
Hearing the Other: Communication as Shared Life

Journal of Applied Hermeneutics
January 31, 2019
©The Author(s) 2019

James Risser

Abstract

In the phenomenological tradition, which took root in the first part of the twentieth century, the issue of intersubjectivity became prominent as a way of characterizing social life. But as seen in the work of Edith Stein, for example, this philosophy of intersubjectivity gives prominence to the subject, and as such it leaves open not only the question of the basic character of social life, but also the hermeneutic problem of understanding the other. The focus of my remarks in this paper will explore the way in which Gadamer moves beyond a philosophy of subjectivity in his effort to establish the conditions for communicative understanding. For Gadamer, communicative understanding only occurs through a genuine way of being with another. It requires not just being in relation to the other but a form of participation that amounts to an idea of shared life. Gadamer establishes the precise character of this shared life in relation to his critical encounter with Karl Löwith's version of the I-Thou relation.

Keywords

Philosophical hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer, communicative understanding, I-Thou, Karl Löwith, intersubjectivity

Presenting the Difficulty

Let me begin today with the key quote for this talk:

Communication' [*Mitteilung*] – what a beautiful word! It involves the idea that we share [*teilen*] something with one another [*miteinander*] that does not become less in the sharing but perhaps even grows. (Gadamer, 1998, p. 6)

Corresponding Author:
James Risser, PhD
Seattle University
Email: jrisser@seattleu.edu

If you had previously read this quote from the outline of my talks or you are just hearing me read it now, you can probably understand why I wanted to include the German words. The German words help us see just how Gadamer understands the word communication (*Mitteilung*) that is not readily understood in our everyday use of the English word communication. Basically, we understand the word communication to mean making contact with another; in communicating, a message of some sort is sent to another. Social media is filled with messages and is now part of the communication industry. For Gadamer, communication is more than this when considered as a fundamental aspect of hermeneutic understanding. That is to say, the hermeneutic problem, as we have seen, is much broader than the problem of interpretation in the human sciences. For Gadamer, it “has to do with everything about which one can seek to communicate,” and this means it has the human situation in the world in view, including that of inter-cultural understanding (Gadamer, 1997, p. 29). I am involved in understanding in hearing what the text has to say, but also in hearing the other who breaks into my ego-centeredness, presenting me with something to understand. Understanding is effectively a communicative event, and this communicative event is more than a simple reception of a message. It involves the effort of bringing something into words and is itself a contact that has something to do with the very formation of human life. It speaks to the commonality that we call human such that it is nothing less than an experience of shared life. Exactly how this communication takes place is evident to every reader of Gadamer. The universe of language lives its life in conversation. When we want to understand something, even a mute written text or a painting, we are caught up in the language of conversation that wants to hear what this other has to say. In the more pronounced case of wanting to understand what the other person wants to say, there is a participatory engagement with the other that has a direct relation to the idea of shared life.

Now, it is almost self-evident that this engagement with hearing the other, with the undergoing of an experience of shared life, is not without its own difficulty. We think that understanding the other is not so different from ordinary communication. It is what occurs when *I* reach out and connect with another. *I* listen, perhaps *I* say, empathetically, “*I* understand what you are saying, *I* had something similar happen to me.” My emphasis on the “*I*” is intentional. It is what poses the difficulty in the first place. How can there be real sharing between one and another when we start from the singular experience of an *I*, when we start from the fact that each of us has a world to ourselves? Even Gadamer will remind us that we encounter others from our own pre-judgments, some of which we are actually blind to. But more than this. In his essay “The Incapacity for Conversation” Gadamer describes how we experience in ourselves the incapacity to hear the other when we ignore and mishear in conversation. He writes:

... one who ignores or mishears or feigns to hear is one who constantly listens to himself, whose ears are so filled by the words of encouragement that he constantly gives to himself in pursuit of his own urges and interests, that he is unable to hear the other. That is, *I* would stress, to some degree or other a character trait we all share. Nevertheless to become always capable of conversation—that is, to listen to the other—appears to me to be the genuine elevation of the human being to humanity. (Gadamer, 2006, p. 358)

From this difficulty, we have our questions. How is communication as shared life, as Gadamer understands this idea, possible? And what constitutes the character of sharing such that it forms a

basic dimension of social life, if not our humanity? I want to answer these questions through a number of steps, beginning with an historical account within the phenomenological tradition of the problem of the relation of one to another, the problem of what we usually call intersubjectivity.

Edith Stein on Empathy and Intersubjectivity

Edith Stein was a German philosopher in the early part of the 20th century. She was born into a Jewish family but converted to Roman Catholicism to become a Carmelite nun. She died at Auschwitz. As a young woman, she entered university studies with an interest in psychology, but soon became interested in the work of Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology. She eventually became Husserl's assistant and her own work closely follows Husserl's phenomenology. With the publication of her book *Philosophy of Psychology and the Human Sciences* in Husserl's Yearbook in 1922, Stein had already made great inroads in her earlier book *The Problem of Empathy* to surpass the prevailing idea, mostly from Husserl, that the relating of one to another resided in analogical presentation. This is the idea that one apprehends the other person by comparison with oneself, where the self is a knowing conscious subject. Stein thought that the experience of relating to another involved more than an experience of self-reference. She thought that empathy, properly understood, constituted a real relation to the other. The experience of empathy was for her an encounter with the foreign other in which the conscious ego sees both sameness and difference, and, as a result, the conscious ego is able to become more aware of itself (Stein, 1989, p. 11). Still, this early work on empathy for all its merits never completely escapes from thinking the relation to the other from the priority of the conscious ego.

