on a new

meaning. *The good is no longer the one.*”⁶¹ Gadamer continues by stating that the power or activity of the good takes refuge in the nature of the beautiful. Here, the good becomes the unity of beauty, proportion, and truth, as well as its cause. That is to say, the activity or power of the good resides inside and is fully present as each of the three terms. Indeed, beauty, proportion, and truth are intrinsically interdependent predicates of the good. Gadamer evidently develops this re-appropriation of Plato’s good in his theory of language as the immanent manifestation of being as truth. The activity of language (self-presentation) is co-equal with the appearance or arrival of being as truth. That is to say, the activity or power of presentation resides in the appearance or disclosure of being as truth. Gadamer identifies this activity as the appearance or manifestation of goodness itself. Indeed, self-presentation (the beautiful) is “...the way in which goodness appears...”⁶² Each event of self-presentation marks the arrival of the good, where the good is understood to be an immanent feature or characteristic of the manifestation of being as truth.

By grounding his hermeneutics on the model of self-presentation as the manifestation of being as truth, Gadamer is clearly influenced by the Neoplatonic understanding of being as an essentially emanative activity. Gadamer’s insistence on the immanent rather than transcendent nature of being as essentially disclosive appears however to be derived from a re-appropriation of the nature of Plato’s good. Gadamer’s reluctance to define the activity of self-presentation as anything other than the appearance or presence of being as truth exemplifies his interpretation of the immanent nature of

⁶¹ 115.

⁶² Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 481.

Plato's good quite decisively.

If my assessment of Gadamer is correct, then the significance of his hermeneutics extends beyond the realm of textual interpretation. Gadamer's hermeneutics is primarily an ontological exposition and it has ontological implications. It may be fruitful to consider, for example, whether or not Gadamer's conception of the good has any ethical implications. If self-presentation is the manifestation of being as truth, and each event of self-presentation marks the appearance of the good, would Gadamer then be forced to claim that every event of self-presentation is *good* in the ethical sense? With respect to Gadamer's firmness in advocating the necessity of prejudice, authority, and tradition in every event of self-presentation, this question seems all the more pressing. Is the coming-into-being of every prejudice the manifestation of goodness itself, or is ethical goodness something apart from this activity? It is doubtful that Gadamer would wish to align himself with such a position, but it would be worthwhile to consider whether his position nonetheless leaves room for such an interpretation.

3.2 Future Work

Relying upon a conception of truth as the manifestation or activity of being, Gadamer's hermeneutics fundamentally opposes most contemporary philosophical accounts that define truth as the satisfaction of a set of propositions. Although recognised primarily for his contributions to the fields of logic and mathematics, Charles S. Peirce also prosecutes an account of truth that is firmly rooted in the ontological tradition. Like Gadamer, Peirce interprets being in the dynamical or active sense. Peirce also asserts that the essential nature of being cannot be reduced to a single predicate.

Rather, Peirce asserts that being intrinsically manifests three absolutely distinct yet mutually interdependent characteristics, which he terms Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness.⁶³ Although Peirce defines reality as the triadic *unity* of First, Second, and Third, each mode of being manifests its own distinct and irreducible characteristics. The particular characteristics of each category of being are explicable according to one of three intrinsically interdependent ontological principles, which, very generally, express: 1) unconditioned activity, 2) differentiation, and 3) ordination.⁶⁴ Since all three principles are mutually interdependent, neither the first, neither the second, and neither the third principle takes precedence over the other. Indeed, the correlative interdependence of each category of being mediates or communicates its essential nature to the other such that each category becomes the medium of the other. Here, the manifestation of being is taken to be the infinite activity of mediation or communication, and each event of mediation is an event of truth. Peirce ‘tests’ this hypothesis in his theory of semiosis or sign communication.

Insofar as both Gadamer and Peirce offer ontological theories of truth based on the activity of being, a comparison between Gadamer’s hermeneutics of emanation and Peirce’s semiotics would be a fruitful project. Since such a comparison would be beyond the limits of this thesis, I will briefly suggest the main distinctions between the two theories that I hope to develop in future work.

