

UNDERSTANDING AS A TELEONOMICAL CONCEPT
-FUNDAMENTALS OF THE HERMENEUTICAL GAME-

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. FOREWORD	1 - 3
2. INTRODUCTION: HERMENEUTICS	5 - 6
3. HEIDEGGER: UNDERSTANDING AS AN EXISTENZIAL	7 - 26
4. GADAMER: THE PROBLEM OF APPLICATION AND THE HERMENEUTICAL CONCEPT OF EXPERIENCE	
4.1 Introduction	27 - 28
4.2 Objects of interpretation: Ontology	28 - 37
4.3 Objects of interpretation: Epistemology	
4.3.1 Aristotle's actuality	37 - 41
4.3.2 Self-knowledge and self-application	42 - 53
4.3.3 <i>Die Konkretisierung des wirkungsgeschichtlichen Bewußt-</i> <i>seins</i> and the hermeneutical concept of experience	53 - 59
4.3.4 <i>Pars pro toto</i> -explanation vs. the concept of the <i>epagoge</i>	60 - 72
4.3.5 The negative nature of experience: Hegel	73 - 92
5. CONCLUSION	93 - 95
REFERENCES	97 - 100

1. FOREWORD

Teleological explanations are so strongly connected to the idea of language that is commonly entertained that it is hardly ever recognized that this is only but one possible -and, as it turns out, rather dubious- perspective. Concentrating on the notion of understanding, a conception is sketched in the following that is in many respects superior to the teleological conception of language and its use. The account described here characterizes the circular nature of understanding in terms of self-maintenance through negative feedback. This immanent directedness of understanding towards possible future 'states' of understanding on condition of past 'states' of understanding and their negation is designated by the notion of *teleonomy*. In contrast to the idea of teleology that explains certain routines and behaviors in terms of extrinsic goals, the notion of teleonomy thus emphasizes the existence (and evolution) of intrinsic goals for these phenomena. While the notion of teleonomy had been conceived in the context of theoretical biology, and eventually gained some importance in cybernetics, it may be fruitfully employed also in an analysis of problems of language. In the particular case of understanding this means to recognize the phenomenon to be fully dynamic, and to consider it as a self-referential and self-generating faculty of the human mind.

However, while this is a characterization that seems to be quite compatible with an analytical point of view, the approach that is investigated here does not really comply with mainstream analytical philosophy of language. Indeed, the conception of language presented here challenges some of the dogmas of the standard analytical conception of language: It is staunchly anti-instrumentalistic and holistic, conceiving language to be constitutive of world and not just an ordering means, and it further contends that understanding is -as are meaning and intersubjectivity- not something to be acquired or established, but rather to be maintained. While the intuition that interpretation is a directed phenomenon is kept intact, interpretation is not conceived as a finalistic, teleological process with understanding as its final goal. Rather interpretation is described as a process that is in itself the goal.

That the origin of the conception, that is discussed in this thesis, is Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* does not exactly make things easier. On the contrary, it only adds to the burden of the argument. After all, the front line between continental philosophy and the analytical approach seems so clearly defined that any breach with the attitudes and conventions of the respective trades immediately faces the need for justification. But, knowing

only one point of view means to have no perspective at all. While this does by no means *per se* imply that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, it certainly could not hurt to risk a glance beyond the demarcation line. Clearly, some findings will turn out to confirm old prejudices, but others are indeed stimulating and thought provoking. Indeed, more disturbing than the obscure language for which Gadamer's work is notorious are the challenges to the analytical position and its conception of language that arise from *Wahrheit und Methode*, when taken seriously.

But despite apparent differences also parallels between analytical conceptions and Gadamerian ideas exist: That Davidson's notions of prior and passing theory converge with themes in Gadamer's hermeneutics has already been observed¹, but also when Davidson discusses the notion of a conceptual scheme and the idea of (in-) commensurability his position is similar to that of Gadamer, only that Gadamer discusses the topic under the heading of the fusion of horizons. (This is also in another respect a highly interesting topic, because while Gadamer's conception seems to agree in many ways with ideas formulated by Paul Feyerabend, their ideas of (in-) commensurability seem to represent the exception that proves the case.)

Indeed, more connections between the different theories and traditions can be found, if the history of hermeneutics is also taken into consideration. (-And since all semantics is ultimately occupied with hermeneutical problems, investigating the historical foundations of hermeneutics is only appropriate.) For example the theological debate about the notions of *explicatio* and *applicatio* of normative texts such as the Bible that Christian hermeneutics contemplated already in the Middle Ages, may be regarded as an early account of the problem of rule following. Thus, the history of dogmatics could enrich the contemporary discussion that was started by Wittgenstein.

Other connections are even more substantial, although maybe less obvious at first sight: Considering the names Gadamer, Schleiermacher, and Grice one might be heavily inclined to associate Schleiermacher with Gadamer, but not with Grice. It turns out that one could not be more wrong: Indeed, Schleiermacher's hermeneutics has more in common with the Gricean conception of language and communication than with the philosophical hermeneutics that Gadamer formulates. While this does not mean that one has to consider Grice to be a Neo-Romanticist -although the idea is quite amusing-, still the parallel needs to be recognized. The more so, since the criticism of Schleiermacher's

¹Cf. e.g. Stokhof (1999). See also Malpas (2002) and Ramberg (2003), who point out further parallels.

hermeneutics that Gadamer formulates applies just the same to the Gricean account of meaning and communication. Indeed, if the foundations of the Gricean conception are only assessed, it turns out that it is by no means any more rational or better justified than Gadamer's hermeneutics.

The perspectives that thus open up should make it plausible, that what is to follow can represent only a beginning. Only further systematic historical and conceptual studies can render the picture that is sketched here more complete. Ultimately this thesis might provide a conceptual basis to describe a notion of language that conceives language (and subsequently meaning) not as a tool, but as a cognitive faculty with formal techniques such as evolutionary game theory, bi-directional optimality theory, or dynamical system theory, and in terms of a model of challenge and response, resp. question and answer.

2. INTRODUCTION: HERMENEUTICS

The term hermeneutics and its Greek pendant ἐρμηνευτική (τέχνη) meaning *the art of interpretation*, stem from the verb ἐρμηνεύειν, which translates to the English *to make something understandable, to interpret, to translate, to explicate*. An etymological explanation of the form points out to Hermes, the messenger-translator of Greek mythology. ‘Messenger-translator’, because not only as commonly known was Hermes’ role to deliver godly messages, but also to translate the godly will into a language that the human addressees in all their earthly challenged capacity of mind and insight were able to understand. But not only for its etymological plausibility is the story of Hermes important: It contains a basic motive that remains dominant and influential in the conception of hermeneutics up to the present. It is the recognition that language in specific situations carries and expresses normative content. –Here, the gods demand obedience through the delivered messages, and it is the task of Hermes to explain the character and content of their dogmatic appeal. Generally, in contexts that set (e.g. religious or profane) rules and maxims, interpretation functions as the guideline of behavior.² In order to meet the presumptive authoritative content, interpretation thus requires special efforts and methodological consciousness. Classical domains of such normative interpretation are of course theology and

²Cf. Betti (1967), p. 600-601; see also Betti (1967) §53, where it is emphasized that legal and religious interpretation do in fact show similar characteristics and face similar problems. A particular aspect of both forms of interpretation is a demand for practical attainment that is connected with the interpretandum: You are supposed to adjust your behavior and conduct according to the expressed norm. A solely *theoretical* understanding of the interpretandum does not suffice, as long as its appeal for realization does not find *practical* application (cf. Betti (1967), p. 602). A detailed discussion of the intricate problems and numerous questions that are related with this aspect of interpretation and hermeneutics is not possible here. But it should be pointed out that the normative status of these special forms of language has to be distinguished from the normative character of language as such. The normativity of the interpretandum in religious and legal contexts is based on a dogmatic supposition. Although this supposition eventually serves as the ultimate criterion of understanding, culminating in a *If you do not agree, you did not understand* (cf. Scholz (1999), p. 18 for a somewhat less pointed formulation of this *Interpretationsgrundsatz*), its legitimacy and hence the authority of the interpretandum may nevertheless be asked into question. (Even though it may earn the interpreter the title of an anarchist, renegade, or heretic etc., it may just the same also indicate that the interpreter understood the ‘rule’ too well.) While questioning the normativity of such rules may be reasonable, questioning the normative powers of language as such would be less so. Normativity of language, i.e. the way of language, is not based on a dogmatic supposition, but derives from the normative powers of the factual: A table is a table, and not a chair. We talk as we talk. While this is not to mean that a critique of language is in principle impossible, there can be no reasonable doubt about the principal facticity of language. Doing so would deem you -if not a lunatic- at least an incompetent speaker.

jurisprudence. Consequently, it is in confrontation with theological and judicial texts that a consciousness for hermeneutical theory developed.

After a long process of emancipation hermeneutics was eventually freed from the conceptual restrictions and specific interests of particular paradigms. With this not only the idea of a general hermeneutics became conceivable, but also -most notably in the works of Schleiermacher and Dilthey- the idea of a theory of understanding itself gained contour. And indeed, both themes arguably reappear in Gadamer's idea of a universal hermeneutics and his concern with the concept of understanding. But while in Schleiermacher's and Dilthey's work the normative impetus that characterized early hermeneutics had been lost, it defines also the driving force of Gadamer's hermeneutics. -It is only that in case of Gadamer the idea of normativity is not one deriving from convention or dogma. In Gadamer's conception it is the normative powers of the factual that figure as the driving force of the hermeneutical task: His hermeneutics is concerned with the reality of our Being and the understanding of the world we inhabit.

To what extent the phenomenon of understanding is essential to our Being has been analyzed by Heidegger. And although Gadamer can not be regarded as merely an epigone of Heidegger, his hermeneutics emulates in many respects themes and concepts of Heidegger's philosophy. Since the understanding of Gadamer's hermeneutics becomes thus conditional on understanding Heidegger, at least the basics of Heidegger's fundamental-ontology shall be sketched in the following.

3. HEIDEGGER: UNDERSTANDING AS AN EXISTENZIAL

One of the most prominent characteristics of understanding and the hermeneutical task is its circular nature: In order to understand the whole, one has first to understand its parts. Yet, in order to understand the parts, one has first to understand the whole. This is in a very basic formulation the problem of the hermeneutical circle.

It is maybe the difference in the assessment of the circularity of understanding in which the breach between Heidegger and the hermeneutical tradition becomes most obvious. While the hermeneutical circle is generally regarded to be a vicious circle, Heidegger's verdict about the circle completely lacks any defamatory tone. On the contrary, the circle, according to Heidegger, is not a problem that could be eliminated, or avoided, but rather defines sum and substance of understanding. Indeed, the actual problem, so Heidegger, is not to escape the circle, but to come into it in the right way. He writes: "Das Entscheidende ist nicht, aus dem Zirkel heraus-, sondern in ihn nach der rechten Weise hineinzukommen."³

Heidegger's positive interpretation of the circle is not only an explicit departure from the traditional doctrine, he moreover accompanies it with a severe criticism of the established conception of understanding. He accuses the advocates of a vicious-circle interpretation to sustain a fundamentally ill-conceived idea of understanding: "*Aber in diesem Zirkel ein vitiosum sehen und nach Wegen Ausschau halten, ihn zu vermeiden, ja ihn auch nur als unvermeidliche Unvollkommenheit "empfinden", heißt das Verstehen von Grund aus mißverstehen.*"⁴ Actually, from Heidegger's perspective, a classification of the concept of understanding as an epistemic category is nothing but a blatant category mistake. To him understanding is not an epistemological term, but something more foundational: Understanding is a manifest fundamental of human Being, and as such presents a constituent of the sphere of ontology. Thus, also the circle of interpretation and understanding belongs "[...] zur Struktur des Sinnes, welches Phänomen in der existenzialen Verfassung des Daseins, im auslegenden Verstehen verwurzelt ist. Seiendes, dem es als In-der-Welt-sein um sein Sein selber geht, hat eine ontologische Zirkelstruktur."⁵

³ *SuZ*, p. 153.

⁴ *SuZ*, p. 153. Italics in the original.

⁵ *SuZ*, p. 153. Note that in the theological context, or in the context of humanism in which understanding is correlated with ideas such as devoutness, or the pursuit of classical ideals, the question whether understanding is an epistemological or rather an ontological concept

Clearly, the aspects of Heidegger's thinking in *Sein und Zeit*, that were just touched upon, need further elucidation. Brought into context, not only his oddly suggestive language (as especially the last citation is exemplary of), but his peculiar position regarding the concept of understanding itself, will eventually lose its cryptic appeal. In the following I will sketch the underlying intention and general characteristics of *Sein und Zeit* that are relevant here.

Heidegger's leitmotif in *Sein und Zeit* can be summarized in a single question that he raises. It is the question of the meaning of Being: What does *Being* mean? As Heidegger poses this question he positions himself explicitly against the philosophical tradition in which it originally had been raised and approached. Not only is he dissatisfied with the answers ontology has delivered so far, but he moreover disapproves the very sense and scope the question is generally regarded to have within philosophy. Thus, to destroy and actually overcome traditional ontology -responsible for the question's misconception and trivialization⁶-, Heidegger raises the question of Being anew. Consequently, what he conceptualizes in *Sein und Zeit* and what motivates his insistence on the question of Being is not concerned with the construction of a new categorical system, for doing so would only mean to remain entangled within the shortcomings of tradition.⁷ Rather, by asking what the meaning of Being is, does not really apply. Understanding turns in these contexts indeed into a *form of life*.

⁶Cf. *SuZ*, §1.

