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Firefighting, Temperance, and Hermeneutical Virtue: Gadamer's Fusion of Horizons as Key to Understanding Temperance in The Fire Service

Ty D. Camp

Abstract

Traditional understandings of temperance do not adequately address the ethical alienation and displacement firefighters experience because these definitions do not account for the constant and often extreme transitions firefighters make in their work. I argue that firefighters would be better served by a novel, hermeneutically-conceived approach to temperance. Moreover, temperance is not only or even primarily about self-control. Rather, temperance is best understood on the basis of Gadamer's conception of the "fusion of horizons" as a kind of ethical agility to move between difficult and disparate situations. This, I suggest, is an essential aspect of philosophical hermeneutics because the fusion of horizons is the means by which we experience the transitions, oscillations, and amalgamations of the world. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics provides a vital way, therefore, in which firefighters can cultivate the virtue of temperance as they transition and move between difficult and disparate circumstances.

Keywords

Firefighting, virtue, temperance, alienation, displacement, hermeneutics, philosophy, Gadamer, fusion of horizons, ethics, agility

Corresponding Author:
Ty D Camp
Albuquerque Fire Rescue
Email: tydcamp@gmail.com

> And if the earthly fades and has forgot
> you, whisper to the silent earth: I flow.
> To the onrushing water say: I am.
>
> -Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*

In this article, I wish to argue that the work of firefighting demands a novel, hermeneutically-conceived understanding of temperance characterized not so much by self-control, but rather by agility. The constant and often extreme transitions firefighters make in the course of their work raises difficult and confounding ethical concerns resulting in not only behavioral and emotional stress, but also ethical alienation and displacement. While many in the fire service have responded to this reality from the perspective of behavioral health and, what I will call, a static understanding of virtue, these approaches have left many of the questions of philosophical ethics unasked. The result has been that firefighters are left with an approach to virtue that is overly-rigid and does not equip them to flourish in the changing and often fragmented circumstances of their work. The ethical life of firefighters demands an understanding of virtue that moves, shifts, and transitions with them as they go about their work. My suggestion will be that virtue and, in particular, the virtue of temperance is best understood therefore on the basis of Gadamer's celebrated conception of the "fusion of horizons" as a kind of ethical agility to move between difficult and disparate situations. My conclusion will be that an understanding of temperance as agility enables us to remain open to the changing circumstances of our lives and therefore to flourish in the face of alienation and displacement in our work as firefighters.

The Need for Rehabilitating Temperance in the Fire Service

In his pioneering memoir, *Report from Engine Co. 82*, firefighter Dennis Smith (1972) recounts his experience of fighting fire on one of New York's busiest engine companies during the late 1960s. He writes:

> It is six o' clock. The evening is still bright, and I will work through the night, watching for the morning horizon all the while. In fifteen hours it will be 9:00 A.M., Monday, and I will be relieved of duty. Then I'm off for three days, but I will sleep through the first… On Tuesday I will relax, read Steinbeck or Mailer again, and practice the guitar… Wednesday will be much like the day before…I will play tennis or basketball with friends on the courts behind the town high school. After a shower, dinner, bedtime stories for the boys, a soft hour with my wife, I will sleep, and I will return to duty, Thursday and Friday, nine in the morning to six at night. (pp. 200-201)

The work of firefighting, according to Smith, is always in motion and this movement spans a variety of disparate situations or horizons. In a real sense, firefighters often find themselves navigating the horizonal space between the fire station and home.

As a firefighter, I often find myself looking for the horizon. Sometimes it is the horizon of the next call that demands a shift in mindset, skill, and emotional fortitude. We often move from forcing a door open on a structure fire to the grueling work of overhaul (pulling drywall off the studs of a structure to check for hidden fire) only to be quickly assigned to the EMS group transporting a burned patient to the trauma center. Sometimes it is the horizon of crawling inside an upside-down car to start patient care while the Heavy Rescue Squad works their magic with the jaws of life. Sometimes, like Smith described, the horizon is the light of morning as it breaks over the mountains as we are backing into the station after an early morning call, having just told someone's spouse of fifty years their loved one will never breathe again. And sometimes it is the horizon of my front driveway—pushing off fatigue and trying to re-orient my awareness—halfway between the fire station and home.