What is different in *Philosophy of Psychology and the Human Sciences* is Stein's extension of her earlier analysis to include various forms of living together. At the center of this work is the living together of community, which she understood as an organic union of individuals. But here too, even with the introduction of the idea of solidarity and being *with* one another, she continues to frame her analysis in terms of the conscious ego. Her starting point is the subject, as if community were simply a plurality of subjects in a relation of reciprocity. But in starting from the position of the subject Stein fails to thematize the *with-one-another* as such. She only takes note that there is evidence to suggest there is an orientation of individuals to one another. This orientation of individuals to one another is sharing only in the most general sense. The *with-one-another* of community is for her simply "out there in life" (Stein, 2000, p. 197). In the end, Stein's analysis of the relation of one to another is insufficient for coming to terms with more fundamental aspects of the *with-one-another* of shared life that reaches expression in Gadamer's hermeneutics.¹

Martin Buber's I-Thou Relation

Most people are familiar with the name Martin Buber, who was a Jewish philosopher known for his philosophy of dialogue. When Buber published *I and Thou* in 1923, we have what could be considered the first attempt to explicitly thematize the relation of one to another *as* relation. In contrast to Stein, Buber thinks that the I-you relation precedes any self-recognition of an I. Buber writes, "in the beginning is the relation," which means that there are not first two terms,

the I and the you, which are subsequently placed in relation. What is first is the “genuine originality, the lived relationship,” as immediate encounter (Buber, 1970, p. 69).

Why Buber used the expression I-you for the relation of one to another is not without significance. Buber does not invent the expression. It was first used in a letter by Friedrich Jacobi in 1785, and then more prominently by Ludwig Feuerbach in 1943 (Buber, 1972, pp. 209-210). The expression was used by Feuerbach to convey the basic idea that the essence of the human is found only in community, and he uses the expression I-you specifically to capture our communal nature at a personal level. For his part, Buber characterizes the I-you relation in an almost mystical way. The I-you relation expresses a non-mediated contact with another. At one place he characterizes it as “meeting” that can occur without two people speaking with one another. He contrasts this relation with a means-end relation, an instrumental relation of use that fails to support inter-human life. He calls this one-sided relation of knowing and using an I-it relation. So Buber will speak of “setting at a distance” and “entering into relation” to describe the two forms of relating. Buber is now closely associated with this expression I-you, but others working on the idea of intersubjectivity also used it. In particular, the expression was familiar to Buber’s friend and collaborator, Franz Rosenzweig, who contested Buber’s account of the I-you prior to the publication of Buber’s book. Rosenzweig thought that Buber’s presentation of the I-you was too narrow, that he had compressed all of authentic life into an I-you, ignoring other possible relations in the basic relation of one to another (Buber, 1996, p. 280)² Rosenzweig’s influence provoked Buber to amend his text as it was going to print. He convinced Buber that dialogical speech was to be seen as an essential component of the I-you relation (Batnitzky, 2009, p. 114).

The Path to Gadamer’s I-Thou Relation: Karl Löwith

In 1928, Karl Löwith, a student of Martin Heidegger, publishes his *Habilitationsschrift* (a second dissertation required for university teaching) “On the Individual in the Role of Fellow Man” under Heidegger’s supervision. In the same year Gadamer, who was a close friend of Löwith, was completing his *Habilitationsschrift* on Plato under Heidegger’s supervision (Gadamer, 1987, pp. 436-440).³ In his own work Löwith shows that he was well aware of these earlier developments on the sociality of the I-Thou relation and agrees with Buber that the relation has priority over the *relata*. More importantly, Löwith views his work as supplementing Heidegger’s analysis of intersubjectivity in *Being and Time*.

Actually, Heidegger does not use the word “intersubjectivity” in *Being and Time*. And, actually his analysis of being with others is quite sophisticated. In a nutshell, Heidegger thinks that being with others is basic to being human, along with the fact that human existence is always individuated (Heidegger describes being human with the German word *Dasein* and says that *Dasein* is in each case mine). Heidegger claims that for the most part we live in everydayness which is characterized as the world of the “they,” which means we live in an always familiar world with a range of social expectations and interpretations. As a they-self I accept these expectations and interpretations and let my world be structured by them. In this way of being with others I am existing inauthentically: I do not live in terms of my ownmost possibilities and I view my relation to others from a perspective of distance. In modern life this perspective of distance appears in relating to others in terms of a “having”: “my neighbor has two new cars while I only have one.” Heidegger then notes a more positive dimension of being with others, which he

characterizes in general as a form of care that expresses itself in two ways. The first way he calls leaping-in for the other. In leaping-in I take care for the other, I take the other's "care" away from him. In effect, I take over the other's responsibility, as a parent leaps-in to help a child with their homework, or a teacher leaps-in to help a student with their assignment. In this kind of concerned care the other can become someone who is dependent and even dominated. The second way he calls leaping-ahead. His description of this concerned care for the other is almost cryptic since he does not explain it in any detail. This care, Heidegger tells us, leaps-ahead not in order to take "care" away from the other, but to authentically give it back as such. To quote Heidegger, this care, which "pertains to the existence of the other and not to a what which it takes care of, helps the other to become transparent to himself in his care and free for it" (Heidegger, 1927/2010, p. 119). We can say this much: this type of care is concerned with the other's way of existing and not towards the things with which is the other is concerned.