⁷Heidegger articulates his strong anti-traditionalistic stance most clearly in §6 of *SuZ*. He writes: "Die vorbereitende Interpretation der Fundamentalstrukturen des Daseins hinsichtlich seiner nächsten und durchschnittlichen Seinsart, in der es mithin auch zunächst geschichtlich ist, wird aber folgendes offenbar machen: das Dasein hat nicht nur die Geneigtheit, an seine Welt, in der es ist, zu verfallen und reluzent aus ihr her sich auszulegen, Dasein verfällt in eins damit auch seiner mehr oder minder ausdrücklich ergriffenen Tradition. Diese nimmt ihm die eigene Führung, das Fragen und Wählen ab. Das gilt nicht zuletzt von *dem* Verständnis und seiner Ausbildbarkeit, das im eigensten Sein des Daseins verwurzelt ist, dem ontologischen. Die hierbei zur Herrschaft kommende Tradition macht zunächst und zumeist das, was sie "übergibt", so wenig zugänglich, daß sie es vielmehr verdeckt. Sie überantwortet das Überkommene der Selbstverständlichkeit und verlegt den Zugang zu den ursprünglichen "Quellen", daraus die überlieferten Kategorien und Begriffe z. T. in echter Weise geschöpft wurden. Die Tradition macht sogar eine solche Herkunft überhaupt vergessen. Sie bildet die Unbedürftigkeit aus, einen solchen Rückgang in seiner Notwendigkeit auch nur zu verstehen. Die Tradition entwirzelt die Geschichtlichkeit des Daseins so weit, daß es sich nur noch im Interesse an der Vielgestaltigkeit möglicher Typen, Richtungen, Standpunkte des Philosophierens in den entlegensten und fremdesten Kulturen bewegt und mit diesem Interesse die eigene Bodenlosigkeit zu verhüllen sucht. Die Folge wird, daß das Dasein bei allem historischen Interesse und allem Eifer für eine philologisch "sachliche" Interpretation die elementarsten Bedingungen nicht mehr versteht, die einen positiven Rückgang zur Vergangenheit im Sinne einer produktiven Aneignung ihrer allein ermöglichten." (*SuZ*, p. 21. Italics in the original.) On the basis of this diagnosis it is obvious that the attempt to overcome traditional

Heidegger sets out to analyze what traditional ontology implicitly presupposes: An understanding of the meaning of Being. -It is only on the basis of the implicit understanding of what Being means that the idea of ontology is possible at all.

Raising the issue of the meaning of Being seems the most irritating question, because intuitively we do have a definite understanding of what Being means. But once pressed to articulate this idea, -that is to articulate the common characteristic of what it means to be- we face the most serious problems. What do we actually understand by the concept of Being? All answers provided by tradition concerning the common characteristics or foundation of Being remain vague and unsatisfactory. Its meaning seems elusive, and thus the very foundations of ontology are rendered intolerably weak indeed. Or, in Heidegger's words: "[a]lle *Ontologie*, mag sie über ein noch so reiches und festverklammertes *Kategoriensystem* verfügen, bleibt im Grunde blind und eine Verkehrung ihrer *eigensten Absicht*, wenn sie nicht zuvor den *Sinn von Sein* zureichend geklärt und diese Klärung als ihre *Fundamentalaufgabe* begriffen hat."⁸ Thus, to secure the status of ontology, a critical assessment and revision of our understanding of the concept of Being -of the fundamental of any ontology- is inevitable. This is the project that Heidegger devotes himself to. Investigating what the circular structure of understanding seems to conceal⁹ Heidegger aims to elucidate what seems so clear in the question of the meaning of Being, but is so hard to express. It is the transcendental a priori of ontology, that could neither be derived from more general terms, nor could it be split up into more elementary concepts. The title of this project of a transcendental analysis of the preconditions of categorical thinking consequently is that of a *Fundamentalontologie*. This fundamental ontology is set out to expound "nicht ein dem Erkennen transzendentes ‚Sein‘ sondern das jedem Erkennen von Seiendem bedingend vorausliegende

ontology necessitates to overcome the traditional philosophical vocabulary (or at least its conventional interpretation(s)). The destruction of traditional metaphysics at which Heidegger aims struggles thus also (and maybe foremost) with linguistic problems. Heidegger's solution to this is -as exemplified in the quote- the invention of a highly idiosyncratic terminology. The (superficial) drawbacks of this solution are obvious: It renders the task of understanding Heidegger quite demanding, because abandoning the notional tradition means that there is no positive conceptual framework that could provide guidelines for the interpretation of Heidegger's own concepts. One is thus forced really to the phenomena themselves. -Which is exactly Heidegger's interest and intention.

⁸ *SuZ*, p. 11.

⁹ A formulation of the circle of understanding in this particular case may be the following: Only on the basis of an understanding of the meaning of Being can we say, what is. Yet, at the same time, only on the basis of Being is an understanding of the meaning of Being possible at all.

Verständnis von Sein.”¹⁰

The primary problem of this fundamental ontology is of course not to be overwhelmed by the question of the meaning of Being. How could you approach what is “*die prinzipiellste und konkreteste Frage zugleich*”?¹¹ What could provide the Archimedean point from which to break into the circle? Or, in Heidegger’s words: “An *welchem* Seienden soll der Sinn von Sein abgelesen werden, von welchem Seienden soll die Erschließung des Seins ihren Ausgang nehmen? Ist der Ausgang beliebig, oder hat ein bestimmtes Seiendes in der Ausarbeitung der Seinsfrage einen Vorrang? Welches ist dieses exemplarische Seiende und in welchem Sinne hat es Vorrang?”¹² It is an analysis of the formal structure of questions in general¹³ that leads not only to a clarification of the initial question of the meaning of Being, but that provides Heidegger also with a solution to the problems just stated. Trivially, there are three dimensions to a question: What is actually asked for defines one dimension; Another dimension is given by the one who asks -the questioner. Finally, the third dimension is defined by the questionee: It is on the basis of her primary understanding of the question that the questionee is sought to provide an answer. And in the peculiar dialectics of the question of Being, the latter two dimensions gain particular importance. For, when the question of the meaning of Being is asked, questioner and questionee coincide: The one to ask is the one with the competence to answer, since she does have an intuitive understanding of the meaning of Being and thus can provide an answer. (The fact that this understanding is an implicit understanding only cannot discredit her basic competence to answer.) In other words, the (understanding of the) possibility of being questioner and questionee in coalescence defines the scope also of the meaning of Being: The meaning of Being unfolds within the possibilities of the one being capable of raising the issue and understanding its scope. Once this is recognized and understood the Being of the questioner/questionee can figure as the exemplary being Heidegger had asked for in the quotation above: It is human being that is to provide the thematic precedence in the investigation of the meaning of Being. The clarification of the structure of human being -a being whose understanding of the meaning of Being becomes manifest in the possibility of being questioner/questionee in union- will provide an answer to the question of the meaning of Being. Heidegger’s fundamental ontology turns thus inevitably into an exploration of the fundamentals of human being.

¹⁰Mittelstraß, (1984), p. 60 (entrance on Heidegger).

¹¹*SuZ*, p.9. Italics in the original.

¹²*SuZ*, p. 7. Italics in the original.

¹³Cf. *SuZ*, §2.

But what aspects define the a priori core of our self-concept as human beings? The answer is already immanent to the question: It is (our self-)understanding, because understanding ourselves as self-understanding beings is the precondition for raising the question as such. On this account understanding must then be regarded as a fundamental aspect, i.e. an ontological a priori, of human being. It is what Heidegger calls an *Existenzial*.¹⁴ It is a simple argument that justifies and substantiates the *Ontologisierung* of the concept of understanding as an integral constituent of human being further.¹⁵ We simply cannot imagine ourselves as not being understanding beings, because we cannot understand what this would actually mean. -Losing our self-understanding as understanding beings would render us ignorant with regards to our being. The question of the meaning of Being would then never occur. Thus, a discussion analogous to the Cartesian argument and involving the Cartesian demon is not conceivable here. Heidegger may hence assert: “*Seinsverständnis ist selbst eine Seinsbestimmtheit des Daseins.*”¹⁶

The breach with the hermeneutical tradition that this conception represents is not just partial, but total, because Heidegger no longer considers understanding to be an epistemic concept or ideal.^{17,18} Indeed, all ideas and concepts of

¹⁴Note that Heidegger conceives understanding not to be the only such *Existenzial*. *Gleichursprünglich* to understanding is *Befindlichkeit* conceived as a further ontological a priori of human being. (Cf. *SuZ*, §29.)

¹⁵Note that the (self-)legitimatization of Heidegger’s conception is directly related to its justification: In his account the concept of Being is intimately connected to the notion of possibility, as we will see. While under this proviso a satisfactory answer would strongly confirm his conception, or at least render it consistent, it would be disqualified and a failure, if it turns out to be impossible to answer this question. That the answer may not be immediately obvious may appear peculiar, but arguably illustrates only that our self-understanding is bounded in this respect. Indeed, one might argue that this is a happenstance that is conditioned by our inaptness when it comes to the meaning of Being: If understanding is conceived as an integral aspect of Being, then the latter’s unclarity translates to the former’s unclarity.

¹⁶*SuZ*, p. 12. Italics in the original.

¹⁷Cf. *SuZ*, p. 142/143, where Heidegger writes: “Verstehen ist immer gestimmtes. Wenn wir dieses als fundamentales Existenzial interpretieren, dann zeigt sich damit an, daß dieses Phänomen als Grundmodus des Seins des Daseins begriffen wird. ”Verstehen“ dagegen im Sinne *einer* möglichen Erkenntnisart unter anderen, etwa unterschieden von ”Erklären“, muß mit diesem als existenziales Derivat des primären, das Sein des Da überhaupt mitkonstituierenden Verstehens interpretiert werden.”

¹⁸Talking about a revolution here is no exaggeration. One has only to compare the quote from *SuZ* in footnote 7 in which Heidegger articulates his frustration with traditional ontology with the following comment of Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Commenting on the notion of ‘revolution’, Kuhn, although concerned with a different field, echoes precisely the motifs that drive Heidegger: “Why should a change of paradigm be called a revolution? In the face of the vast and essential differences between political and scientific

understanding that the hermeneutical tradition had generated so far are from Heidegger's ontological perspective inadequate, and he consequently abandons them. The hermeneutical problem, as it is formulated by Heidegger, is no longer determined by the question of the ideals and aims of understanding and the pursuit of the (proper) methods for its attainment. Rather than being guided by transcendent or extrinsic motifs, the true concern of understanding is in Heidegger's eyes an intrinsic one: Understanding is not about the understanding of a divine demand or the understanding of others (and the generation of intersubjectivity), but understanding is about *self-understanding*, i.e. about how we are what we are.¹⁹ Heidegger writes in this respect: "Die Hermeneutik hat die Aufgabe, das je eigene Dasein in seinem Seinscharakter diesem Dasein selbst zugänglich zu machen, mitzuteilen, der Selbstentfremdung, mit der das Dasein geschlagen ist, nachzugehen. In der Hermeneutik bildet sich für das Dasein eine Möglichkeit aus, für sich selbst *verstehend* zu werden."²⁰ This (ontological) turn in the conception of understanding is associated with a change in the conception of hermeneutics itself. Heidegger turns hermeneutics into a fundamental philosophy, in which ontology and phenomenology are merged: "Philosophie ist universale phänomenologische Ontologie, ausgehend von der Hermeneutik des Daseins, die als Analytik der *Existenz* das Ende des Leitfadens alles philosophischen Fragens dort festgemacht hat, woraus es *entspringt*

development, what parallelism can justify the metaphor that finds revolutions in both? One aspect of the parallelism must already be apparent. Political revolutions are inaugurated by a growing sense, often restricted to a segment of the political community, that existing institutions have ceased adequately to meet the problems posed by an environment that they have in part created. In much the same way, scientific revolutions are inaugurated by a growing sense, again often restricted to a narrow subdivision of the scientific community, that an existing paradigm has ceased to function adequately in the exploration of an aspect of nature to which that paradigm itself had previously led the way. In both political and scientific development the sense of malfunction that can lead to crisis is prerequisite to revolution." (Kuhn, (1996), p. 92) Other excerpts from §§1 and 6 of *SuZ* may serve as a further illustration. See e.g. *SuZ*, p. 22, where Heidegger remarks: "Soll für die Seinsfrage selbst die Durchsichtigkeit ihrer eigenen Geschichte gewonnen werden, dann bedarf es der Auflockerung der verhärteten Tradition und der Ablösung der durch sie gezeitigten Verdeckungen. Diese Aufgabe verstehen wir als die *am Leitfaden der Seinsfrage* sich vollziehende *Destruktion* des überlieferten Bestandes der antiken Ontologie auf die ursprünglichen Erfahrungen, in denen die ersten und fortan leitenden Bestimmungen des Seins gewonnen wurden." Italics in the original.

¹⁹Cf. Scholz (1999), p. 135 (with a quote from Heidegger (1988), p. 15): "Die Hermeneutik soll es nun also mit dem menschlichen Dasein und dessen Selbstverstehen zu tun haben. Das Verstehen, um das es hier geht, besitzt nach Heidegger einen Charakter *sui generis*: Mit einer erkennenden Beziehung zu anderen Personen und mit Intentionalität habe es nichts gemein; vielmehr sei es *ein Wie des Daseins selbst*." Italics in the original.