Firefighting is horizonal in just that Gadamerian sense where he writes a horizon is "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (1963/1999, p. 302).[1] For Gadamer, a horizon incorporates our historically situated consciousness, tradition, and, indeed, our prejudices. A horizon is the means by which we encounter our own historically effected consciousness and also the means by which we go beyond it (Gadamer, 1963/1999, pp. 306-307). As David Vessey (2009) has written, "Horizons might function as a limit at a particular time, but they are always also gateways to something beyond" (p. 533). So too in firefighting. The many and various situations or horizons that arise in the course of our work comprise a context out of which firefighters see the world, form judgments, and act on behalf of others. And yet, as Gadamer and Vessey suggest, this context is not static, but rather open to change, modification, and cultivation—giving rise to, as we shall see, novel understandings of how we might act in accord with virtue.

As one might imagine, therefore, the horizonal work of firefighting can be fragmented, disorienting, and alienating. The intense and stressful nature of our work affects the way we orient ourselves toward the world, each other, and ourselves. Firefighters face not only harrowing instances of tragedy and death, but also the chronic pressures of shift work that can result in a sense of disorientation or even a separation of one's self from one's beliefs. In her memoir, retired San Francisco firefighter, Caroline Paul (2011), tells the story of a particularly gruesome medical call after which she reflects, "My attitude toward death has changed…Back then, and for a while, I imagined that death would always have an existential power over me…But that was then. Now, death has become mundane" (pp. 165-166). The point here is that the work of firefighting can be alienating and displace us from a sense of what we believe and that to which all of our work is aimed.[2] Firefighters need, therefore, an understanding of ethical life that gives them a way to face alienation and displacement in all of its variety and complexity. Specifically, we need an understanding of the individual character virtues that can be cultivated in the horizonal work of firefighting so that we can orient ourselves toward the good and, as Aristotle might put it, cultivate action in accord with virtue (ca. 350 B.C.E./2011, 1089a15, p. 13).

A significant attempt to cultivate a deeper understanding of ethical life in the fire service was made in 2010 by the Cumberland Valley Volunteer Firefighter's Association (CVVFA) when they published the *Fire Service Reputation Management White Paper*—a spirited call for firefighters and fire departments to re-commit themselves to the noble principles of the fire service in order to maintain trust with the public they serve (M. Wieder. et. al. 2010).[3] The *Reputation*

Management White Paper has had a significant and enduring influence on subsequent conversations surrounding ethics in the fire service.[4] Almost immediately after its publication, the United States Fire Administration (USFA) employed this as a resource for their own code of ethics while firefighters continue to use it as a guide for ethical inquiry in the fire service (USFA, Blume, 2021, H.S. Walker, 2022, pp. 90-92). Indeed, the late, former Editor in Chief of *Fire Engineering Magazine*, Bobby Halton, who, in his opening address at the 2012 *Fire Department Instructors Conference*, called on the fire service to heed the lessons of the *Reputation Management White Paper* by committing themselves to duty through developing a code of ethics similar to the Marines or the US Air Force. Halton (2012/2018) stated, "If we look at our core moral principles, we have everything covered with that simple code. The honor oath is critical: 'To do my duty and live honorably, so help me God.'" The continued and pervasive influence of the *Reputation Management White Paper* indicates its significance for how firefighters understand ethics in the fire service.

According to the analysis of the *Reputation Management White Paper* (Wieder, et. al., 2010), the antidote to instances of moral failure by members of the fire service, is "to rebuild the fire service's foundation of ethical behavior and ethical decision-making. One step in that direction is to establish a national Fire Service Code of Ethics as a guide for improved ethical decision-making" (p. 6). One of the several issues listed by the *Reputation Management White Paper* as contributing to the loss of public trust is alcohol use by members of the fire service (Wieder, et. al., 2010, p. 14ff). They give an example of a volunteer firefighter who was drinking at a bar when he was notified of a nearby structure fire to which he responded. En route, the firefighter collided with an oncoming water tanker, killing another firefighter. Based on this, the authors state, "Any fire service code of ethics must state a fundamental incompatibility between public service, safety, and personal intoxication" (Wieder, et. al., 2010, p. 12). In light of this, many in the fire service have responded by developing codes of ethics that include prohibitions, calls to integrity, and other general rules that, in the words of the USFA Firefighter Code of Ethics, "reflects proper ethical behavior…" (USFA). Importantly, the call from these sources is to develop a general principle of morality (duty, honor, public trust) and then to apply it to one's behavior, particular instances of activity, or institutional practices. Without application of these practices, firefighter Kristopher Blume (2021) concludes, "departments throughout the nation will continue to decline amid higher urban populations that stress outdated ethical frameworks."