Having said this, Löwith thinks that there is a basic sociality of being-with-one-another that is not found in Heidegger's analysis of Dasein/being human. He claims that the being with-one-another is the primary and decisive feature of our being in relation, against what one could consider Heidegger's insistence on having it both ways: Dasein as original co-being and at the same time in each case mine.⁴

Regarding Löwith's contribution to this early development of the idea of intersubjectivity, there are two points of note. First, Löwith's argument for the primacy of the with-one-another entails a primacy of social practices over individual activity. Löwith regards these social practices not as something an individual makes by him or herself, but as pre-existing the individual in their particularity of time and place. In effect he is saying that there is always a cultured social world that precedes the individual. This may be splitting hairs with Heidegger, but for Löwith this amounts to a difference that allows him to start from what he calls *human Dasein* and not simply Dasein (Heidegger, 2007, p. 290).

The second point concerns the point of intersection between Löwith and Gadamer that emerges from his emphasis on the importance of conversation in being-with-one-another. In the section from his book titled "Being-with-one another as speaking-with-one-another" Löwith claims that the with-one-another of conversation binds the speakers such that there can be communication (*Mitteilung*). Löwith writes:

That which is communicated is there in an original way only in communication. In the communication [*Mitteilung*] that communicates something one shares [*teilt*] oneself with another at the same time. The authentic meaning of the "with" of sharing [*mit* "der *Teilung*"] is found in the one-another [*Ein-ander*].⁵

When Gadamer then writes his *Habilitätionsschrift* on Plato, he too will describe the being with-one-another in conversation, but not without some reservation of Löwith's position.⁶ In his preliminary discussion of the nature of Socratic conversation and the ability to bring about a shared understanding, Gadamer first notes how the matter to be understood in speech is inseparable from its expression, and this pattern of mutual self-expression constitutes a specific way of being with another. He then adds that the shared understanding guiding this activity does not necessarily mean that agreement is reached, but only what enables "the participants themselves

to become manifest to each other in speaking about it” (Gadamer, 1991, p. 37). Translation: I hear you, you hear me, but I am not sure if we are sharing. The question for Gadamer is “whether this way of understanding the other person is a genuine way of being with one another” (Gadamer, 1991, p. 37). What is behind his question is the concern that understanding others through self-expression is made possible by a constant return to the self as if it were two “I”s trying to come to agreement. For Gadamer, such a reflective stance is a degenerate form of being with one another.⁷ In such a relation a person will reflect him or herself out of the real mutuality of the relation, thus changing the relation and destroying its moral bond in the process. Despite having the character of a “we” relation, it is the form of understanding oneself by contrast with others, and, as such, Gadamer insists, it actually pushes the other away. It is not a genuine being with the other. For Gadamer a real conversation attends only to the substantive intention of what is said and not to the expression of speech. Only in this way can the distinction (and separation) between I and the other break down. The small, yet important, criticism of Löwith’s position appears in a small footnote in Gadamer’s text. According to Gadamer, Löwith understood thinking in a one-sided way, as dealing with fixed assumptions, which loses sight of a more encompassing thinking and reasoning that Gadamer wants to argue for. While the critique is small, it opens for us the context for yet another version of a shared life in which the thou is a focal point (Gadamer, 1991, p. 43).⁸

Gadamer’s Idea of Shared Life

The small distance that Gadamer wants to take from Löwith’s work does indeed pertain in part to his rejection of the privileged place of self-reflection operative in speaking-with-one-another. It is not that Gadamer is opposed to reflection, since it is undoubtedly an essential dimension of thinking and the ability to make something present to the mind. What is his point? The reflexivity of reflection amounts to a “secondary phenomenon, compared to turning directly to some object” (Gadamer, 2000a, pp. 277-278). Gadamer wants to let the critical function achieved by reflection be carried out by the dynamics of question and response over the matter at issue in conversation. And conversation, in turn, while oriented to communication, is not simply for him communication involving an agreement over some proposition or statement.

The difference here pertains to the enlarged sense that Gadamer gives to being with-one-another and to the way in which the thou in the relation of one to another has priority. As noted at the outset of my earlier remarks, for Gadamer, being with one another comprises the entirety of intentional life in human living. It is the world itself which is communicatively experienced in the life of language.⁹ Language for Gadamer is the very commonality that makes sharing, in its proper sense, possible, an idea that Gadamer first finds in Aristotle.¹⁰ As noted in his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle thinks that humans achieve a sense of community among themselves because they are capable of mutual understanding through speech (Aristotle, 1967, pp. 1253a15-18). But Gadamer will translate this idea into his hermeneutics in a decisive way. With a very intentional phrasing, Gadamer writes: “Who thinks language already moves beyond subjectivity.”¹¹ In saying this, Gadamer’s slight departure from Löwith’s position becomes more evident. The “with” of sharing is not simply found in the one-another, as Löwith maintains, but is constituted in the life of language, with in turn opens individuals to an expansion of their world. In sharing there is an opening, presumably between one and another, where the world becomes larger. Without sharing, one’s world can be potentially very small, like Narcissus in front of his reflection or Echo

waiting for the return of her voice. The narcissist only sees himself, there is no experience of the other for the narcissist, and there is no real community for the narcissist as well. The difference between community, with its overtones of formation in the relation of one to another, and mere association, which can be a mere group of individuals, may very well lie with this idea of sharing.¹²