²⁰Heidegger (1988), p. 15, quoted after Scholz (1999), p. 135.

und wohin es *zurückschlägt*.”²¹ -Namely in an *understanding* Being. With this is Heidegger’s relation to the hermeneutical tradition brought to the point.²²

This means that the concept of understanding can neither be reduced to, nor be derived from any more fundamental notion. -It is a quintessential, uncontestable foundational concept. This of course renders the nature and the conditions for its further analysis rather peculiar: Since there are no more fundamental concepts that we could refer to, any inquiry into the notion of understanding has to be oriented solely at the concept of understanding itself, and at what becomes manifest with it. -Thus, we involuntarily arrive at Husserl’s maxim *Zu den Sachen selbst*!²³, and the analysis becomes immediately phenomenology.²⁴

What Heidegger’s inquiry into the phenomenal structure of understanding calls first to attention is that understanding is a directed phenomenon.²⁵ Just as consciousness is always consciousness of something, understanding means to understand something.²⁶ -Understanding is always steered towards that which is to be understood. On this account one might hence deem understanding to be a ‘relational’ concept. Yet, although tempting, it would be too rash to interpret

²¹*SuZ*, p. 38. Italics in the original.

²²Note that these themes find a radicalization in Gadamer. Adding another twist, Gadamer conceives the ontological turn also as a linguistic turn: Identifying language (resp. meaning) as *the* ontological fundamental, his hermeneutics becomes not just an aspect of ontology, but ontology itself.

²³Cf. *SuZ*, p. 34.

²⁴§7 of *SuZ* (and especially Abschnitt C therein) are instructive with regards to this complex. Two short quotes shall suffice to make this clear: “Phänomenologie des Daseins ist *Hermeneutik* in der ursprünglichen Bedeutung des Wortes, wonach es das Geschäft der Auslegung bezeichnet. Sofern nun aber durch die Aufdeckung des Sinnes des Seins und der Grundstrukturen des Daseins überhaupt der Horizont herausgestellt wird für jede weitere ontologische Erforschung des nicht daseinsmäßigen Seienden, wird diese Hermeneutik zugleich ”Hermeneutik“ im Sinne der Ausarbeitung der Bedingungen der Möglichkeit jeder ontologischen Untersuchung.” (*SuZ*, p. 37) And Heidegger continues later on: “Ontologie und Phänomenologie sind nicht zwei verschiedene Disziplinen neben anderen zur Philosophie gehörigen. Die beiden Titel charakterisieren die Philosophie selbst nach Gegenstand und Behandlungsart. Philosophie ist universale phänomenologische Ontologie, ausgehend von der Hermeneutik des Daseins, die als Analytik der *Existenz* das Ende des Leitfadens alles philosophischen Fragens dort festgemacht hat, woraus es *entspringt* und wohin es *zurückschlägt*.” (*SuZ*, p. 38. Italics in the original.) The origin and ultimate point of reference that Heidegger alludes to here is of course understanding itself. The analysis of the concept of understanding falls thus back on our pre-understanding of the concept of understanding. (Note that in Gadamer’s conception the notion of meaning is turned into *the* fundamental concept of ontology, which renders his hermeneutics after this onto-linguistic turn pure ontology.)

²⁵Cf. *SuZ*, p. 142, where Heidegger writes: “Verstehen ist immer gestimmtes.”

²⁶The parallelism between consciousness and understanding is no mere coincidence: In the form of self-consciousness and self-understanding both are arguably identical.

this supposition in terms of the concepts of interpreter and interpretandum, i.e. in terms of the subject/object-distinction. -After all, this would mean to remain entangled within the conceptual framework of classical ontology (resp. classical epistemology²⁷), which is exactly what Heidegger aims to overcome in his conception of a *Fundamentalontologie*.

A crucial role in the explanation why traditional ideas do not comply with Heidegger's account is played by the further conceptualization of the formal structure of understanding. Heidegger conceives the directedness of understanding in terms of a directedness towards (the realization of) *possibilities*. (Note that because of the existential conception of understanding it follows hence instantly that Being may be considered also as a *Being-towards-possibilities*.²⁸)

This of course renders the notion of possibility critical for Heidegger's conception of understanding (resp. Being), and it is decisive to comprehend that Heidegger understands the idea of possibility not as a theoretical concept, or abstract object, or property such as e.g. the possibility of being true. Rather the notion of possibility is interpreted by Heidegger in terms of concrete pragmatic possibilities and practicalities.

The background for this idea is provided by the observation that our practical interests are prior to our theoretical interests: -Human Being for Heidegger is not a theoretical concept to start with, but exhausts itself in everyday practice and the pragmatics of living. Indeed, not only precedes our pragmatic concern with the things that surround us in life any theoretical contemplation, but reflective thought or theory cannot go behind, let alone substitute everyday life and its concerns.²⁹ And since understanding is conceived as an *Existenzial*, this has to be reflected in its phenomenal structure, i.e. in the conception of understanding as directed towards (the realization of) possibilities.

Hence, it is only consequential, that the notion of possibility signifies in Heidegger's account the possibilities of Being that become manifest in the confrontation with world and that define (both, the facticity and the prospects of) human existence. In Heidegger's conception the notion of possibility is designated as the (abundance of) concrete, pragmatic practicabilities and concerns

²⁷Note that the intuition of the directedness of understanding (more precisely the directedness of interpretation as steered towards the realization or completion of understanding, respectively the acquisition of knowledge) lies also at the heart of the classical accounts of understanding.

²⁸Cf. *SuZ*, p. 148.

²⁹This theme had already been emphasized in Dilthey's *Lebensphilosophie*. One might argue that on this account theory is not the most sublime form of practice, as Aristotle asserts, but only the most corrupt form of practice, because it is translated, disenacted, (paralytic) practice.

of everyday life that condition its subsistence. Perceived in this way Being and understanding may be conceived as directed towards the realization of possibilities. -Namely the possibility of existence itself.³⁰ Or, in Heidegger's words: "Im Verstehen liegt existenzial die Seinsart des Daseins als Sein-können. Dasein ist nicht ein Vorhandenes, das als Zugabe noch besitzt, etwas zu können, sondern es ist primär Möglichsein. Dasein ist je das, was es sein kann und wie es seine Möglichkeit ist. Das wesenhafte Möglichsein des Daseins betrifft [...] immer schon das Seinkönnen zu ihm selbst, unwillen seiner."³¹

That understanding is described to follow a pragmatic orientation instead of being directed towards theoretical goals and ideals has important repercussions for the concept of understanding, because on this account understanding becomes conceivable as pre-predicative, as we will see in a moment. But before this point will be elaborated in more detail, first some further implications that connect to the idea of understanding as directed towards pragmatic possibilities shall be addressed briefly. -By recognizing them we will arrive at a more comprehensive picture of Heidegger's general conception.

Thus, note first that by conceiving understanding as directed towards possibilities in terms of practical application, a distinction is implicitly made that concerns a very basal, but very important aspect of our self-conception. By existentially linking understanding to the concept of (pragmatic) possibility, human world-orientation is immediately set apart from blind impulse: The directedness of understanding towards possibilities determines human Being as a Being that is -qua being an understanding Being- released from bare natural necessity and the scheme of stimulus-response in most of its actions. Our concern with world may thus be characterized as 'strategic', or 'operative' action, rather than as involuntary activity. -To understand means to transcend the realm of the instinct. Heidegger implicitly demarcates in his conception of understanding in its upshot thus the concepts of *world* and *having-world* as specifically human from the notion of the *environment* as the sphere of the brute beast.³² On this account is hence the notion of *Being-towards-possibilities* arguably rendered syn-

³⁰Note that 'possibility' thus means the domain of *what is*, or *what is not yet*, but *what could be*. Since there are no a priori restrictions on the idea of possibility conceivable, and since our existence is finite, time becomes then *the* ultimate limit.

³¹*SuZ*, p. 143.

³²The concept of the *Existenzial* signifies hence a *differentia specifica*: Not being capable of understanding would mean to lose the freedom of grasping the possibilities of Being. It should become clear then that Heidegger's remark that "[d]as Dasein ist die Möglichkeit des Freiseins für das eigenste Seinkönnen" (*SuZ*, p. 144. Italics in the original.) delivers on this account a decisive refinement of the concept of human Being (which further exhibits in this formulation a moment of self-referentiality).

onymous to the notion of *Being-in-world* that plays in Heidegger's conception also a rather prominent role, because it figures as the Heideggerian alternative to the classical idea of the subject/object-distinction.

Speaking of *Being-in-world* note, that the *in* must not be interpreted in terms of a spatial relation between mutually distinct bodies. Although a pretty tempting idea, this would be a serious misunderstanding.³³ Emphasizing an archaic meaning of *in*, Heidegger interprets the notion of *Being-in-world* rather in the sense of a natural familiarity with world (-which of course might be interpreted as a natural understanding of world that we have qua being practical Beings).³⁴ This runs in line with the idea of being a practical Being and the observation that the ontological foundation of human existence and everyday life lies in practice, not theory. It determines that 'world' becomes manifest in terms of its relation towards human existence in form of an abundance of (positive and negative) pragmatic aspects (such as e.g. its serviceability-for (*Dienlichkeit zu*), usability (*Verwendbarkeit*), and detrimentality (*Abträglichkeit*)³⁵), rather than that world reveals itself unmotivatedly and autonomously to an otherwise disengaged and in principle separated observer. The idea of world becomes meaningful to us not as such, not under the aspect of *what* things there might be, but only under the aspect of *how* it is available to us, *how* we might engage with it in our everyday life.³⁶ While classical ontology postulates an opposition of

³³Indeed the spatial interpretation would render the distinction between being in an environment and the concept of having world, that was just addressed, nonsense. -At least as long as one does not assume the existence of two spatially distinct universes: One inhabited by those who are free to choose and reflect their actions, whereas the other is determined by sheer compulsion.

³⁴Cf. *SuZ*, p. 54. Heidegger does here not shy away from etymological exegesis: "In-Sein [...] meint eine Seinsverfassung des Daseins und ist ein *Existenzial*. Dann kann damit aber nicht gedacht werden an das Vorhandensein eines Körperdinges (Menschenleib) "in" einem vorhandenen Seienden. Das In-Sein meint so wenig ein räumliches "Ineinander" Vorhandener, als "in" ursprünglich gar nicht eine räumliche Beziehung der genannten Art bedeutet [...]; "in" stammt von inan-, wohnen, habitare, sich aufhalten; "an" bedeutet: ich bin gewohnt, vertraut mit, ich pflege etwas; es hat die Bedeutung von colo im Sinne von habito und diligo. Dieses Seiende, dem das In-Sein in dieser Bedeutung zugehört, kennzeichneten wir als das Seiende, das ich je selbst bin. Der Ausdruck "bin" hängt zusammen mit "bei"; "ich bin" besagt wiederum: ich wohne, halte mich auf bei ... der Welt, als dem so und so Vertrauten. Sein als Infinitiv des "ich bin", d.h. als Existenzial verstanden, bedeutet wohnen bei ..., vertraut sein mit ... *In-Sein ist demnach der formale existenziale Ausdruck des Seins des Daseins, das die wesenhafte Verfassung des In-der-Welt-seins hat.*" Italics in the original.

³⁵Cf. *SuZ*, §18 (but also *SuZ*, §15 ff.).

³⁶Note that how world is revealed is not exhausted alone in terms of the possibilities of practical relatedness. World is not only defined by the concrete objects that we, as human beings, happen to encounter (*Zeug*, as Heidegger says), but moreover takes also shape to those occupying it in relations of social interaction: "Die Welt des Daseins ist *Mitwelt*. Das

subject and object, Heidegger propagates with this an *interdependency* of Being and world. Indeed, in this conception human Being and world do not figure as two autonomous entities (subject and object) that only happen to interact at the deliberation of the subject. -There is no such thing as a self-contained, or pure monadic ego.³⁷ Thus, the idea of subject and object is overcome in the conception of Being-in-world. This is how the concept of Being-in-world is to be understood. That thus conceived both, the concept of world, and the concept of Being as the constituents of the notion of Being-in-world cannot be considered as static concepts, but are characterized as (inherently) dynamic, contextual, and situation-dependent should be obvious.

With this we return to Heidegger's analysis of understanding proper. It had already been mentioned in passing that in Heidegger's account understanding is characterized as pre-predicative (i.e. that it is conceived as pre-theoretical.) While this arguably follows already from the conception of human Being as a practical Being (simply because -as was already explained- theory cannot go back behind, or even substitute the practical reality of our Being), the substance of the matter and its importance for the overall conception may also be illustrated with the focus remaining on the idea of the directedness of understanding towards possibilities.³⁸

But note first that when understanding is conceived to be pre-predicative, then writing about understanding, i.e. explaining the concept of understanding, is in a specific respect trivially, but decisively constrained: If understanding precedes predication, any explication of the matter can only happen *ex post*.³⁹

In-Sein ist *Mitsein* mit Anderen. Das innerweltliche Ansichsein dieser ist *Mitdasein*." (*SuZ*, p.118. Italics in the original.) World is thus further defined and constituted by ones attitudes, concerns, and interests, by ones feelings and fears, etc. Note further that in the distinction between the question *How ...?* and the question *What ...?* the phenomenological basic intention of *Sein und Zeit* is realized. Cf. *SuZ*, p. 27: "Der Ausdruck "Phänomenologie" bedeutet primär einen *Methodenbegriff*. Er charakterisiert nicht das sachhaltige Was der Gegenstände der philosophischen Forschung, sondern das *Wie* dieser. Je echter ein Methodenbegriff sich auswirkt und je umfassender er den grundsätzlichen Duktus einer Wissenschaft bestimmt, um so ursprünglicher ist er in der Auseinandersetzung mit den Sachen selbst verwurzelt, um so weiter entfernt er sich von dem, was wir einen technischen Handgriff nennen, deren es auch in den theoretischen Disziplinen viele gibt." Italics in the original.

³⁷Cf. for a short criticism of Cartesian ideas *SuZ*, p. 24/25.

³⁸Since understanding defines an existential aspect of Being this is not so much of a diversion as it may seem anyway.