The problem with this applied understanding of virtue is twofold. First, it does not align with the horizonal work of firefighting. It is static in the sense that it leaves out the particular and changing realities that, as we have seen, are crucial aspects of the horizonal work of firefighters. Granted, responding to a fire call while intoxicated seems obviously wrong in a number of ways. However, the analysis of the white paper stops at the general rule, leaving the more concrete, complex, horizonal questions unasked: What kind of choices, institutional structures, and cultural mores led to this kind of behavior? What were the beliefs, motivations, and obligations that compelled this firefighter to answer the call while intoxicated? More hermeneutically, how did this firefighter's training, history, and character give rise to the understanding (or misunderstanding) that he should respond to a fire in this condition? Simply appealing to an abstract code of ethics does not address the concrete and transitional specificity of the individual's ethical situation.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, a static understanding of virtue separates us from the end of ethical life, i.e., virtue in accord with the good or flourishing. This is so because, on the static understanding, ethical principles are always and again separated from activity, requiring, therefore a further effort to apply those principles to individual actions. Problematically, this application can never match the specificity of the individual circumstance and therefore leaves us removed, alienated, or displaced from our ethical principles and without an understanding of how we might move forward. As the President of the CVVFA, David Lewis (2020), reflecting on the ten-years following the publication of the *Reputation Management White Paper,* "While much progress has been made in changing the behaviors of fire service personnel, incidents of the nature described above continue to occur." Why is this? According to Lewis, it is because individual firefighters and departments have yet to apply or implement the general rules outlined in the *Reputation Management White Paper*. However, we must ask whether it is the failure to apply these recommendations or rather the difficulty of a static view of virtue that leads to this problem. On the static view, it is difficult to understand how one might close the gap or apply one's general rule to an individual ethical situation in all of its complexity.

It is my view that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics gives us a more promising approach. However, I should clarify that by calling into question certain types of "applied ethics" as they have been taken up by many in the fire service, I do not mean to oppose the connection drawn by Nancy Moules and her colleagues (2015)—and, indeed Gadamer himself—between application and phronesis (pp. 49-50). Accordingly, I wish to suggest that we turn to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in order to elucidate this question of ethics in the work of firefighting. But first, I would also like to suggest that the way to approach this question is to rehabilitate the virtue of temperance and for this I would like to turn our attention to Plato's *Charmides* to see how Socrates' military service might illuminate our inquiry.

Socrates' Military Experience and Temperance as Agility

Socrates' military service, especially as it is portrayed in Plato's *Charmides*, shows us the importance of understanding temperance as agility. The opening lines of the dialogue are particularly relevant for this point:

> We had returned the previous evening from our encampment at Potidaea, and since I'd been away for some time, I was keen to revisit my old haunts. So I went to the palaestra of Taureas, the one right across from the shrine of Basile, and I found quite a lot of people there—some of who I didn't even know, though most were familiar…[Chaerephon] grabbed me by the hand and said, "Socrates! How did you survive the battle?"… 'Like this, as you see me,' I replied. (Plato, ca. 380 B.C.E./2019, p. 3)

In this opening frame of the dialogue, Plato portrays Socrates as someone who is able to move from fierce battle to a friendly, familiar setting with ease and fluidity. A portrayal which, to my mind at least, does not establish an iconography of male-dominated virtues associated with war, the battlefield, and the slaying of dragons, but rather resonates with how firefighters often characterize their work.[5] As we shall see, Plato upends this kind of idolization of war and brute force for a more fluid approach to virtue.