One essential difference between the two theories is that Peirce grounds his

⁶³ 1.302-53. All quotations are from the *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (Vols.I to VI). Following the practice set by the editors of the *Collected Papers*, I give the first number of the volume and then a decimal point indicating the number of the paragraph in that volume. Thus, my first quotation 1.302-53 indicates volume I paragraphs 302-53.

⁶⁴ 6.214-37.

ontology on direct empirical experience. Peirce contends, for example, that entities of any kind have three intrinsic features of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, such that each can be experienced independently of the other. Moreover, Peirce advocates the reality of Thirdness, generality or ordination, as well as the reality of the unique singularity or *haecceitas* (Firstness) that characterises every singular entity.⁶⁵ For Peirce, the presence or manifestation of each category is mind-independent, and communication or mediation is not a uniquely human activity. Indeed, mediation constitutes the basic nature of every entity, regardless of complexity. Communication is thus an irreducible or ultimate principle, and every entity is an immanent manifestation of this activity.

Gadamer of course takes emanation or the activity of self-presentation to be a universal principle as well. Indeed, language is the *complete* mediation of being as truth. However, since language is a uniquely human activity, Gadamer could be construed as advancing a form of linguistic idealism. A major point of comparison would thus be Gadamer's use of language as the medium of the manifestation of being versus Peirce's contention that the manifestation of being is essentially mediation or communication itself. Both theories have strong idealist tendencies. However, Peirce's concept of the primacy and mind-independent nature of communication would represent an attempt to develop a thoroughgoing ontology of communication.

A final point that I would like to explore is whether or not either theory offers or is capable of supporting an ethical principle. As I have already mentioned in the above conclusion, it is unclear whether Gadamer's conception of the good ought to be

⁶⁵ For the reality of Thirdness, see 1.343, for Firstness, see 1.300-313.

understood in the ethical sense of goodness. Peirce is certainly well acquainted with the various applications of the concept, as evidenced in his lecture “The Three Kinds of Goodness.”⁶⁶ It is his paper entitled “Evolutionary Love” however that provides the best insight into what may be construed as an ethical maxim.⁶⁷ Here, Peirce defines love as *agape* or unconditional concern. Since it is unconditional, this kind of love is open to what it does not determine or control. Peirce describes the activity of love thus, “The movement of love is circular, at one and the same impulse projecting things into independency and drawing them into harmony.”⁶⁸

Peirce’s account of communication as the infinite mediation of the three mutually interdependent modes of being parallels his description of the activity of love. For example, insofar as each mode of being is the medium of the other, no mode takes precedence over the other. Rather, the highest principle is the activity of communication itself, which, by necessity, is open to and surrenders itself to the other. It remains to be seen if Peirce’s ontology of communication offers a better account of interpretive activity than Gadamer’s ontology of emanation.

⁶⁶ Peirce, 5.120-50. Peirce identifies the three ‘kinds’ of goodness as, ethical, aesthetical, and logical.

⁶⁷ Peirce, 6.287-317.

⁶⁸ Peirce, 6.288.

Bibliography of Works Consulted

Works by Hans-Georg Gadamer

Hans-Georg Gadamer, *A Century of Philosophy: A Conversation with Riccardo Dottori*, trans. Rod Coltman and Sigrid Koepke. New York: Continuum, 2006.

---*Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, trans. P. Christopher Smith. New Haven: Yale UP, 1980.

---*The Idea of the Good in Platonic Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. P. Christopher Smith. New Haven: Yale UP, 1986.

---*Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge. L.A.: University of California Press, 2004.

---*Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd revised ed. London: Continuum, 2004.

Other Works Consulted

Catherine H. Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, 6 vols. Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard UP, 1965.

Emil L. Fackenheim, *Metaphysics and Historicity*. 1961; Milwaukee: Marquette UP, 1988.

Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift, eds. *The Hermeneutic Tradition from Ast to Ricoeur*. "SUNY Ser., Intersections: Philosophy and Critical Theory". Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.

Joel Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1985.

John M. Cooper and D.S. Hutchinson, eds., *Plato: Complete Works*. Indiana: Hackett, 1997.

Richard Campbell, *Truth and Historicity*. New York: Oxford UP, 1997.