³⁹This is a predicament that *any* discussion of the issue has to face. Also, and in particular, Heidegger's presentation runs into difficulties at this point, because his conception of understanding is thus rendered a truly metaphysical -if not mystic- notion: As an ontological a priori of human Being understanding can only *show* itself. Namely as the condition for the possibility of (its own) understanding. -With this Heidegger's concept arguably ends up in

In its consequence one must then observe a strong asymmetry between the phenomenon of understanding and the expression or explanation it takes.

Yet, rather than regarding this to be an epistemic particularity, this feature might be attributed to an important ontological distinction in Heidegger's conception. The point squares indeed neatly with the concept of the ontological difference with which Heidegger seeks to signify the difference between *Being* as an ontological concept and *that what is* as the ontic actualization of Being. The parallel becomes clear when Heidegger elaborates in more detail on the conception of the directedness of understanding, and in particular on the importance of the concept of possibility in this connection. He writes: "Der Entwurfcharakter des Verstehens [i.e. the directedness of understanding, D.B.] besagt [...], daß dieses das, woraufhin es entwirft, die Möglichkeiten, selbst nicht thematisch erfaßt. [*sic*] Solches Erfassen benimmt dem Entworfenen gerade seinen Möglichkeitscharakter, zieht es herab zu einem gegebenen, gemeinten Bestand, während der Entwurf im Werfen die Möglichkeit als Möglichkeit sich vorwirft und als solche *sein* läßt. Das Verstehen ist, als Entwerfen, die Seinsart des Daseins, in der es seine Möglichkeiten als Möglichkeiten *ist*."⁴⁰ While it seems from the formulation that (in the context of the conception of understanding as directed towards possibilities) it is a streak of self-similarity and a peculiar form of abstraction that lies at the heart of the concept of the ontological difference, the basic dilemma that Heidegger alludes to here is that when talking about Being, the unconditional, most general has to be expressed within a particular conceptual framework that is itself not unconditional, but indeed conditioned exactly by what it is to reflect: Being. The task is basically to explicate or describe the ontological in terms of the ontic. -But with this the verge of self-contradiction is reached: Since the ontic cannot exhaust the ontological, the discussion will arguably always be deficient.⁴¹ Indeed, the concept of Being remains thus ultimately elusive.

While the general matter is too precarious to be discussed here in further detail⁴², at least the account that Heidegger gives here should become clearer, once a slightly broader perspective on the themes of the quote is taken, and the connection between the concept of Being and the notion of possibility is made more explicit. -Taking a more general point of view indeed results in a gain in

the same metaphysical muddle he actually set out to overcome.

⁴⁰*SuZ*, p. 145.

⁴¹This difficulty is indeed principally unsolvable, if the idea of the ontological difference is to be meaningful at all.

⁴²For a brief overview on the different conceptions of the notion of 'Being' and the problems they face, (that critically discusses also the Heideggerian account) see e.g. Keller (1974).

clarity.

Thus, recall that by conceiving understanding to be an aspect of Being -and that means understanding in its directedness towards possibilities- our Being is immediately rendered a Being-towards-possibilities. But while this seems to be a pretty specific statement, it is not. On the contrary. It is the most general conception of Being imaginable, because what is actually possible is in this context indeterminate and cannot be defined: If we could pre-determine and delineate the realm of possibility in the conception of the notion of Being-towards-possibilities, we would have to transcend our Being beyond its own possibilities. But that is impossible. -The boundaries of ontology cannot be overcome.⁴³ What this means is that while we perceive ourselves as directed Beings in our understanding, we cannot justifiably say, whether we are actually directed in understanding at something that goes beyond our own Being. -On this account understanding becomes then self-referential, resp. self-reflexive.⁴⁴ The hermeneutical circle gains here a fundamental-ontological motivation.

Explaining the notion of understanding, i.e. rendering the notion of understanding eventually comprehensible as something that is understood is a matter of what Heidegger calls *Auslegung*.⁴⁵ When he expounds that *Auslegung* is the articulation of *Something as something (Etwas als etwas)*⁴⁶, a scheme is described that not only both, this presentation and Heidegger's own discussion (most notably e.g. where he writes "Das Verstehen ist, **als** Entwerfen, die Seinart des Daseins, in der es seine Möglichkeiten **als** Möglichkeiten *ist*"⁴⁷) obey to, but that is arguably principally unavoidable, because you can discuss *something as such* only under the condition that it is available *as something that is actually predicatable*. -Simply because you cannot talk about something that has no Being.⁴⁸ Now, while this is a point that most philosophical positions can agree on (put bluntly, it simply means that Being is the ultimate *conditio sine qua non*), it is crucial to realize what import this has within the Heideggerian conception.

⁴³This means ultimately that everything is possible, and nothing necessary. The meaning of the notion of possibility remains thus indeterminate. One might thus deem it semantically self-similar.

⁴⁴This is an important point that appears with some refinements also in Gadamer's hermeneutics.

⁴⁵Cf. *SuZ*, p. 148: "Die Ausbildung des Verstehens nennen wir die Auslegung."

⁴⁶Cf. *SuZ*, p. 149.

⁴⁷op. cit. Italics in the original, bold my emphasis.

⁴⁸Whether this pattern really defines the sole fundamental of the designation of meaning shall not be discussed here. Yet, it is clear that if this is the case, it justifies Heidegger's concept of understanding as an *Existenzial*. It is also obvious that the problem that had been pointed out in the above that the ontological has to be explained in terms of the ontic extends to the notion of *Auslegung* and indeed determines its conception by Heidegger.

Note that from the premise that from Being derives the idea of being possible (resp. being predicable) it follows that once understanding is conceived as an existential, the idea of possibility becomes its conceptual correlate. On this account it should then become clear why Heidegger may assert: “Die Auslegung ist nicht die Kenntnisaufnahme des Verstandenen, sondern die Ausarbeitung der im Verstehen entworfenen Möglichkeiten.”⁴⁹ The conceptual bond between Being/understanding and the notion of possibility that characterizes the scheme of the interpretation of *Something as something* is expressed by Heidegger more explicitly, when he remarks: “Die Artikulation des Verstandenen in der auslegenden Näherung des Seienden am Leitfaden des ”Etwas als etwas“ liegt vor der thematischen Aussage darüber. In dieser taucht das ”Als“ nicht zuerst auf, sondern wird nur erst ausgesprochen, was allein so möglich ist, daß es als Ausprechbares vorliegt.”⁵⁰ What this means is that the foundation of meaning lies not within language, but within Being: What may be expressed in language can be predicated (in the terms of the formula of *Something as something*) only on the basis of (its) Being, because what is predicable is conditioned as possible at all only by (its) Being.⁵¹ Note that thus a topos of classical hermeneutics is reversed. Interpretation is not directed at understanding, but understanding conditions interpretation. -Interpretation can only confirm or realize the possibility of predication. Heidegger brings this to the point as follows: “Auslegung gründet existenzial im Verstehen, und nicht entsteht dieses durch jene.”⁵²

Insofar it is only consequential that Heidegger argues that the function of interpretation is not to explore the meaningless, or label the as of yet unnamed with a name, -just as if interpretation is nothing but the generation of a (static) inventory-, but that interpretation is rather the (dynamic) manifestation of an aspect of Being: “Sie [the specific exploratory function of interpretation, D.B.] wirft nicht gleichsam über das nackte Vorhandene eine ”Bedeutung“ und

⁴⁹ *SuZ*, p. 148.

⁵⁰ *SuZ*, p. 149. Italics in the original.

⁵¹ This renders not just the statement “In der Auslegung wird das Verstehen nicht etwas anderes, sondern es selbst.” (*SuZ*, p. 148), but also some of the worst Heideggerian idiosyncrasies such as: “In [der Auslegung] eignet sich das Verstehen sein Verstandenes verstehend zu” (*SuZ*, p. 148) more comprehensible. Yet, note that although the conception becomes thus arguably more coherent, it becomes at the same time even more problematic, because whenever ontology follows the scheme of the interpretation of *Something as something* Being is ultimately explained only in the circular terms of *Being as Being*. And while ontology -if it is to explain Being as it is- may not be able to avoid this dilemma (and ontological matters thus prove themselves to be truly acataleptic), it is under the epistemological perspective rather unenlightening, turning philosophy into nothing but tautological quibble.

⁵² *SuZ*, p. 148. The problem that this conception causes is of course that the question on which level interpretation could become *critical* remains open.

beklebt es nicht mit einem Wert, sondern mit dem innerweltlichen Begegneten als solchem hat es je schon eine im Weltverstehen erschlossene Bewandtnis, die durch die Auslegung herausgelegt wird.”⁵³

What Heidegger contends here is that the world that we encounter and that becomes manifest in interpretation is pre- (in Heidegger’s terminology fore-) structured by our Being. Indeed, since *Weltverstehen* has to be understood existentially here, what Heidegger asserts is that it is ultimately the onto-phenomenological structure of human Being that conditions the possible ways of interpretation. How we understand ourselves, or ‘the world’ preconditions what we are involved in, resp. how we interpret what we confront. -The idea of interpretation does not transcend the onto-phenomenological structure of human Being, but reflects only what is immanent to Being. This means that the general themes that characterize interpretation and that become manifest in the formula of *Something as something*, viz. conceptual determination, directedness, and systematicity or connectedness -just to give a tentative description of the relevant dimensions- are conceived by Heidegger to originate in the Being of the interpreter and are not regarded as mere hermeneutical heuristics.⁵⁴ Emphasizing the fore-structure of interpretation Heidegger designates this ontological substrate that preconditions interpretation and characterizes the scheme of *Something as something* in the triumvirate of the notions of fore-having (*Vorhabe*), fore-sight (*Vorsicht*), and fore-conception (*Vorgriff*).⁵⁵

While the puffed-up terminology only contributes to the intricacy of the complex, taking a rather pedestrian, less commanding perspective on the issue than Heidegger should render the conception nonetheless comprehensible. When elucidating the notion of interpretation now, one is in truly phenomenological fashion committed to the phenomenon itself: Any account -any interpretation of the notion of interpretation- will remain self-contained. This means that interpreting interpretation is a self-explaining matter.⁵⁶ Doing so we will see that the Heideggerian fore-concepts cannot be considered independent from each other: Rather, they form a conceptual amalgam.

⁵³*SuZ*, p. 150. -What renders language meaningful is not a concept of reference, but Being. The quote may be read as a clear renunciation of instrumentalism.

⁵⁴The difference in conceptions becomes apparent here again: While the tradition regards the notion of understanding as an epistemological category, Heidegger conceives it ontologically.

⁵⁵Cf. *SuZ*, p. 150: “Die Auslegung von Etwas als Etwas wird wesentlich durch Vorhabe, Vorsicht und Vorgriff fundiert.”

⁵⁶This means that the discussion has to be a pretty exact mirror of the topic itself, because if not, either my interpretation does not fit Heidegger’s picture, or, rather, Heidegger’s picture does not fit actual interpretation.

When contemplating the concept of *fore-having* to begin with, the first point to be mentioned is that Heidegger understands the notion in at least two ways.⁵⁷ First, it may be interpreted literally as a form of pre-possession. It may be surprising, but Quine's discussion of the problem of translation serves perfectly to make the point comprehensible. The example of the field linguist who confronts a native uttering in certain situations *Gavagai!* that Quine discusses presupposes something which is so essential that it almost escapes attention: The observed behavior of the native must not be so alien to the linguist that it is no longer compatible with her conception of rational, or more generally, human behavior. If the native and the linguist would not share (i.e. fore-have) a mutual repertoire of behaviors the task of translation would be doomed from the beginning. In this sense is interpretation indeed pre-conditioned and fore-structured.⁵⁸ The second connotation of the notion of *Vorhabe* relates the concept to the German *Vorhaben*. Since *Vorhaben* translates to 'intention', it should be immediately clear why Heidegger may assert that interpretation is founded in fore-having: No matter whether you read (to stay with a linguistic example) to be inspired, or amused, or to get to know something, etc., under all circumstances interpretation is a directed, intentional phenomenon. And this is the point where the notions of fore-having and fore-sight meet: The intention -the *Absicht* (as a German synonym of *Vorhaben*)- which underlies interpretation is always directed at the realization of an idea -a (*Vor-*)*Sicht*⁵⁹- that guides, motivates and substantiates interpretation, however changing or vague it may be.⁶⁰ -Implicitly interpretation aims at turning a mere possibility into reality. It

⁵⁷My discussion follows in part Wellmer (2004), pp. 360-361.

⁵⁸The ontological relevance of this point probably becomes clearer when considering the fact that the interpretation of Being in terms of *Dasein* is conditional on the *Dasein's* fore-having Being. Note that other examples do not even leave room for this point, but allow only for an epistemological perspective on the notion of *Vorhabe*. This is somewhat misleading, because it obscures Heidegger's fundamental-ontological conception of the notion. However such a change in perspective is still interesting, because here a strong element of contextual dependency becomes relevant: Recognizing e.g. a text as open for interpretation is only possible within a (cultural) context in which artifacts such as texts are indeed conceived as interpretable objects. (Fore-)having this knowledge is not at all trivial: While a *quipú* (which is an arrangement of knotted strings) served to the Inca as a form of text, it is to the ignorant nothing more, but indeed just a bundle of knotted strings, and consequently not worth much attention, let alone hermeneutical interest.

⁵⁹Given that 'idea' derives etymologically from the Greek verb *ideîn*, which means 'to see', 'to recognize', the relation to the notion of (*Vor-*)*Sicht* is clear. As with the other fore-notions the bracketing renders the concepts' connotations more perspicuous.