Classicist Sara Monoson (2014) argues that one of the most striking themes found in Plato's portrayal of Socrates is the way Socrates responds to the trauma he faced in battle throughout his life. According to Monoson (2014), it is no accident that Plato includes Socrates' war experience at various points throughout his dialogues. In fact, Monsoon (2014) writes, "Plato identifies Socrates' endurance of calamitous war experiences that could produce what today we call 'war trauma'…as *constitutive of his excellence*" (p. 133, my emphasis). In Monoson's view, this underappreciated aspect of Socrates' character sheds light on a number of philosophical issues, especially when it comes to Socrates' character as he returns from war and reintegrates into civilian life in Athens. For example, she observes that all of Alcibiades' anecdotes from Plato's *Symposium* about Socrates at war "stress continuities between home and war zones and [Socrates'] exceptional personal endurance" (Monoson, 2014, p. 141, Plato, ca. 380 B.C.E./1997a, pp. 501-503). Of the battle at Potidaea, Monoson points out (2016, p. 98) that Socrates experienced the stress of a lengthy deployment (potentially up to three years) during which he experienced intense battle as a Hoplite, the arduous construction of siege works, all while enduring disease, lack of food, and cold weather. When Plato describes the return of Socrates at the beginning of the *Charmides*, we should, therefore, be struck by, as Monoson puts it (2016), "the speed and ease with which Socrates returned to his philosophic labors" (p.100).[6]

As a virtue, temperance, on the standard understanding, is usually defined as a way to control our animal instincts.[7] For example, in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle (ca. 350 B.C.E./2011, p. 62) argues that temperance is the intermediate state in relation to our bodily pleasures or as the virtue that indicates moderation in the satisfaction of bodily desires.[8] So too, Plato (ca. B.C.E. 380/1997), in other dialogues suggests that temperance is a kind of ordering of the bodily desires.[9] However, in the *Charmides* he takes a different approach. While the bulk of the dialogue is taken up by two lengthy—and aporetic—conversations about the definition of temperance, the dialogue is framed by the return of Socrates from battle. As Monoson suggests (2014), Socrates' ability to transition between the horrors of war and the safety of home gives us insight into the philosophical current at work in the dialogue. [10] In my view, Plato is urging us to see the ease—indeed, the agility (a term inspired by Monoson (2014, p. 149))—with which Socrates navigates the various horizons of his experience while maintaining his commitment to philosophy and his community.[11] Socrates demonstrates that temperance is not limited to controlling one's animal desires, but also includes an agility to move between disparate and difficult situations. Even Aristotle (ca. B.C.E. 350/2011) elaborates his definition of temperance by arguing in Book 6 of the *Nichomachean Ethics* that temperance preserves phronesis (p. 121).[12] Granted, he relies on his previous definition that temperance moderates our bodily desires, but this elaboration suggests, in my view, that there is a wider connection of temperance to our ethical life as a whole. My suggestion is that the breadth of temperance is wider than control of our animal instincts and incorporates moving between disparate and varying horizons of experience as we work toward the good.

But how, we must ask, is this not just another abstract principle that must be applied to concrete situations? For this we need to turn to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, specifically his concept of the fusion of horizons.

Gadamer's Fusion of Horizons and the Activity of Ethical Life

As we have seen, the work of firefighting is horizonal in the Gadamerian sense. The many and varied experiences firefighters encounter present themselves with a textured past and, as Gadamer (1960/1999) puts it, "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (p. 302). As we have also seen, a crucial error at this point would be to assume that a horizon is fixed, unable to be altered—waiting to be discovered by an idealized subject. To the contrary, Gadamer writes (1960/1999) that in the event of understanding "a real fusing of horizons [*Horizontverschmelzung*] occurs—which means that as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously superseded. To bring about this fusion [*Verschmelzung*] in a regulated way is the task of what we called historically effected consciousness" (p. 307). Fusion, for Gadamer, is a dynamic process through which understanding takes place. Ted George (2020) writes that Gadamer's notion of fusion of horizons "concerns the continual challenge of dissolution, the continual heating, softening and liquefying that allows for our prejudices to become permeable and combine in novel ways" (p. 62). On a similar note, Monica Vilhauer (2009) suggests that "[I]f we understand what Gadamer really means by 'fusion' in terms of its larger context of the play-process…then we can avoid believing that Gadamer's conception of understanding is one that tries to—to put it bluntly—'kill' difference" (p. 361). In other words, Gadamer employs the concept of a fusion of horizons in order to describe the agility with which one must approach the movement of understanding. It is the fusion of disparate and varied horizons of experience, according to Gadamer, that is the work of understanding.[13] If understanding is a universal aspect of human experience, then the fusion of horizons is, indeed, a crucial part of our experience, demanding we move, transition, and navigate between tragedy and beauty, battle and the streets of Athens, and, indeed, the fire station and home. In this sense, fusion is the oscillation or agility with which we navigate the many and various horizons of our experience.