Gadamer's Reformulation of the I-Thou Relation

But the exact sense of the encounter with the other in which shared life takes place is yet to be seen. From what has been said so far, it should be becoming apparent that the encounter between the I and thou that structures hermeneutic understanding, for Gadamer, should not be taken as one of intersubjectivity in the strict sense.¹³ In an 1993 interview with Gadamer, Carsten Dutt quotes Gadamer's own text on the nature of conversation in order to solicit a response from Gadamer. Here is Dutt's quote: "Conversation with another person, whatever the objections or disagreements, whatever the understandings or misunderstandings, means a kind of expansion of our individuality and a probing of the possible commonality we have to which reason encourages us" (Gadamer, 2001, p. 59). Dutt then poses the question whether Gadamer's philosophy thematizes conversation as our capacity for rational intersubjectivity, and Gadamer responds: "Oh, please spare me that completely misleading concept of intersubjectivity, of a subjectivism doubled! In the passage you quoted I did not make any clever theoretical constructions at all: I said a conversation is something one gets caught up in, in which one gets involved" (Gadamer, 2001, p. 59). What Gadamer objects to is framing conversation in terms of the priority of a "subject," a doubling of the subject no less. In different words—and this is the key—through such framing the very commonality that subtends subjectivity, namely, the shared common world of language to which we first belong as the condition for sharing, is lost.¹⁴

Yet despite this reservation towards intersubjectivity, Gadamer employs a very rich account of the I-thou encounter in *Truth and Method*, an account that we can now better understand in view of our consideration of both Buber and Löwith's positions.¹⁵ That account emerges in *Truth and Method* in connection with Gadamer's analysis of the concept of experience. As noted in my first essay in this series, in our experiencing, which involves the experience of encounter, our expectations are not always confirmed. Experiencing will involve encountering something that is different than expected, and encountering this difference is what it means to be experienced. This encountering of difference, this reversal of expectations, is what we mean when we say we learn from experience. The experienced person knows this about experience so the experienced person is one who remains open for new experience! What we then learn from experience is not simply the new thing, but just what experience teaches us, namely, we learn about the limits of our knowing, what philosophers call the experience of finitude. Gadamer then claims that we should be able to find this same structure in *hermeneutic* experience, and he makes this connection by characterizing hermeneutic experience through three versions of the I-thou relation.

The first version of the I-thou has actually little to do with a thou, since it is described as the mastery of what is encountered in methodological research. Here Gadamer notes the use of method in historical understanding to confront the past in a free and uninvolved way. On an everyday level, it is the experience of treating the thou as a predictable object. On a personal level, it is the experience of engaging someone dispassionately on the basis of one's knowledge

of people who are just like that someone. The second version of the I-thou is a form of self-relatedness that comes close to what Gadamer finds in Löwith's social philosophy. It involves the claim to know the other from one's own point of view. The thou is "preempted reflectively from the standpoint of the other person" (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 359). In this relation the thou loses the immediacy with which it makes its claim; in fact, in this relation I may claim to know the other better than the other knows himself. The third version of the I-thou is the only one that captures the full import of hermeneutic experience as Gadamer understands it. Gadamer writes:

In human relations the important thing is, as we have seen, to experience the thou truly as a thou—i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us. Here is where openness belongs.... Without such openness to one another there is no genuine human bond. Belonging together always also means being able to listen to one another.... When two people understand each other, this does not mean that one person 'understands' the other. Openness to the other, then, involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so. (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 361)

Only this third form will constitute shared life as Gadamer understands it, for the openness he describes involves both the I and the thou belonging not so much to themselves but to the world and its language in which both participate and communicate. But more than this. The last sentence in the quote is also quite revealing. Notice how it mirrors the character of real experience. In the openness to the other, which effectively grants superiority to the thou, the I undergoes a learning. The problem in understanding what the other has to say is not simply that I do not understand the person, but, to quote Gadamer, "that we don't understand ourselves." In the effort to understand "we must break down resistance in ourselves if we wish to hear the other as other" (Gadamer, 2007, p. 371) You can begin to see that Gadamer's idea of communicative understanding depends on a certain humility on the part of one who wants to understand. That is why Gadamer gives priority to the thou, for by strengthening the other against oneself one not only allows one "to recognize in principle the limitation of one's own framework," but also "allows one to go beyond one's own possibilities" (Gadamer, 2000a, p. 284). Conversation can thus have a transformative power, as we know from a successful outcome in a therapeutic situation. And a final note in this regard. In his later writings, Gadamer will use the word "other" in place of the "thou." While Gadamer acknowledges the philosophical importance that the I-thou problem served in the 1920s, he also acknowledges that such speech "hides a mystifying substantiation" that blocks us from getting at the real problem. To say "the other" in place of "the thou" changes the perspective, for "every other is at the same time the other of the other" (Gadamer, 2000a, p. 282).

The Further Dimensions of Shared Life: Participation, Friendship, and Solidarity

But as yet we have not shown how this relating of one to the other comes to characterize our sociality. In pursuing this we cannot move too quickly away from the issue of language, for, as Gadamer writes, "language intends the other." Such a claim makes little sense of course if we confine language to propositional statements in which the intentions of meaning in language are removed. As previously noted, Gadamer regards language as a unique life process where world is disclosed, "uniting all who talk with one another" (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 446). So Gadamer

would insist, along this Aristotelian line, that being with-one-another “developments in the true life of language,” which we find in conversation. Conversation, in turn, is the word seeking an answer; that is to say, while there are the intentions of meaning from the speakers in dialogue, in a genuine dialogue words are given their play, which means “the one-another of word and answer has its own entitlement.” This entitlement is what Gadamer describes in *Truth and Method* as the self-presentation of meaning in language; it is language “making something intelligible in the *how* of its meaningfulness” (Gadamer, 1969/1989, p. 563). And this is to say that the with-one-another that develops in the true life of language is an enactment and a sharing in its fundamental sense of participation. The word is not just seeking an answer, but, as reported in my first lecture, it is seeking the right word that enables one to hear the other.