⁶⁰An important correlate of the scheme of the interpretation of *Something as something* gains here contour: The interpretation of *Something as something* may always be complemented with what might be called an intentional nexus that characterizes what and how

is in this sense a form of anticipation. Heidegger remarks about this point: “Die Zueignung des Verstandenen, aber noch Eingehüllten vollzieht die Enthüllung immer unter der Führung einer Hinsicht, die das fixiert, im Hinblick worauf das Verstandene ausgelegt werden soll. Die Auslegung gründet jeweils in einer *Vorsicht*, die das in Vorhabe Genommene auf eine bestimmte Auslegbarkeit hin ”anschneidet“.”⁶¹

The idea that you cannot anticipate anything from nothing -to put it naively- lies also at the heart of the notion of fore-conception: You cannot interpret the native’s utterances of *Gavagai!* as meaningful without already having a concept of meaning. Generalized this means that without a conceptual framework that conditions and governs it, interpretation would not be possible at all.⁶² While with this we touch upon a topic that can not be discussed here in more detail, note that in this conception meaning is not instantiated insularly or in isolation, rather, predication is always embedded in, and motivated by an already meaningful context. The concept of a ‘hammer’ exists not *per se*. Rather its meaning is constituted by a pragmatic context in which the possibility of interpreting something as a hammer is realized by something gaining relevance qua being useful as what we call ‘a hammer’. But knowing how a hammer might be used is

,things’ are realized in interpretation as purposeful: “Alles Zubereiten, Zurechtlegen, Instandsetzen, Verbessern, Ergänzen vollzieht sich in der Weise, daß umsichtig Zuhandenes in seinem Um-Zu auseinandergelegt und gemäß der sichtig gewordenen Auseinandergelegtheit besorgt wird. Das umsichtig auf sein Um-zu Auseinandergelegte als solches, das *ausdrücklich* Verstandene, hat die Struktur des *Etwas als Etwas*. Auf die umsichtige Frage, was dieses bestimmte Zuhandene sei, lautet die umsichtig auslegende Antwort: es ist zum... Die Angabe des Wozu ist nicht einfach die Nennung von etwas, sondern das Genannte ist verstanden *als* das, *als* welches das in Frage stehende zu nehmen ist.” (*SuZ*, p. 148-149. Italics in the original.) The introduction of what at first sight may look like a teleological element here is a rather important point -also with respect to Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, as we will see later on. Note that the purpose that the *in-order-to* describes is context dependent: What may serve in one situation as a magnifying glass, may figure in another context as a burning glass. Heidegger remarks in this respect: “Aus der im Weltverstehen erschlossenen Bedeutsamkeit her gibt sich das besorgende Sein beim Zuhandenen zu verstehen, welche Bewandtnis es je mit dem Begegnenden haben kann.” (*SuZ*, p. 148) Note further, that since the purpose may always be related to the Being of the interpreter, the context dependency of interpretation turns into an ontological holism. On this account Being as a Being-towards-possibilities reveals itself in interpretation as a purpose in itself.

⁶¹ *SuZ*, p. 150. Italics in the original.

⁶² This of course renders the idea of an evolution of meaning problematic, at least in so far, as it presupposes a ‘null state’, i.e. a state in which no meaning is present yet. -There can be no such completely pre-semantic state. Indeed, the idea is nonsense: We could not conceive what it would actually mean to be in such a state. (This way language truly becomes a *differentia specifica*.) Rather than asking how we come to *acquire* or *establish* meaning, the question should be how we come to *maintain* meaning.

conditional on knowing how things are present in the particular situation one is involved in (and what actions are required in this situation). This suggests that to understand the idea of a hammer means first to understand the situation one is engaged with.⁶³ Heidegger signifies the holistic stance in his conception with the notion of the involvement-whole (*Bewandtnisganzheit*).⁶⁴ In summary, what Heidegger highlights and calls to attention with the notions of fore-having, foresight, and fore-conception is that understanding is context-dependent on every level.

And indeed, we will see shortly that the idea of context-dependency is one of the most important points that Gadamer adapts and refines in his hermeneutics. But note first that Heidegger does not figure as the sole point of reference for Gadamer. In formulating his conception of hermeneutics Gadamer is in fact rather eclectic, drawing (positive and negative) inspiration from a number of authors and conceptions. Among those that need to be mentioned in this connection are, besides Heidegger, Aristotle, Hegel, Kant, Husserl, Humboldt, Schleiermacher and Dilthey, to name only those that will be touched upon in due course. Their works define the context -the horizon- in which, and against which the ideas that are formulated by Gadamer in *Wahrheit und Methode* have to be viewed.

Mentioning the notion of the horizon alludes of course to the metaphor of the horizon that, in various formulations, plays a rather prominent role in Gadamer's conception of hermeneutics. In the wake of Heidegger, Gadamer conceives of the notion of understanding not in the overcome terms of traditional hermeneutics. On the contrary. He explicitly distances his conception from traditional

⁶³Although Wittgenstein takes a different position, this reminds one nonetheless of his remark that to understand a sentence means to understand a language: "Einen Satz verstehen, heißt, eine Sprache verstehen. Eine Sprache verstehen, heißt, eine Technik beherrschen." (Cf. Wittgenstein (1993), p. 344, §199.)

⁶⁴Cf. *SuZ*, p. 84: "*Welche* Bewandtnis es mit einem Zuhandenen hat, das ist je aus der Bewandtnisganzheit vorgezeichnet. Die Bewandtnisganzheit, die zum Beispiel das in einer Werkstatt Zuhandene in seiner Zuhandenheit konstituiert, ist "früher" als das einzelne Zeug [...]. Die Bewandtnisganzheit selbst aber geht letztlich auf ein Wozu zurück, bei dem es *keine* Bewandtnis mehr hat, was selbst nicht Seiendes ist in der Seinsart des Zuhandenen innerhalb einer Welt, sondern Seiendes, dessen Sein als In-der-Welt-sein bestimmt ist, zu dessen Seinsverfassung Weltlichkeit selbst gehört." Italics in the original. The difference of 'having world', i.e., mastering life in terms of realizing possibilities vs. the conception of merely inhabiting an environment and succumbing to natural necessity becomes relevant again when it comes to explain the idea of holism that Heidegger formulates here: In mastering life everything is directed at maintaining or realizing the possibilities of Being that are brought about in human existence. On this account (the subsistence of) human Being defines the center of the involvement-whole. (But see footnote 60 again for this.)

ideas, and remarks: “Die traditionelle Hermeneutik hat den Problemhorizont, in den das Verstehen gehört, in unangemessener Weise verengt.”⁶⁵ Rather than characterizing the notion of understanding as a form of reproduction, or as a methodological ideal, or in goal-rational (teleological) epistemological terms, Gadamer formulates, with Heidegger, an ontological account of the notion of understanding: “*Verstehen ist [...] die ursprüngliche Vollzugsform des Daseins, das In-der-Weltsein ist. [...] Verstehen ist der ursprüngliche Seinscharakter des menschlichen Lebens selber.*”⁶⁶ As such understanding is a dynamic, historically situated and situation-dependent phenomenon that is inherently guided and conditioned by ones own preconceptions, experiences, and the (intellectual and linguistic) tradition that one partakes in. But while Gadamer designates these essentials of understanding as a horizon of ‘prejudices’, the notion does not celebrate the ignorance and bigotry that characterizes the narrow-minded dogmatic who is neither willing, nor conscious of the possibility of a critical (rational) revision of her background and understanding. Rather, having a horizon means to recognize oneself as a bounded Being. Admitting this implies that ones own prejudices -ones own position- are not taken as absolute, but as open for reconsideration and correction. This is exactly what understanding and interpretation are about. Based on the (pre-)supposition of the truth of the interpretandum -in Gadamer’s terminology the ‘claim of validity’ that connects to the interpretandum⁶⁷-, interpretation becomes thus a contest between

⁶⁵ WM, p. 265.

⁶⁶ WM, p. 264. Italics in the original.

⁶⁷Cf. WM, p. 299: “Der Vorgriff der Vollkommenheit, der all unser Verstehen leitet, erweist sich mithin selber als ein jeweils inhaltlich bestimmter. Es wird nicht nur eine immanente Sinneinheit vorausgesetzt, die dem Lesenden die Führung gibt, sondern das Verständnis des Lesers wird auch ständig von transzendenten Sinnerwartungen geleitet, die aus dem Verhältnis zur Wahrheit des Gemeinten entspringen. So wie der Empfänger eines Briefes die Nachrichten versteht, die er erhält, und zunächst die Dinge mit den Augen des Briefschreibers sieht, d.h. für wahr hält, was dieser schreibt -und nicht etwa die sonderbaren Meinungen des Briefschreibers als solche zu verstehen sucht-, so verstehen wir auch überlieferte Texte auf Grund von Sinnerwartungen, die aus unserem eigenen vorgängigen Sachverhältnis geschöpft sind. Und wie wir Nachrichten eines Korrespondenten glauben, weil er dabei war oder es sonst besser weiß, so sind wir grundsätzlich der Möglichkeit offen, daß ein überlieferter Text es besser weiß, als die eigene Vormeinung gelten lassen will. Erst das Scheitern des Versuchs, das Gesagte als wahr gelten zu lassen, führt zu dem Bestreben, den Text als Meinung eines anderen -psychologisch oder historisch- ‚zu verstehen‘ [...]. Das Vorurteil der Vollkommenheit enthält also nicht nur dies Formale, daß ein Text seine Meinung vollkommen aussprechen soll, sondern auch, daß das, was er sagt, die vollkommene Wahrheit ist.” While the motivation of this ‘axiom of hermeneutics’ (cf. WM, p. 376) is similar to the idea that underlies the principle of charity that Quine and Davidson formulate, it is in its conceptual implications and consequences less chauvinistic. In case of a failure of interpretation the blame lies in

the interpreter's own horizon and the horizon that the interpretandum represents. Interpretation is on this account conceived as a process of constant, but productive crisis: It seeks to challenge and revise or confirm the position and self-understanding of the interpreter.

This is more or less philosophical folklore. And, as it is with all folklore, its origins and conceptual fundamentals remain rather obscure. The following is intended to change this situation, and to shed some light on the conceptual foundations of Gadamer's hermeneutics.

Quine's and Davidson's conception solely with the other: If you cannot make sense of it, even though you exercised the principle of charity, then you are entitled to the rather uncharitable assumption that your counterpart's behavior can not be reasonable, but must be regarded irrational. The idea that your own concept of rationality could be deficient and questionable does not occur here. Gadamer is more cautious at this point: In his conception the claim of validity arguably persists, even in case of hermeneutical failure. Failure for him represents a challenge that has not been met. And the question is, why this is so? It ultimately evokes the necessity to reconsider ones own approach to interpretation.

4. GADAMER: THE PROBLEM OF APPLICATION AND THE HERMENEUTICAL CONCEPT OF EXPERIENCE

4.1 Introduction

The concern of the following represents not only an essential aspect of Gadamer's overall concept of hermeneutics, but indeed we will approach with it already what Gadamer calls "in Wahrheit das zentrale Problem der Hermeneutik überhaupt".⁶⁸ It is the problem of application. Broadly understood, the problem of application describes what might be called the universal grounding effort of human Being. It stands for the reflection on the meaning of Being, and the conquest of an abundance of possibilities that characterizes our lives in all of its aspects. The notion of application describes the dynamic process of signification and confirmation, that allows us to distinguish between the particular and the general, generates a sense of situatedness, and thus prevents the individual to be overwhelmed when confronting a world of richness.⁶⁹ As such, application is the decisive moment in any effort at understanding the self and the world, and the epitome of any philosophical reflection. But how do we come up with a concept of world? How do we gain and maintain the idea of the self? How are we able to make sense at all? What is application?

Hermeneutics, when it exposes and approaches the problem of application in its universality, becomes a truly philosophical hermeneutics and indeed the *prima filosofia*. And when Gadamer articulates the Hegelian conviction that "[a]m Ende ist es die Vernunft, die sich selber begründet"⁷⁰, a position is reflected that he eventually adopts himself. Ultimately, reason figures not only as the moving force and governing principle of application, but delivers ends and means of the venture of Gadamer's hermeneutics as a whole.

Considering the comprehensive character of Gadamer's hermeneutics it is immediately obvious that when turning now to the actual presentation of the concept of application, the idea can only be examined to a limited extent. A thorough discussion of the full implications that arise in connection with the notion of application is simply not conceivable here.

And finally, one last introductory remark in this connection needs to be made: It must be pointed out again that Gadamer's work exhibits a certain

⁶⁸ *WM*, p. 312.

⁶⁹ All this of course sums up in the distinction of 'having world' versus being in an environment.

⁷⁰ *WM*, p. 351.

notorious conceptual looseness.⁷¹ This, paired with a rather high degree of complexity of the subjects and concepts introduced, causes any presentation to be seriously challenged. This also holds for the following. In particular it needs to be pointed out that it remains open whether the questions that the concept of application generates find satisfactory answers in Gadamer's own discussion of it. The notion is problematic, and will continue to be so also in the following. -Even though it appears as if it could be portrayed in rather simple terms:

The leitmotif of the following is delivered by an ordinary truism. It explains the central role of application to the hermeneutical task: If you accept everything, you understand nothing. Or, in other words, understanding is -in its proper sense- always and necessarily critical understanding. It is our inherent capacity to evaluate and criticize, to *question* and *apply* what is said to what you know and vice versa, in which understanding and knowledge are realized at all. Application is in its upshot the ascertainment of the critical (self-)consciousness of the interpreter, involving the interpreter's relentless reflection on the grounds of interpretation, and the critical assessment of understanding itself.