For Gadamer, understanding is an event by which we open ourselves up to the complex horizons of the situation by means of the fusion of horizons. A hermeneutical understanding of temperance as agility therefore suggests that our ethical experience is an event in which we must be open to the shifting and complex situations of ethical life as it unfolds in our experience. Here, one might think of Friedrich Schiller's (1795/1982) suggestion that an essential aspect of our ethical cultivation is the playful and dynamic experiences of different kinds of beauty. According to Schiller (1795/1982), whereas energizing beauty is a corrective to overindulgence in sensuous nature, melting [*schmelzende*] beauty reveals itself as tranquility in response to the violence of life and, by way of contrast, serves to "arm abstract form with sensuous power" in order to move one toward a playful equilibrium of matter and form (pp. 111-121). While Gadamer usually refers to Schiller by way of a rehabilitation of the concept of play, the fusion of horizons [*Horizontverschmelzung*] echoes Schiller's understanding of melting [*schmelzende*] beauty as a dynamic and playful aspect of our cultivation. Temperance as agility therefore is not an idealized virtue which we apply to concrete situations, but rather a playful agility by which we navigate through, oscillate between, or melt into the complexities of our disparate human experiences.

My suggestion is that Gadamer's fusion of horizons and temperance as agility describe the same movement of ethical life. For Gadamer, fusion is the amalgamating, melting, or combining in novel ways the many different and disparate aspects of our horizonal experience. In the same way, temperance as agility—as we have seen in Plato's *Charmides*—suggests a virtue by which

we not only moderate our animal instincts, but also navigate and re-orient ourselves as we move and transition through the many complex situations of ethical life. In my view then, Gadamer's fusion of horizons is the virtue of temperance understood as agility.

What does this mean for the work of understanding? Does fusion as agility then untether us from our horizons? In other words, what is it that anchors temperance as agility?[14] It seems to me, that, for Gadamer, temperance as agility understood as the fusion of horizons, must be aligned with the question at hand—*die Sache*. Along with our historically effected consciousness and our factical situation, the question at hand is that which guides our inquiry and, indeed, anchors our understanding. While it is true, and, as we have seen, crucial, for understanding, that this often leads to displacement and alienation, it is the matter at hand that always and again orients us in our conversations. As Haley Burke (2022) recently wrote, "…Gadamer highlights prejudices and openness which may lead to understanding through displacements and fusions. Beyond this, Gadamer also recognizes the importance of caring about the matter. Without this element, displacements and fusions would not be anchored to anything but opinion" (p. 8). For Gadamer, the agility of the fusion of horizons enables us to nimbly orient and re-orient ourselves to the matter at hand as we encounter the complexities of factical life.

But what about the issue of application? Might not this understanding of temperance as agility as the fusion of horizons set up another abstract principle that we must then apply to our concrete experiences? For Gadamer, this problem of application arises in direct response to the modern opposition of theory and practice in modern science—an opposition Gadamer (1963/1999) works to move beyond.[15] For it is out of these concrete situations that the very possibility of moving beyond them arises. Rather, philosophical hermeneutics describes the way in which understanding takes place as an event that depends constitutively on our concrete experiences. In his essay, "On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics," Gadamer (1963/1999) writes,

> The moral-philosophical deliberation that is implicit in the practice of philosophical ethics is not a theory that must be made practically applicable…but rather a necessary consequence of the fact that it is always situated within circumstances that condition it. (p. 33)[16]