In his late essay, “Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language,” Gadamer describes this interaction as partnership, which in turn requires taking part in something larger than oneself (Gadamer, 2000c, p. 46). With this slight variation in the description of sharing Gadamer is able to link language and ritual.¹⁶ Rituals are not simply modes of behavior, such as a courting ritual, that one can readily see even in animal life. Rituals are cultural arrangements that are a form of acting, an acting in which the individual does not act as an individual. In rituals the individual is sustained by the whole. The with-one-another of language has the same form. For both there is an enactment through mutual agreements, and for ritual in particular it is an enactment in which the correctness is not supported by the rule of law, but by the *ethos* in living together. Rituals pertain to those forms of human living that “carry and support us,” but then the same can be said with respect to speaking with-one-another, and, one could add here, this is precisely what Gadamer means by tradition.¹⁷

This idea of partnership can also be characterized by what Leo Strauss considered to be the form of the I-thou relation in classical Greek philosophy, namely friendship—an idea that Gadamer will follow in his own way.¹⁸ This is the friendship that Gadamer sees in the friendly questioning of Socratic *elenchus*, namely, a favorable putting forth questions to call for further statements, or, as Gadamer says in his reply to Derrida in 1981, a good will to see that the other is right (Gadamer, 1989, p. 55). This is also, and preeminently so, the friendship of goodwill and mutuality that we find in Aristotle’s ethics. But Gadamer is not suggesting here that the friendship in which the communality of life is lived out is a simple friendship among those who are alike in virtue or as a general love of one’s neighbor. He is also not taking literally Aristotle’s contention that friendship involves a self-sufficiency. Gadamer insists that Aristotle knew well “that when someone is wholly sufficient unto himself, something essential is missing from true perfection. What is lacking is precisely the increase that friendship signifies” (Gadamer, 1999, p. 136). Here too it is a matter of participation. For Gadamer, Aristotelian friendship is that distinctive relation with an other—the “stream of self-forming commonalities”—in which one begins to feel and recognize oneself.¹⁹ It is an orientation toward fulfillment against the cognizance of one’s own limitations.

In this regard it is interesting to see how Gadamer describes the associated Aristotelian virtue of *sunesis* in ethical life in his discussion of *phronesis* (practical reasoning) in *Truth and Method*. The word *sunesis* is actually related to a cluster of words connoting a kind of understanding or comprehension in the manner of a quick comprehension. In English we might use the word “astute.” It is often translated as good intelligence, but this does not adequately convey its intended sense. In Aristotle the word is used to name the capacity to discern what is to be done in

relation to the council of others, conveying more precisely the sense of conscientious apprehension.²⁰ Gadamer will translate *sunesis* as sympathetic understanding (*Verständnis*) in practical matters, adding “someone’s sympathetic understanding is praised, of course, when in order to judge he transposes himself fully into the concrete situation of the person who has to act” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 323). This transposition, though, should not be confused with empathy. It is simply that the one who is understanding “does not know and judge as one who stands apart and unaffected but rather he thinks along with the other from the perspective of a special bond of belonging, as if he too were affected” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 323). *Sunesis* is thus not so much an individual’s ability to be united with the other through sympathetic knowing; *sunesis* is not an understanding of the situation of the other in which the subject can say “I can understand the other, the other is like me.” *Sunesis* is rather understanding for the view of someone else, which is possible only if one and the other are bound together from the outset.²¹

And finally, this partnership, this practice with respect to life in common, is given one other formulation by Gadamer that deserves comment. In his essay “Citizens of Two Worlds,” Gadamer describes friendship as “a sustaining solidarity which alone makes possible the organized structure of human coexistence” (Gadamer, 1992a, p. 219). For Gadamer solidarity does not mean that everyone is united on some common agreement. It also does not mean that everyone is united by a vague notion of humanity that would make an appeal to an equally vague notion of tolerance towards others. Rather, it simply pertains to the coexistence of differences in contemporary social life. This coexistence will require the “self-evident communality which alone allows for the common establishment of decisions which each considers to be correct in the areas of moral, social, and political life” (Gadamer, 1992a, p. 218). In this common establishment there is not simply the common as a substantialized entity that robs sociality of its differences, but a relation to the other in which “one is risking one’s own in relation to the recognition of the other.”²² So understood, Gadamer sets the notion of solidarity against the ever-increasing uniformity of life brought about by a globalized technological society, and in this context, he worries about the possibilities for our humanity.²³ But equally so, he worries about the other extreme, namely, a public life that places “too much emphasis on the different and disputed” in which what unites us, however minimal that may be, is without a voice (Gadamer, 1992d, p. 192). Solidarity is indeed about the humanism of life, and for Gadamer the humanism of life entails the need to live with an other, to live as the other of the other. In fact this is precisely what is at stake in the humanism of life. At one place Gadamer writes: We may perhaps survive as a humanity if we . . . learn to stop and respect the other as an other . . . ; and if we would be able to learn to experience the other and others, as the other of our self, in order to participate with one another” (Gadamer, 1992e, pp. 235-236). It is ironic that in America where a version of this idea is in play undercuts itself when it is played out in terms of identity politics.