Thus described, as mostly a moment of (self-)reflection, it is plain that the notion of application represents an integral and indispensable part of the idea of understanding. And indeed, Gadamer explains the notion of understanding in terms of the idea of application. He writes: "Verstehen ist [...] ein Sonderfall der Anwendung von etwas Allgemeinen auf eine konkrete und besondere Situation."⁷²

4.2 Objects of interpretation: Ontology

Clearly, the 'definition' of understanding that Gadamer delivers here is everything but satisfactory. Indeed, making understanding conditional on appli-

⁷¹Cf. Teichert (1991) p. 32. Teichert writes: "Anders als bei den bisher erörterten Kapiteln von *WM*, die ausgewählte theoretische Positionen in geschichtlicher Folge diskutieren und sich dabei an die Begrifflichkeit der behandelten Autoren anlehnen, ergibt sich im folgenden die Schwierigkeit, Gadamer's eigenem Nachdenken und seinem -oft kritisierten [Teichert refers here to Bodammer (1987), p. 11]- Sprachgebrauch gerecht zu werden. Schwierig ist dies deshalb, weil Gadamer keine Terminologie im Sinne einer festen Begrifflichkeit entwickelt, sondern mit Metaphern arbeitet, denen der Status von Begriffen zugeschrieben wird. Die so entstehenden Konzepte werden meist durch die Opposition zu kritisierten theoretische Positionen konturiert, wobei Gadamer anzunehmen scheint, daß durch sie unerwünschte Verengungen und Einseitigkeiten vermieden werden. Darüber hinaus wird die Bedeutung dieser Metaphern meist offengelassen. Der Vorteil einer solchen Strategie liegt auf der Hand: die permanent offenen Leitmetaphern können im Gegensatz zu schwerfälligeren Begriffen mit abgeschlossener Bedeutung in ganz unterschiedlichen Zusammenhängen eingesetzt werden [...]"

⁷²*WM*, p. 317.

cation, nothing is explained. A clarification of what understanding means is simply postponed until an explanation of the notion of application is attained. The issue is thus only shifted. It is centered then around basic problems such as: How does application proceed? To which ends? What are the objects of application at all? And, more specifically, how is this ‘generality’ that is to find application in a particular situation to be defined?

Having conceived the notions of understanding and application rather wide so far, the question what the actual nature of the applicandum is, is of course rather unspecific. However, at least the formal character or motivation that connects to the notion of application in Gadamer’s conception may be specified: Application is for Gadamer the realization of an imperative demand. It is generated by the confrontation of the idea of ‘world’ as the interpreter conceives it to be with the concept of ‘world’ that the interpretandum describes. In any case a claim of legitimacy (in Gadamer’s terminology a *Geltungsanspruch*) is connected to both. And if the horizon of the interpreter is not compatible with the horizon that the interpretandum sketches, a challenge -the need for interpretation- results: Provided that there is only one world, one reality, the task is to maintain a single concept of reality.

Once the motivation for application is identified at least in its fundamentals, the question is of course what substantiates this formal demand? For certainly it cannot be empty: The idea of application seems meaningful only, when you know what to apply. The imperative must have meaning or content, something application is about, some kind of propositional core that substantiates the demand. With that the digression has found a natural end, for the initial leading question what the objects of application actually are subsequently reappears now again in its wake.⁷³

An answer to this question is especially important, if we suppose (with Aristotle) that a method is determined by its objects, i.e. that the concept and possibility of application is defined by the objects to be applied. When application is the realization (or assessment) of some (general) entity in a particular situation, the nature of this entity determines not only the imperative force that drives its realization, but also the procedural unfolding of its application. Or, in other words, it may be assumed that the (hermeneutical) objects determine the idea of application and thus influence the process of understanding as a whole.

⁷³The importance of this first upshot will become clearer only later. It will not be a coincidence, that the further explanation that Gadamer delivers will rely on ethical imperatives as the model for the hermeneutical concept of application. In the case of ethical maxims a general, abstract demand is confronted with a certain situation.

Regarding Gadamer's description of understanding as the application of some generality in a particular situation, it may appear that application is only a technicality. In this picture application would only be a predetermined means to a definite end. A routine. The function of application could be conceived as the instantiation of some abstract, yet determinate and static object via a systematic resolution of the tension that arises from the confrontation of a concrete and particular situation of interpretation and a claim of legitimacy that is connected to the interpretandum.

But once the specific dimension of the hermeneutical situation is reconsidered, doubts arise as to whether the idea of application as a form of goal-rational process, or a mechanical machination can be maintained. What reasons do we actually have for the assumption of (Platonic) objects of interpretation, beyond that we refer to them via definite descriptions like 'the meaning of', 'die Überlieferung', or more abstractly 'the general' and 'the particular', etc.? Is it right to speak of objects at all, when we think of the (propositional) substance of the demand for application? Could it be that this is merely a reification induced by the peculiarities of grammar?

That there is reason to regard the idea of an 'objective' hermeneutics skeptically becomes apparent, when considering the failure of the Diltheyan founding project. Oriented at the apparently epistemologically safe and sound (and not to forget rather successful) natural sciences, Dilthey's concern was to provide a comparably reliable epistemological base also for the hermeneutical paradigm.⁷⁴ But despite incessant efforts and a variety of approaches⁷⁵ the problems Dilthey encountered could not be overcome. The project of the objectification of hermeneutical knowledge through a scientization of hermeneutics failed, eventually interfering with greater philosophical ambitions of Dilthey: The project's underlying motivation was not only to render historical explanations as authoritative as explanations in the natural sciences.⁷⁶ The epistemological interest of Dilthey reached deeper. It was 'critical' just in the sense of Kant's transcendental philosophy, aiming at the exposure of the *a priori*s of the possibility of historical

⁷⁴Actually, Dilthey's interest was mostly centered around foundational problems of the historical science. Nevertheless, since history was regarded to be the leading discipline among the moral sciences, the results achieved there immediately gained paradigmatic importance for the whole sphere of the interpreting/hermeneutical disciplines.

⁷⁵Dilthey's work presents a rather heterogenic picture and remained in large parts only fragmentary. The following can thus only concentrate on aspects of his work that are of concern to the present analysis.

⁷⁶Cf. Dray (1997). The presentation draws also from Stegmüller (1969) (especially chapter vi), and Popper (1971) who deliver brief, but systematic surveys of basic themes of philosophy of history.

knowledge. With that Dilthey became a prominent figure within a Neo-Kantian current in the philosophy of history, the ambition of which was to examine “the philosophical foundations of history as a type of knowledge and enquiry [*sic*] somewhat as the Kantian philosophy undertook to examine the categories and presuppositions of scientific knowledge.”⁷⁷ On this account, it is not too far off to say that it is the spirit of enlightenment that drives the venture of founding and systematizing historical knowledge and the idea of history itself within a rational framework.

In as much as epistemological matters gained substance for the conception of historiography as a scientific discipline, the reflection on (meta-)theoretical problems reached importance, too. In particular, questions regarding the normative framework and methodological apparatus of scientific study had to be discussed. One particular (methodological) concern of the project of scientization was the question, whether it is possible to formulate laws of historical evolution. For making history rationalizable in this form would indeed mean to demythologize the notion of the past: Myths, and ideas of fate or of meaning unfolding in the course of time, could then be abandoned in favor of a more rational concept of history.⁷⁸

A central role among the complications that arise in this connection occupies a rather general problem of scientific method and rationality: The problem of induction. Accompanied by the usual questions regarding the explanatory powers and adequacy of inductive laws, its particular variety within historiography can be summed up in the question whether it is possible to formulate laws of historical development on the basis of inductive argumentation.⁷⁹ (-And in order to be established as a nomothetic science, history must be about empirical facts.) In the following some aspects of this complex of problems will be sketched.

We first turn to questions about the nature of the data at the base of the inductive generalizations envisioned. The main point here is a rather trivial finding: One has to acknowledge that the facts historiography attends to are indeed *historical* facts. Being just that, this means that the facts are not directly

⁷⁷Cf. Dray (1997), p.763.

⁷⁸Influential for the whole complex proved to be Darwinistic ideas. Nevertheless, with Marxism the most powerful doctrine of historical evolution had been conceived already earlier.

⁷⁹Cf. Stegmüller (1975). This characterization is due to the physicist Hermann von Helmholtz, who addressed the delineation of the natural from the moral sciences in 1862 in a talk titled *Ueber das Verhältniss der Naturwissenschaften zur Gesamtheit der Wissenschaft*. For a short discussion of the complex and its problems cf. Teichert (1991), Chapter II.1.3.2, and Scholz (1999) Teil I, C. 13, but see. also *WM*, Zweiter Teil, I. 2.

observable, but present indeed only in their consequences. Thus, any inductive conclusion is reached on grounds of a rather impoverished, and therefore unreliable empirical database, rendering the generalization itself questionable. On the other hand, under the ideal premise that history can be as positivistic as the empirical natural sciences in the perception of its objects (think for instance about the history of the recent past, where historical facts appear as almost immediate, directly accessible empirical data) the problem is reversed: The historiographer faces an overwhelming abundance of materials. -The situation to be explained or described is too complex to be perspicuous in all its relevant constituents, eventually forcing the observer to make *ad hoc* simplifications or reductions. Thus, in any case, already at this level of the problem, serious difficulties of justification arise when laws of historical development in form of inductive generalizations are postulated.⁸⁰

Further, even if we ignore the above predicament for a moment, and assume that the observer is actually in a position to identify all the relevant aspects of a certain historical occurrence, and is able to formulate principles of history, a number of problems persist. Most of these can be subsumed under the general question how scientific (or positivistic) historiography (resp. the moral sciences as a whole) might be: Is it possible to impose the normative measures of 'hard' science also as criteria for the methodology of historical science? What kind of demands regarding scientific standards such as testability, repeatability, etc. might be expected to be satisfied by theories of historical evolution?

Since the kind of universal truths envisioned are intended to be prognostic⁸¹, a first tempting question is whether the idea of predicting future historical constellations or phenomena is not a contradiction in itself? Although this is certainly a somewhat sophistic question, it shall be pointed out already that there is a definite potential of paradox inherent to the complex: We will see in a moment that the combination of deterministic theories of the evolution of human history with an unrestricted concept of prognosis poses serious problems.⁸²

⁸⁰As the reason for the overwhelming richness of facts may be regarded that the perspective of the historiographer is too narrow, and lacks the *historical* distance. This is a general problem that will be discussed in a moment.

⁸¹Cf. Stegmüller (1969), p. 397, and Popper (1971).

⁸²Zimmerli (1992), p. 94 remarks on the issue: "[W]enn es Gesetze der Geschichte gibt und wenn diese erkannt werden können (und nur insofern sind sie *geschichtswissenschaftlich* von Interesse) dann folgt daraus -mindestens prinzipiell- auch die Möglichkeit, den weiteren Verlauf der Weltgeschichte und u.U. auch ihr Ende bzw. Ziel vorauszusagen. [...] Daß sich hieraus, faßt man die vollständige Erkennbarkeit der allgemeinen Gesetze des Geschichtsverlaufs als konstitutiv für die historischen Wissenschaften auf, eine Menge von Paradoxien ergeben, die mit der Reflexivität auch des historischen Wissens und der damit verbundenen Möglichkeit

But before we explicate this further, other issues, such as e.g. questions concerned with conceptual problems of testability and repeatability shall have precedence at least for the moment. What strategies of (dis-)confirmation might be employed? How are such rules to be tested?

The idea of direct, empirical (experimental) tests seems rather problematic for the reasons given above: We are talking about history. Of course, it is possible to confirm resp. falsify a certain class of hypothesis concerning historical evolution by means of archaeological findings. And indeed, the reliance on archaeological data presents a rather unproblematic and straight-forward case of a practical procedure of (dis-)confirmation: Take any law-like universal claim of the form *If x at time t, then y at time t + t'* that postulates a correlation (either in terms of coexistence or succession⁸³) of certain attributes of human history that can be expected to leave empirical traces, then such a thesis may possibly be substantiated by archaeological findings.

But, and this is the point here, the concept of prediction that underlies this method is implicitly restricted: It is confined to the realm of what is already historical. These predictions are so to say 'backwards' predictions, not being projections of future 'facts-to-be', but being constrained to already historical facts, that are just waiting to be uncovered in the future. Thus, actually, the concept of prognosis is retrodictive, not predictive. This is a rather strong (self-)limitation on the projective powers and the scientific 'dignity'⁸⁴ of historiography, and the question is whether such a limitation is really necessary?

When we consider in the following the consequences that ensue from the utilization of an unrestrained concept of prognosis, the necessity to delimit the notion becomes immediately evident.⁸⁵ (Here is where the paradoxes mentioned above come into play.)

Thus, assume we are able to formulate a scientifically founded, law-like proposition that determines future phenomena to some degree. (A drastic case would be a law that in its upshot allows us to predict the end of the world.) But, since predictions can -whenever adequate- also figure as "eine mögliche Erklärung [...], insofern die adäquate Prognose auch als Erklärung hätte fungieren können, wenn sie nach dem Eintritt des Ereignisses erfolgt wäre", as Hempel and Oppenheim argue⁸⁶, the question is, what hindrance

kontrazyklischen Handelns ("self destroying prophecies") zusammenhängen, ist evident."

⁸³Cf. Jammer (1994), p. 118.

⁸⁴Cf. Precht & Burkard (1999), p. 470.

⁸⁵Cf. Popper (1971), p. 94ff, who argues against the idea of prognosis as a working hypothesis of historiography.

⁸⁶Cf. Precht & Burkard (1999), p. 470

there should be to actually intervene in the course of events in such a way that the predicted development is obstructed and averted.