For Gadamer, philosophical ethics takes place within the complex and often alienating moments of our factical lives.[17] This is why Gadamer closely aligns his philosophical hermeneutics with Aristotle's notion of phronesis and ethical life therefore is best understood as an event or activity in accord with virtue. [18] Moreover, in the same way that Aristotle elaborates his understanding of temperance as that which "preserves" phronesis, so too Gadamer's fusion of horizons understood as agility "preserves" understanding by demanding movement, displacement, and alienation serve as its constituent parts. It is my suggestion that we further understand the fusion of horizons as the virtue of temperance. In this way, we can see that temperance is not an abstract virtue to be applied but rather an agility by which we engage our ethical activity as we navigate the complex world around us and through which we cultivate and develop the character to act in accord with the good (Aristotle, ca. B.C.E. 350/2011, 1140b5-20, pp. 120-121).

Temperance as Agility and Flourishing in the Fire Service

A hermeneutical understanding of virtue—and, in particular, an understanding of temperance as agility through the fusion of horizons—gives us insight into the complex ethical life of firefighters. This insight, I would now like to suggest, better enables us to live well in the midst of the movement and transitions of our work.

First, temperance as agility enables us to face alienation and displacement, both of which are key features of the work of firefighting not as problems that prevent ethical behavior, but rather as the means by which our ethical life develops. As we have seen, a static approach to virtue leaves out the vital ways in which the particularities of our factical life give contour and shape to our potential to flourish. We can now ask, with Gadamer, is it not our prejudices, histories, and concrete situations that engender the questions and choices of our ethical lives? Is it not our choice, in the particular moment, to act in light of these particular, and often conflicting, obligations or duties that generates a habitus or ethos out of which our ethical life takes shape? A hermeneutical understanding of temperance as agility is at home in these difficult circumstances and questions. As we have seen, fusion—*Verschmeltzung*—is a melting, oscillating, or amalgamating of the difficulties, concerns, and questions of ethical life as they happen. To cultivate this agility then is to cultivate an openness to each situation as it is given. Temperance, then, is the agility to be open not only to the situation at hand, but also to our own specific histories. We are invited to engage in the kind of dialectical questioning that Gadamer (1960/1999) discusses in Part 2 of *Truth and Method*—the kind that is a fluid, open-ended movement toward self-knowledge (pp. 362-379). As Nancy Moules and her colleagues (2015) write in the context of hermeneutical analysis, what is called for is:

> An interaction between the general and the particular that renders simultaneously a nuanced understanding of the concrete situation, and a set of questions and possibilities for seeing, thinking, and acting in the future. (p. 60)

On this understanding, firefighters are invited to engage the specific aspects of each situation, allowing those to shape their choices and actions.

Second, temperance as agility clears a space for cultivating virtue—for flourishing—for living in accord with virtue in all of its dynamism, change, and movement. In other words, it is part of the activity of ethical life. We have seen that a static approach to virtue leaves a gap between developing an abstract principle and applying it to a concrete situation. A hermeneutically-conceived understanding of temperance as agility, on the other hand, shows us that the possibilities, questions, and concerns for ethical activity arise in and through the horizonal situations in which we find ourselves. For firefighters, this means that our ethical concerns develop in and through the work of firefighting. But the work of firefighting is, as I have suggested, horizonal and thus never really only about the fire. It is about finding ways to keep the tragedies of life from cutting too deeply into the human spirit. Zac Unger (2004), a firefighter in Oakland, captures this well in his book, *Working Fire*, where he writes:

> Our talent is not for putting out fire but for building tenuous levees of safety against chaotic rivers of destruction. When we open a nozzle, when we cut a hole in the roof, our job

> isn't only to extinguish the flames and lift the heat. What we're really trying to do is make a person whole again. (p. 184)

Firefighting is about life, wholeness, or living well. Gadamer's conception of the fusion of horizons shows us therefore that a hermeneutically-conceived understanding of the virtue of temperance as agility presents us with an opening to engage the horizonal aspects of firefighting and to cultivate activity in accord with virtue. Put simply, to live life well, firefighters must cultivate the agility of temperance.