To conclude, what we see in Gadamer’s version of shared life is a distinctive form of relation and encounter. Undoubtedly, what Gadamer speaks for here is not without its difficulty. I think the merit of his position is that it is unquestionably a relation and encounter in which one’s world can become larger. In the end, Gadamer is not a philosopher who offers a prescription for truth. He simply wants to mark out what must be undergone in order to make ourselves at home in the world, which at the same time elevates our humanity. The difficulty here is not that I have to be friends with my enemies, but that, through the with-one-another of shared life, we are able to see ourselves put into question. Put differently, the attempt to hear what the other has to say is the

very essence of hermeneutic understanding. To understand someone else, Gadamer tells us, “is to see the justice, the truth, of their position. And this is what transforms us” (Gadamer, 1992c, p. 152). I will end with my favorite sentence from *Truth and Method* that succinctly captures what I have been saying here: “To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 379).

References

- Aristotle (1967). *Rhetoric* (J.H. Freese, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Batnitzky, L. (2009). *Idolatry and representation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Buber, M. (1970). *I and Thou* (W. Kaufmann, Trans.). New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons.
- Buber, M. (1972). The history of the dialogical principle. In *Between man and man* (R. Gregor Smith, Trans.). New York, NY: Macmillan Co.
- Buber, M. (1996). *The letters of Martin Buber: A life of dialogue* (N. Glatzer & P. Mendes-Flohr, Eds.). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Cohen, R. (1994). *Elevations: The height of the good in Rosenzweig and Levinas*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1960/1989). *Truth and method* (J. Weinsheimer & D.G. Marshall, rev. trans.). New York, NY: Continuum.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1975). Hermeneutics and social science. *Cultural Hermeneutics*, 2, 311.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1987). “Ich und Du (Karl Löwith),” *Neuere Philosophie II, Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 4 (pp. 436-440). Tübingen, Germany: Mohr/Siebeck
- Gadamer, H-G. (1989). Reply to Jacques Derrida. In D. Michelfelder & R.E. Palmer (Eds.), *Dialogue and dialectic* (pp. 55). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1991). *Plato’s dialectical ethics* (R. Wallace, Trans.) New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1992a). Citizens of two worlds In D. Misgeld & G. Nicholson (Eds.), *Hans-Georg Gadamer on education, poetry, and history* (pp. 218-219). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1992b). The future of European humanities,” In D. Misgeld & G. Nicholson (Eds.), *Hans-Georg Gadamer on education, poetry, and history* (p. 207). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Gadamer, H-G. (1992c). Applied hermeneutics. In D. Misgeld & G. Nicholson (Eds.), *Hans-Georg Gadamer on education, poetry, and history* (p. 152). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Gadamer, H-G. (1992d). The limitations of the expert. In D. Misgeld & G. Nicholson (Eds.), *Hans-Georg Gadamer on education, poetry, and history* (p. 192). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Gadamer, H-G. (1992e). The diversity of Europe. In D. Misgeld & G. Nicholson (Eds.), *Hans-Georg Gadamer on education, poetry, and history* (pp. 235-236). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Gadamer, H.G. (1997). Reflections on my philosophical journey. In L. Hahn (Ed.), *The philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (p. 29). Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing.

Gadamer, H-G. (1998). Culture and word. In *Praise of theory and other essays* (C. Dawson, Trans.; p. 6). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Gadamer, H-G. (1999). Friendship and self-knowledge. In *Hermeneutics, religion and ethics* (J. Weinsheimer, Trans.; p. 136). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Gadamer, H-G. (2000a). Subjectivity and intersubjectivity, Subject and person (P. Adamson & D. Vessey, Trans.). *Continental Philosophy Review*, 33(3), 277-278.

Gadamer, H-G. (2000b). Boundaries of language In L.K. Schmidt (Ed.), *Language and linguisticality in Gadamer's hermeneutics* (pp. 11-12). Lanham, MD.: Lexington Books.

Gadamer, H-G. (2000c). Towards a phenomenology of ritual and language. In L.K. Schmidt (Ed.), *Language and linguisticality in Gadamer's hermeneutics* (p. 46). Lanham, MD.: Lexington Books.

Gadamer, H-G. (2001). *Gadamer in conversation* (R.E. Palmer, Ed. & Trans.). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Gadamer, H-G. (2006). The incapacity of conversation (D. Vessey & C. Blauwkamp, Trans.). *Continental Philosophy Review*, 39, 358.

Gadamer, H-G. (2007). Hermeneutics and the ontological difference. In *The Gadamer reader* (R. Palmer, Ed. & Trans.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Grondin, J. (2000). Play, festival, and ritual in Gadamer: On the theme of the immemorial in his later works. In L.K. Schmidt (Ed.), *Language and linguisticality in Gadamer's hermeneutics* (pp. 51-57). Lanham, MD.: Lexington Books.

Heidegger, M. (1927/2010). *Being and time* (J. Stambaugh, Trans.; D. J. Schmidt, rev. Trans.). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Heidegger, M. (1984). *The metaphysical foundations of logic* (M. Heim, Trans.). Bloomington: IN: University Press.

Heidegger, M. (1997). *Phenomenological interpretation of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (P. Emad & K. Maly, Trans.). Bloomington: IN: University Press.

Heidegger, M. (1998). On the essence of ground. In *Pathmarks* (W. McNeill, Ed. & Trans.). Bloomington: IN: University Press.

Heidegger, M. (2001). *Einleitung in die Philosophie, Gesamtausgabe 27*. Frankfurt, Germany: Vittorio Klostermann.