This is a proposal that at first sight seems completely abstruse, because the implications that the idea of intervention has are unquestionably severe. The prognosis would turn into a self-destroying prediction. -A concept which seems to deny any scientific utility, being incompatible with basic methodological concepts and scientific standards such as testability and repeatability: Since in a self-destroying prediction the predicandum remains necessarily only a fictional possibility, any probe of its adequacy is impossible. Thus, in its upshot, the idea of intervention runs diametrically counter to the whole concept of systematic, methodological inquiry. After all, science comes without wire-pulling: Any deliberate intervention in the natural course of events that a law is to capture would come close to criminal manipulation and a sabotage of the idea of scientific research itself. Natural laws are supposed to describe what is independent of human will.

But while this is one of the fundamental doctrines of the natural sciences, the question is whether the position just sketched might, or even should be guiding also for historical science (and the moral sciences as a whole). Can the methodological demands and criteria that 'normal', empirical science imposes on itself be satisfied by historiography? Are these reasonable norms at all, when it comes to historical science?

The answers to these questions may be regarded as largely disillusioning with respect to the idea of a scientific historiography. Not only can the methodological concepts of 'hard' science merely be applied in a very restricted sense -if at all- in history, but moreover does it turn out that the legitimacy of these ideals may rightfully be questioned: As intolerable the proposal of intervention from the perspective of the natural sciences appears, things are different in case of historiography. Indeed, in this frame of reference the strict adherence to a methodological demand of neutrality would undermine the actual foundations of the idea of history. Contrary to nature, the concept of which is based on the total absence of human command, history is the very result of human action. Without intervention, everything would be nothing. Thus, insisting not to intervene with a predicted historical development would drive the concept of history ad absurdum: It would mean to negate the possibility of history.

Further, the demand of non-involvement immediately relativizes the universal claim connected to the aspired laws of historical development, for it aims to exclude the scientist with regards of her practical capacity for action (which includes the potential to postulate such a law) from the historical continuum. Al-

though the researcher is essentially a historical (i.e. practical) being, she would nevertheless have to be regarded as an a-historical and ultimately hapless quiddity. The vision that is thus described is that of a science that completely falls out of history. -While history is just what provides the ground for its existence.

This is a point that, when further elaborated, is also with respect of a number of other notions instructive. That the meta-theoretical concepts of historiography themselves cannot transcend history, but on the contrary are indeed determined in their import and range by it, becomes apparent also when we consider the notion of neutrality. Closely related to the demand not to interfere, it delivers another criterion of scientificness⁸⁷: In order to achieve objective results, and thus objective knowledge, the researcher must take an unbiased, impartial perspective of the object of study. Yet, the methodological distance (that in case of the natural science seems to follow from the independence of nature from human will) cannot be achieved in historiography, as the above argument has shown: It is a *factum brutum* that the researcher is a historically situated being, and remains entangled in history. Thus, the position of interpretation is inexorably always a historically contingent position. Consequently, any understanding of history (also in form of nomothetic explanations) is conditional on the situation (or tradition -to use another popular term-) of interpretation, and thus contingent. It is impossible to attain a neutral Archimedian point of view. Actually, the same conclusion as above has to be reached: The idea of an unaffected strictly scientific assessment of history is not only not achievable, but is indeed not legitimate, for it demands to abandon that on grounds of which the idea of historiography is only conceivable: historicity.⁸⁸

Altogether, as outrageous as the idea of intervention initially seemed to be, it now turns out that in fact not the proposition to interfere, but its prohibition presents an unacceptable ideal. The more so, if another danger of this excess of theoretical self-forgotteness that shall at least be pointed out is considered: The scientist who demands in the name of science not to intervene with the predicted course of events would not only promote fatalism (which makes a strange motivation for scientific inquiry), but may indeed be regarded to take the position of the shaman, whose taboos prohibit to intervene with fate. The idea of a rationalized history would thus turn into the myth it set out to dethrone. What Horkheimer and Adorno call the dialectic of enlightenment would come

⁸⁷The concepts introduced so far are admittedly treated rather superficially, but for the point to be made a further distinction does not seem relevant. I thus suppress a further discussion of any conceptual subtleties in this respect.

⁸⁸Cf. *WM*, p. 400, for a similar argumentation.

with this to full effect.⁸⁹

The deeper cause for the dilemma of a scientific historiography that the discussion carried so far, is rooted in the self-reflexivity of historical knowledge: Epistemic subject and epistemic object coincide. With that also fundamentals of traditional ontology and epistemology dissolve. This is the core problem for Dilthey. Only on the grounds of self-reflexivity is the notion of a self-destroying prediction conceivable. In its consequences the discussion has reached now a (metaphysical) dimension, in confrontation with which the technical or methodological aspects of the problem of induction lose their significance: In the case of history, the idea of objectivity turns indeed out to be not just questionable, but inconceivable. What has become clear is that the interpreter cannot gain the neutral, i.e. unaffected and unprejudiced position that the observer or experimentator of the natural sciences is regarded to occupy. With that one of the fundamentals and prerequisites for the idea of a scientific foundation of the moral sciences is denied.

As a consequence of the missing success to provide a systematic foundation for the epistemology of the humanities, Dilthey was lead to pronounce the existence of two qualitatively distinct epistemic categories: One defined by the epistemic ideal of indisputable and infallible, 'objective' knowledge (as the well defined ends of the equally well defined means of exact and standardized systematic methodologies). The other, the underachieving companion of the former so to say, being the realm of knowledge based on 'defective', i.e. unprincipled means of inquiry.

And although Gadamer never fails to emphasize the differences between his idea of hermeneutics and the romantic tradition in which also Dilthey stood, he adopts the idea of an opposition of the natural sciences and the moral sciences, describing the latter to be concerned with "[...] der Mensch, und was er von sich weiß."⁹⁰ But Gadamer assesses the epistemic prospect that connects to this distinction in a principally different way than Dilthey. The fact that the idea of the subject/object-distinction turns out not to be applicable as a working concept for the moral sciences is interpreted by Gadamer not as a reason to regard the moral sciences to be epistemically defective in comparison to the natural sciences. -If there is anything defective at all, it is the static epistemic concepts of the natural sciences, because they can not account for the dynamics of Being, and turn thus out to be insufficient to describe the most basic ontological fundamentals. So, it is not the moral sciences, but the natural

⁸⁹Cf. Horkheimer & Adorno (1947).

⁹⁰ *WM*, p. 319.

sciences that do not fit the picture: The dynamic has (ontological and epistemic) prius over the static, and not vice versa. The failure of Dilthey's project delivers thus a good argument for the concept of a fundamental-ontology as projected by Heidegger. Indeed, it should become clear, why Heidegger may remark: "Weil Verstehen seinem existenzialen Sinn nach das Seinkönnen des Daseins selbst ist, übersteigen die ontologischen Voraussetzungen historischer Erkenntnis grundsätzlich die Idee der Strenge der exaktesten Wissenschaften. Mathematik ist nicht strenger als Historie, sondern nur enger hinsichtlich des Umkreises der für sie relevanten existenzialen Fundamente."⁹¹

The question is of course, what consequences derive from this for the analysis of the notion of application. Since we cannot objectify what characterizes the hermeneutical situation, it follows immediately from the Aristotelian axiom, that we also cannot identify a method or systematic procedure of application. The ontological question has thus reached a conceptual dead end: The notion of application remains utterly obscure. This is naturally highly unsatisfactory. The more so, since we conceive ourselves as (self-)understanding beings.

If we are not willing to give up on the idea that application defines a relevant aspect of understanding (and being able to critically discuss the issue -to take the challenge and to question and apply the idea of application itself- is arguably already reason enough not to do so), then another approach has to be found in the analysis of the notion of application. And the solution is plain: Even though we can not give an objective account of the neither the notion of application, not the situation of application, we implicitly *know* what application means. Now, asking what knowledge this is that governs application, an alternative to the ontological question that started the whole discussion is reached.

4.3 Objects of interpretation: Epistemology

4.3.1 Aristotle's actuality

A discussion of what kind of knowledge is presented by Gadamer in a chapter entitled *Die hermeneutische Aktualität des Aristoteles* in *Wahrheit und Methode*.⁹² Certainly, the title seems rather odd, and it stands to question what Aristotelian philosophy, and in particular Aristotelian ethics, could contribute to the

⁹¹ *SuZ*, p.153.

⁹² Actually, this is one of the core chapters of *Wahrheit und Methode*. Not only because the problem of application is the core problem of hermeneutics and it is addressed in this chapter, but also because other important themes of Gadamer's hermeneutics gain contour here. For instance it could also be read as the argumentative basis for Gadamer's anti-instrumentalism. Actually the richness of the chapter can be overwhelming. Consequently, I will in the following concentrate only on a presentation of what for the present problem is important.

analysis of the concept of understanding. -Intuitively it is not clear at all, what issues the hermeneutical task should have in common with questions of moral conduct. Yet, we will see in a moment that the Aristotelian concept of practical philosophy not only inspires Gadamer's idea of understanding, but indeed provides the blueprint for an answer to the question of application in hermeneutics: The concept of practical knowledge that Aristotle sanctions in his discussion of ethics (in the *Nicomachean Ethics*) provides a natural and potent framework for the integration and consolidation of the notion of application. Thus, in its essence is Gadamer's approach to the problem of understanding based on Aristotelian ideas, leading him so far to regard Aristotle's explication as providing a model for the hermeneutical problem. Gadamer remarks in this respect: "Wenn wir zusammenfassend die Beschreibung des ethischen Phänomens und insbesondere der Tugend des sittlichen Wissens, die Aristoteles gibt, auf unsere Fragestellung beziehen, so zeigt sich in der Tat die aristotelische Analyse als eine Art *Modell der in der hermeneutischen Aufgabe gelegenen Probleme.*"⁹³

Speaking of a model here is of course only possible when a degree of agreement in the description of the ethical and the hermeneutical situation exists that goes beyond trivial coincidence. Among the critical characteristics that define a common essence of both, the ethical and the hermeneutical situation, it is a correspondence in their formal structure that will concern us first: Both situations are defined by the same imperative incentive. In both an individual (i.e. the interpreter, the moral being) finds herself confronted with an imperative demand insisting on its practical realization. While in case of the ethical situation this does not need any elaboration, the imperative impetus that drives the hermeneutical situation in Gadamer conception needs some elaboration. But the issue is pretty simple: Conceiving interpretation to be prestructured by prejudices, any deviation from what the interpreter expects represents a challenge that calls for special attention. The task is to explain this deviation away, and to assess its (resp. the horizon of prejudices') origin and legitimacy. Indeed, this deviation from the expectation pattern of the interpreter figures as the trigger for the process of interpretation. As long as the interpreter's expectation horizon is met, understanding is immanent, while in order to maintain the qualitative integrity of this horizon (i.e. pre-understanding) any deviation from it -any challenge to understanding- immediately demands its critical consideration.

Next, another remarkable parallel needs to be pointed out briefly. Although with this we leave the description of similarities of the actual situations, it nevertheless needs to be mentioned in order to understand the depth of compliance

⁹³ *WM*, p. 329. Italics in the original.

of Gadamer's concept with the Aristotelian model.

The point of concern now introduces a historical, not a systematic motif: It is a similar motivation that provides the background for Aristotle and Gadamer to approach their respective themes. With regards to the problem of moral conduct and the hermeneutical task their positions represent each a direct reaction to alternative proposals popularized by Plato, resp. the hermeneutical tradition. At the heart of these approaches lies an idea of the Good (resp. of meaning) as a static, definite entity which figures as the object and motivation for morality and interpretation. In contrast to these theories, Aristotle and Gadamer both emphasize the idea that ethical norms and the hermeneutical imperative underlies a situational dependent, dynamic concept of meaning, and that consequently good conduct, respectively interpretation is not concerned with the recovery or pursuit of Platonic objects. The idea of morality and hermeneutics that Aristotle and Gadamer describe does not conform to a simple machination of certain means to a definite end. Application is not similar to the application of some argument to a function.

When Aristotle criticizes Plato's idea of the Good as an ideal static object, a 'real' understanding of which is only possible through purely rational, i.e. theoretical contemplation, this anticipates Gadamer's disapproving of theories of hermeneutics as the ideational uncovering of meaning in form of a definite psychological complex. The cardinal point of critique of both is that a purely theoretical reflection of the ethical or hermeneutical task is oblivious to its practical demands (for application): A morality or interpretation that leaves the subject unaffected is empty. The existence of the Good is, as Aristotle argues, not independent of its practical application (and thus of the individual to apply a moral maxim). It is not to be regarded in terms of an autonomous Platonic idea. Against this idea of the Good as an object *per se*, Aristotle conceives a theory of the Good as a concept that, though guiding for human action, gains at the same time significance only through action. Indeed, morality, and thus moral Being, come to existence only through practical application: A moral maxim that finds no application is insignificant, and renders moral Being a farcical Being.⁹⁴ Thus, practical application, not naïve theoretical consideration defines the essence of the Good and of moral Being. -This is an insight that also

⁹⁴The general claim of being a moral Being fails then. The parallel to Heidegger's conception becomes all too apparent here. Aristotle's idea of moral Being and the notion of Being in Heidegger's existential philosophy agree conceptually. Indeed there are a number of further parallels and similarities in their philosophies. Both commit to a holistic framework in which a certain anthropological idea is embedded: That of human being as a historical, dynamic being, directed towards a realization of possibilities.