Author Note

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Notes

[1] My understanding of the horizonal is indebted to Theodore George's (2020) discussion of "horizonal displacement" in his book, *The Responsibility to Understand: Hermeneutical Contours of Ethical Life*, (pp. 58-62). For a related usage of the "horizontal" by which I have been influenced see also, N.J. Moules et. al. (2015), *Conducting Hermeneutic Research: From Philosophy to Practice*, (p. 60.).

[2] It is no wonder then that there is growing attention in the fire service to the health and well-being of firefighters due to the chronically stressful nature of the work. See Jada Hudson's (2022) *Firefighter Emotional Wellness: How to Reconnect with Yourself and Others*, which is intended as a resource for firefighters on the many issues surrounding behavioral health. See

also, S. M. Southwick, et. al. (2023), *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges*, which is an important resource for the IAFF's Resiliency Training.

[3] For other applied ethics approaches see also: P. Sandin (2009), D. Dawson (2014), and H.S. Walker (2020).

[4] See, for example, US Fire Administration, *Code of Ethics* (USFA), K. Blume (2021), & H.S. Walker (2020, p. 90-92).

[5] See, for example, the opening address at the annual Fire Department Instructors Conference (FDIC International), where Bobby Halton (2022), characterizes the work of firefighting in this way.

[6] This is also noted by Moore & Raymond (2019, p. xxxii).

[7] Moore & Raymond point out in their Introduction to their translation of the *Charmides* (2019) that "Ever since Cicero sought Latin equivalents for sophrosyne . . . translators of Greek have suffered over this word. They have often concluded that nothing fits precisely, or stably, or across all contexts" (p. xxxiv).

[8] See also, Terence Irwin's explanation in the glossary entry, "Temperance," of his translation (1985, p. 428).

[9] It should be noted that in the translation the word 'moderation' is used to translate '*sophrosyne*.' The translator (Plato, 1997), however, does make a footnote that points out sophrosyne "has a very wide meaning: self-control, good sense, reasonableness, temperance, and (in some contexts) chastity" (p. 1062, note 5).

[10] Monoson (2014, p. 149) cites *Republic* 357b-d: "Yet surely they must be gentle to their own people and harsh to the enemy. If they aren't, they won't wait around for others to destroy the city but will do it themselves first…" (See Plato, ca. B.C.E. 380/1997).

[11] Monoson (2014, p. 149) uses the phrase "psychological agility" when referring to Plato's suggestion that soldiers be able to navigate the transition between war and home.

[12] This connection has no small importance for understanding Gadamer's emphasis on the rehabilitation of an original ethics. Bruce Krajewski (2011) suggests that Gadamer's reliance on Heidegger's "monolithic" understanding of phronesis and sophrosyne combined with their association with National Socialism calls into question any attempt to base a philosophical ethics on their views (p. 7). A detailed discussion here is merited, but would take us too far afield for this article.

[13] As Georgia Warnke (1987) writes, what Gadamer means by a fusion of horizons is "the integration of one's understanding of a text or historical event with its relevance to one's own circumstances in such a way that an 'original' or 'intended' meaning cannot be differentiated

from the meaning of the text or event for oneself. This fusion is part of all hermeneutic understanding. . .” (p. 69).

[14] This incisive question was raised by Karen Davis at CHI 2025.

[15] Gadamer (1963/1999) writes, “It is with the rise of modern science that the opposition as such becomes fully fixed and at the same time the concept of theory acquires a new profile” (p. 19).

[16] See also, *Truth and Method* (Gadamer, 1960/1999), where he writes, “The human sciences stand closer to moral knowledge than to that kind of ‘theoretical’ knowledge. They are ‘moral sciences.’ Their object is man and what he knows of himself…The purpose of his knowledge is to govern his action” (p. 314).

[17] On this note, Ted George (2020) urges us to consider Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics as an original ethics in which our responsibility to understand lies in a concern for our factical situation (p. 48).

[18] Gadamer links understanding with phronesis, but he does not explicitly connect other aspects of his hermeneutics to the other character virtues. My thesis in this article would indicate that while Gadamer himself does not develop the specific character virtues, there are Gadamerian ways to connect them. See Giancarlo Tarantino (2022).