Heidegger, M. (2007). Letter exchange with Karl Löwith on *Being and Time*. In T. Kisiel & T. Sheehan (Eds), *Becoming Heidegger: On the trail of his occasional writings, 1910-1927* (p. 290). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Heidegger, M. (2010). *Logic: The question of truth* (T. Sheehan, Trans.). Bloomington: IN: University Press.

Honneth, A. (2003). On the destructive power of the third: Gadamer and Heidegger's doctrine of intersubjectivity. *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 29(1), 5-21. doi: [10.1177/0191453703029001830](https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453703029001830)

Kearney, R. (1995). Text matters. In *States of mind: Dialogues with contemporary thinkers*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Long, C. (2004). *The ethics of ontology: Rethinking an Aristotelian legacy*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Risser, J. (2011). Shared life. In B. Weber, H. Karlfriedrich, E. Maral, T. Dobashi, & P. Schweitzer (Eds.), *Cultural politics and identity: The public space of recognition* (pp. 49-60). Berlin, Germany: LIT Verlag.

Smith, C. (1991). *Hermeneutics and human finitude*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press.

Stein, E. (1989). *The problem of empathy* (W. Stein, Trans.). Washington, D.C: ICS Publications.

Stein, E. (2000). *Philosophy of psychology and the humanities*. (M. Baseheart & M. Sawicki, Trans.). Washington, DC: ICS Publications.

Vessey, D. (2005). Gadamer's theory of friendship as an alternative to intersubjectivity. *Philosophy Today*, 49, 61-67.

Vessey, D. (2011). Paul Ricoeur's and Hans-Georg Gadamer's diverging reflections on recognition. In F. Mootz & G. Taylor (Eds.), *Gadamer and Ricoeur* (pp. 142-155). New York, NY: Continuum.

Watson, S. (2001). *Tradition(s) II*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Zahavi, D. (2001). Beyond empathy. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 8, 151-167.

Notes

1. In this context see Dan Zahavi, (2001). In relation to a critique of the priority of the subject and its presumed encapsulation, Heidegger will be dismissive of the claims of empathy: “‘Empathy’ does not first constitute being-with, but is first possible on its basis, and is motivated by the prevailing deficient modes of being-with in their inevitability” (Heidegger, 1927/2010, p. 121). For Heidegger, empathy leaves unexplained how this alter ego is first manifest to an ego. The critics of Heidegger who insist there is a solipsistic element of Dasein seems to fly in the face of Heidegger’s own insistence that Dasein is fundamentally a being-with-others and that as being-in-the-world Dasein is fundamentally a relationality. However, that there are different modalities of being-with will undoubtedly complicate the issue, as is the case with Heidegger’s insistence that Dasein is inseparable from a notion of selfhood. See below, note 3.
2. Buber (1996), *The Letters of Martin Buber: A life of dialogue*. The precise sense of these other relations is made clear by Richard Cohen (1994, p. 89) in *Elevations*. He-It corresponds with creation and thus with God; We-It corresponds with “global redemption through both Judaism and Christianity,” and this with community.
3. In his Habilitationsschrift on Plato, which was accepted in February of 1929 and published in 1931, Gadamer discusses in one section the notion of a shared world necessary for dialogical conversation. He not only references Löwith’s work but also points to his review of Löwith’s work, which was published in 1929. See Hans-Georg Gadamer (1987), “Ich und Du (Karl Löwith),” *Neuere Philosophie II, Gesammelte Werke*.
4. From a 1925-26 lecture course, Heidegger writes: “In interpreting the phenomenon of being-with and as being-unto-an-other never forget that we never experience other people as some indeterminate mental ‘centers’, floating around in an empty ‘over-against-us’. We experience each other person as an existence, a being-with, a being-with-one-another in a world. Even being-with-another lives first of all from a shared-being [Mitsein] with him in a world. Thus, the other is, in principle, uncovered for others in his very existence. So it is a mistake to interpret the other phenomenally as a second ego, and it is absurd to pose the problem of co-being with others in such a way that one posits the constructivistic presupposition that first I am given only to myself—and then how does this *solus ipse* manage to reach out to a thou? (Heidegger, 2010, p. 197). What is more interesting is Heidegger’s similar statements made in lecture courses after the publication of *Being and Time*. They can be found in his 1927-28 winter semester course, his 1928 summer semester course, and his 1928-29 winter semester course. A similar statement also appears in his essay “On the Essence of Ground,” written in 1928 and published in 1929. All of these explicitly refer to the I-thou relation. Two deserve citation. From his 1928-29 lecture course, Heidegger writes: “The With-one-another [Miteinander] cannot be explained through the I-Thou relation, but rather conversely: this I-Thou relation presupposes for its inner possibility that Dasein functioning as I and also as Thou, is determined as with-one-another; indeed even more: even the self-comprehension of

an I and the concept of I-ness [Ichheit] arise only on the basis of the with-one-another, not from the I-Thou relation” (Heidegger, 2001, pp. 145-146). Heidegger is even more explicit in “On the Essence of Ground”: “The statement: *Dasein exists for the sake of itself*, does not contain the positing of an egoistic or ontic end for some blind narcissism on the part of the factual human being in each case. . . . The statement in question contains neither a solipsistic isolation of Dasein nor an egoistic intensification thereof. By contrast, it presumably gives the condition of possibility of the human being’s being able to comport ‘himself’ *either* ‘egoistically’ *or* ‘altruistically’. Only because Dasein as such is determined by selfhood can an I-self comport itself toward a you-self. Selfhood is the presupposition for the possibility of being an ‘I’, the latter only ever being disclosed in the ‘you’. Never, however, is selfhood relative to a ‘you’, but rather—because it first makes it possible—is neutral with respect to being an ‘I’ and being a ‘you’, . . . (Heidegger, 1998, p. 122). See also Heidegger (1997, p. 214); and Heidegger (1984, p. 187).

5. The passage in German reads: “Ursprünglich da ist das Mitgeteilte nur im Mitteilen. In der etwas mitteilenden Mitteilung teilt der eine, indem er Etwas mitteilt zugleich sich selbst einem andern mit. Der eigentliche Sinn des “mit” der Teilung liegt im Ein-ander.” Karl Löwith, *Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen* (München: Drei Masken Verlag, 1928), p. 109.
6. Gadamer’s *Habilitationsschrift* was published three years later under the title *Platos dialektische Ethik*. An English translation, *Plato’s Dialectical Ethics*, appeared in 1991. See Gadamer (1991).
7. The emphasis on reflection by Löwith is apparent from the quote from Schelling which is the opening lines of *Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen*: “We awake through reflection, through coerced turning back to ourselves. Without opposition there is no turning back.” *Das Individuum*, 1.
8. *Plato’s Dialectical Ethics*, p. 43. Gadamer states basically this same criticism in his review. See “Ich und Du (Karl Löwith),” p. 238.
9. In the Afterword to *Truth and Method* Gadamer (1960/1989, p. 562) describes philosophical hermeneutics as pertaining “to the whole of our experience of life and our world, but like no other science—rather like our very experience, articulated in language, of life and the world.”
10. Commenting on the passage in Aristotle’s *Politics*, Gadamer refers to the concept of *syntheke*, which he claims is misleadingly translated as “convention.” “In truth, the complete sense of language and the whole sense of the humanity of life are determined through this expression. . . . The concept ‘syntheke’, mutual agreement, implies first that language constitutes itself in the with-one-another (*Miteinander*), to the extent that understanding develops by means of which one can come to agreements.” (Gadamer, 2000b, pp. 11-12), “Boundaries of Language”

11. See Aristotle (1967), *Rhetoric*, 1253a15-18. “Wer ›Sprache‹ denkt, bewegt sich schon immer in einem Jenseits der Subjektivität.” Gadamer, *Hermeneutik im Rückblick, Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 10, 99. See “Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity,” p. 286.
12. In the same essay Gadamer (1998, p. 6) defines culture in this way, i.e., culture [*Kultur*] is the domain of all that becomes more by sharing it.
13. In Alex Honneth’s (2003) “On the destructive power of the third: Gadamer and Heidegger’s doctrine of intersubjectivity,” Honneth critiques what he considers Gadamer’s position on intersubjectivity, citing Löwith against Gadamer because of Löwith’s retention of the element of reflection. But in failing to see that conversation for Gadamer is not a matter of intersubjectivity Honneth’s criticism of Gadamer is misplaced. The fact that Gadamer would want to separate himself from Heidegger in this regard is further evidence for the misplaced criticism.
14. Gadamer repeats himself in relation to a similar question in an interview with Richard Kearney. See Richard Kearney (1995, p. 277), “Text Matters,” in *States of Mind: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers*.
15. After noting the second of the three versions of the I-thou, Gadamer references this “reflective” dialectic of the I-thou in Löwith’s *Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen*. See *Truth and Method*, (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 359).
16. The idea of ritual approximates the idea of festival that Gadamer discusses in relation to the concept of play in *Truth and Method*. See *Truth and Method*, (Gadamer, 1960/1989, pp. 122-123). See also Jean Grondin, “Play, Festival, and Ritual in Gadamer: On the Theme of the Immemorial in His Later Works,” in *Language and Linguisticity in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics* (2000, pp. 51-57).
17. This implication is made by Jean Grondin. See “Play, Festival, and Ritual in Gadamer,” (2000, p. 57).
18. See *Truth and Method* (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 535). The connection of Gadamer’s notion of sociality with friendship has received considerable attention. See Stephen Watson (2001), *Tradition(s) II*, chapter 1; David Vessey (2005), “Gadamer’s Theory of Friendship as an Alternative to Intersubjectivity”; James Risser (2011), “Shared Life,” in *Cultural Politics and Identity*.
19. “The wisdom of Aristotle recognizes in all human cognition—as in the *sumpatheia*—an element of the ‘with’: perceiving-with, knowing-with, thinking-with—that is, living with and being with (*Mitsein*).” Gadamer (1999), “Friendship and Self-Knowledge,” in *Hermeneutics, Religion and Ethics*.
20. See Christopher Long (2004, p. 148), *The Ethics of Ontology: Rethinking an Aristotelian Legacy*.

21. See P. Christopher Smith (1991, p. 86), *Hermeneutics and Human Finitude*.
22. See “The Future of European Humanities,” in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History* (Gadamer, 1992b, p. 207). David Vessey (2011, pp. 142-155) in his article “Paul Ricoeur’s and Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Diverging Reflections on Recognition” argues that Gadamer gives up the dialectic of recognition in his later writings for the idea of friendship as the proper mode of being with others. While I am sympathetic to his argument and his scholarship, I do think Gadamer holds to a notion of recognition even within friendship. Formally Gadamer seems to hold to a complementary double emphasis in friendship, namely, the self recognition through the other and the recognition of the other as encounter.
23. Solidarity is also set within the relation to modern science in general, and can be seen as Gadamer’s (1975) version of the life world. What is at stake in this relation then is “a critical effort which shares the modern ideal of method and yet which does not lose the condition of solidarity with and justification of our practical living” (p. 311).