Gadamer holds up and actually generalizes in his universal hermeneutics: The general claim of meaningfulness or legitimacy of an expression gains substance only in its critical application in the particular situation of interpretation that the interpreter faces. An essential of this confrontation of the general and the particular is its holistic rigorism: Just as the whole of a moral frame of reference is damaged by moral misdemeanor (because the application of a moral norm is itself result of a moral decision), failing to understand in a particular instance renders the whole claim of understanding questionable: What is already understood determines what can possibly be expected and understood, and whenever something remains defiant of understanding it is so on account of insufficiencies in previous understanding. -What is already understood determines the interpreter's expectation horizon, and thus determines what can possibly be expected and understood. A deviation from the expectation horizon is trivially testament to an inadequacy of your expectation horizon. (At least it makes a reconsideration of your previous understanding necessary: It renders the whole of it questionable. And this is the point here.) If this aberration continues to exist and to defy understanding, it creates a constant challenge to your understanding.

Considered that Gadamer broadly conceives Being in Heideggerian terms as Being-in-world⁹⁵, any actually applicable aspect of 'world'⁹⁶ that presents itself, but goes unrecognized (is not understood as a possibility) directly affects the interpreter's Being in the worst way: Being renders itself ignorant with respect

⁹⁵This is slightly inaccurate: Gadamer adds to the original Heideggerian concept of Being-in-world a decisive ontological twist by conceiving 'world' to be generated by language. Being-in-world then becomes Being-in-language. This is a rather crucial distinction: At this point Gadamer's conception goes beyond a purely epigonal reception of Heidegger's philosophy.

⁹⁶The notion of 'world' (*Welt*) is a technical term that Gadamer conceives just as Heidegger in distinction from the notion of *Umwelt* (habitat, environment, surroundings). With these concepts he differentiates between two aspects that characterize the relation of human Being and world: While the concept of *Umwelt* signifies (roughly) the world as far as it is governed by the causal nexus to which all living beings (humans and animals alike) fall subject too, the notion of 'world' reflects the specific human ability to transcend the scheme of stimulus-response that characterizes the notion of *Umwelt*, and to gain (at least to some degree) control (i.e. freedom or autonomy) over an otherwise sheer habitat. (Gadamer coins for this concept of *Welt* also the term *Umweltfreiheit*. (Cf. *WM*, p. 448)) The medium that allows for this kind of cogitation is language: Language is what sets human Being apart from animal nature as a (largely) self-determined Being that 'has world'. Cf. for this e.g. *WM*, p. 447, where Gadamer writes: "Welt haben heißt: sich zur Welt verhalten. Sich zur Welt verhalten erfordert aber, sich von dem von der Welt her Begegnenden so weit freihalten, daß man es vor sich stellen kann, wie es ist. Dieses Können ist ineins Welt-haben und Sprache-haben. Der Begriff der *Welt* tritt damit in Gegensatz zu dem Begriff der *Umwelt*, wie sie allem auf der Welt seienden Lebendigen zukommt." Italics in the original.

to its own Being.⁹⁷ Taking this into consideration it then becomes obvious that interpretation is indeed existential business. But beyond the existential aspect also the epistemic dimension of application -its importance for the interpreter's self-conception- finally becomes manifest with this. In fact, now we have reached a turning point of the presentation: In the following the focus will turn to questions concerning the epistemic dimension of the hermeneutical task.

In order to understand the nature of hermeneutical knowledge and its relation to application two fundamentals of Gadamer's philosophy need to be recalled briefly again. (A rough sketch shall suffice.)

The first of these fundamentals to be reviewed concerns the underlying concept of Being. The classical idea of a monadic subject is abandoned in favor of a holistic concept of the self. Being is conceived in the Heideggerian term of Being-in-world: In as much as the concept of world is constituted by the self, the Being of this self is constituted by world. -Both, the concept of world and the concept of Being are codependent and formative for each other. In fact, everything that Being relates to -world- is constitutive part of its own Being, when Being is conceived as a Being-in-world. The concept thus commits one to a self-reflexive frame of reference. The consequences of this are rather far reaching, for, when - put bluntly- everything you see is indeed an aspect of your self, the subject/object-distinction is obviously rendered problematic.⁹⁸

The keyword that describes the other fundamental of Gadamerian hermeneutics is that of the ontological turn of language. Following Humboldt, Gadamer conceives language not as an ordering means, but moreover regards it as the actual bearer of world. Ontologically turned language does not describe world, but in fact generates world: The concept of language defines *the* ontological dominion.

Whenever world is generated by language, then an interpreter of language has world only insofar s/he is able to understand what has been said. Further, since the interpreter's Being is conceived as a Being-in-world (which is after the ontological turn a Being-in-language) this means that every linguistic expression -every constitutive of world- which the interpreter fails to understand (fails to realize the meaning of, fails to apply) constitutes an aspect also of the interpreter's Being that is not understood. Understanding, or the idea of having world, thus turns into the existential matter of self-knowledge.

⁹⁷Actually the argument may be driven further: Since Being is conceived to be directed towards the realization of possibilities -to be dynamic-, failing to do so means that it reaches a standstill, and turns into a static, i.e. regressive Being.

⁹⁸Holism then becomes solipsism. It seems the only perspective possible, whenever there is no Archimedean point of view that is distinct from the observer conceivable.

4.3.2 Self-knowledge and self-application

It is on this account on which Aristotelian ideas could gain importance for Gadamer's hermeneutics, as we will see in the following: Not only figures the notion of self-knowledge as one of three epistemic categories that Aristotle defines, but furthermore also the underlying broader conception of an interdependency of Being and knowledge that was just sketched corresponds with Aristotelian ideas regarding moral Being and the realization of the Good, as we will see in a moment. This convergence of concepts constitutes the headstone to bridge the gap between the hermeneutical task as conceived by Gadamer and the Aristotelian approach to ethics. Gadamer explains: "Gewiß geht es bei Aristoteles nicht um das hermeneutische Problem oder gar um dessen geschichtliche Dimension, sondern um die richtige Bemessung der Rolle, die die Vernunft im sittlichen Handeln zu spielen hat. Aber eben dies ist es, was uns hier interessiert, daß es sich da um Vernunft und Wissen handelt, die nicht von einem gewordenen Sein abgelöst sind, sondern von diesem her bestimmt und für dieses bestimmend sind."⁹⁹ And when Gadamer later recapitulates "*Denn auch das hermeneutische Problem setzt sich von einem ‚reinen‘, vom eigenen Sein abgelösten Wissen offenkundig ab*"¹⁰⁰ this may be regarded as a direct continuation of the above quote that delivers two things: A résumé of the apparent parallels between the hermeneutical task and the ethical problem that Gadamer conceives, and justification for his reference to Aristotle in this.

As the quotes stand they can deliver only a first, superficial characterization of the concept of knowledge in question. This will be deepened, when now the classical tripartite division of the epistemic realm as proposed by Aristotle is discussed. In doing so the presentation follows largely the account given by Gadamer.¹⁰¹

Talking of moral or hermeneutical knowledge¹⁰² in connection with self-knowledge or self-reflective knowledge as it concerns us here represents actually a slight deviation from the original terminology: Aristotle designates this kind of knowledge as practical knowledge. As that it is distinguished from two other types of knowledge: Theoretical knowledge on one side, and technical, or productive knowledge on the other side. Together the three notions of practical, theoretical, and technical knowledge comprise the core of Aristotelian epistemology.

⁹⁹ *WM*, p. 317.

¹⁰⁰ *WM*, p. 319. Italics in the original.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *WM*, p. 317-329.

¹⁰² 'Moral knowledge' may be regarded as a hyperonym and applies here in the same sense that underlies the notion of the moral sciences.

Before the background of the hermeneutical problem, resp. the moral task the distinction of practical knowledge and technical knowledge requires some elaboration and represents the focus of Gadamer's discussion¹⁰³, the concept of theoretical knowledge plays only a minor role in the following. As it is characterized as "clear, certain and not subject to change"¹⁰⁴, mathematics represents the prototypical discipline in which theoretical knowledge is attained. Consequently, the concepts of truth and logical proof describe the ideal and dominant criteria of theoretical knowledge. It is a static, a-historic, non-empirical, and absolute form of knowledge. As such it is distinct from the other two types of knowledge, and when Gadamer 'defines' moral knowledge in the following quote, the notion of theoretical knowledge figures as a conceptual contrast. "Aus der Abgrenzung des sittlichen Wissens gegen Wissen von der Art der Mathematik könnte eine geisteswissenschaftliche Hermeneutik gewiß nichts lernen. Solcher ‚theoretischen‘ Wissenschaft gegenüber gehören die Geisteswissenschaften vielmehr mit dem sittlichen Wissen eng zusammen. Sie sind ‚moralische Wissenschaften‘. Ihr Gegenstand ist der Mensch und was er von sich weiß. Er weiß sich aber als ein Handelnder, und das Wissen, das er dergestalt von sich hat, will nicht feststellen, was ist. Der Handelnde hat es vielmehr mit solchem zu tun, das nicht immer so ist, wie es ist, sondern das auch anders sein kann. In ihm entdeckt er, wo er handelnd einzugreifen hat. Sein Wissen soll sein *Tun* leiten."¹⁰⁵

The quote is remarkable in more than one respect: It not only delivers a more detailed account of the parallels that Gadamer draws to Aristotle, but it indeed may be regarded as more or less Gadamer's philosophical credo. Hence, the density of topics that may be developed from the quote is rather rich. I will thus confine the discussion to those points that allow Gadamer to establish a link to Aristotle. Since here epistemological considerations are intimately related to the ontological conception this complex is already involuted enough.

Note in this regard, that when Gadamer subsumes hermeneutics under the moral sciences, one motif is emphasized in particular: It is the conception of human Being, resp. the idea of moral Being as a practical-applying Being. Here the Aristotelian conception and the conception of Gadamer converge. And with the object of interest of hermeneutics and the moral sciences being identical not

¹⁰³We will see that it is possible to connect with the distinction of technical knowledge vs. practical knowledge a far reaching distinction of paradigms in the philosophy of language: While Gadamer's anti-instrumentalism complies with the concept of practical knowledge, all instrumentalistic conceptions of language may be correlated with the idea of technical knowledge. This opposition provides a prevalent theme throughout the following.

¹⁰⁴Heath (1967), p. 154.

¹⁰⁵WM, p. 319/320. Italics in the original.

just nominally, but conceptually, hermeneutical knowledge and moral knowledge themselves may be considered identical. Both represent the same kind of knowledge: Self-knowledge. And since the concept of Being as a practical-applying Being is situationally determined, this knowledge cannot be static, but must be dynamic. This is a feature that -besides the self-reflexivity of the conception¹⁰⁶- is important to be recognized in order to understand the full import of the quote. Only on this account becomes the explicit normative precept in the quote with which Gadamer ties practice (*Tun*) and application as aspects of Being to knowledge comprehensible.

For, the self-conception (or alternatively self-knowledge, or self-understanding) of human Being as a practical Being is nothing but a self-commitment to practice and application. -Actually it has almost the character of a self-fulfilling prophecy. The point is indeed trivial: If you conceive yourself as an *x*, then you have to be an *x*, in order to justify this self-conception. Thus, in order to maintain the conceptual integrity (which in this case is an ontological and epistemological concern) as a human Being, the claim of practical determination has to find practical application itself. This means that we have to apply ourselves, in order to maintain the concept of ourselves, and our knowledge of ourselves.¹⁰⁷

But thus conceived the task at hand is rendered circular, and with this the prospects for a self-elucidation of human Being -and this is all that the idea of self-knowledge that Gadamer supports is about- seem not exactly promising. But note that this conception follows a stringent motif: While (self-)knowledge

¹⁰⁶While in the present context it is trivial to emphasize the idea of self-reflexivity, it shall be pointed out nonetheless. In the course of the following it will become clear that self-reflexivity (also in the modified notion of self-referentiality) defines an ever occurring formal element that is fundamental for the whole of Gadamer's hermeneutics.

¹⁰⁷At first sight it may seem as if Gadamer's concept of human Being as described here underlies the idea of a compulsive character. That this is not the case, and that rather the concept of human Being originates in existential self-reflection becomes obvious, if one considers that the idea of a non-applying Being as the counter-model to the concept described here is driven *ad absurdum* immediately by any reflection on the human condition: Self-reflection of this kind is always self-application. -Which confirms the concept described. With this it should further become clear that although in the quote (and in the subsequent discussion) normative vocabulary is employed, Gadamer's concept is *not* a normative concept of human Being. Rather than signifying a mere accidental, the notion of application describes here an aspect of human Being that may be designated with Heidegger an *Existenzial*. As such application does not succumb to willful deliberation (intention), but correlates with the most basic level of human cogitation: self-consciousness. Put bluntly, this means that you are always already in a situation of application. This will be elaborated a bit further in a moment in the text.

without application would be vain (and would contradict the self-understanding of Being as a practical Being), application without knowledge would be hapless accident (for there is no application without knowledge of the objects and objectives of application conceivable).¹⁰⁸ Although in light of this one might find some reassurance in Heidegger's comment "Das Entscheidende ist nicht, aus dem Zirkel heraus-, sondern in ihn nach der rechten Weise hineinzukommen."¹⁰⁹ that comes to mind again here, the situation appears still stupefying: For, when asking *But what concept is there that could find self-application?* The answer is that of human Being as an applying Being.¹¹⁰ This seems to be a classic dead end. And rather than pondering the significance, or the proper approach to the problem at hand, another route shall be taken that is more feasible: In the following I will concentrate on the question whether the concept of human Being that is to find self-application is of the kind of a static plan that the skilled worker applies and realizes in production, or whether the application of this self-concept is of a different, dynamic nature, and also guided by a knowledge different than the craftsman's technical knowledge. -The question is how self-perspicuous the concept or the knowledge of human Being can be?

With this we have reached the point, where the distinction between technical knowledge and practical knowledge becomes decisive, and we may already anticipate Gadamer's account of it: He supports the thesis that the self-application of the concept of human Being is a matter of practical knowledge. What motivates this position are massive conceptual dissonance in the subject/object-distinction that arise when it comes to self-reflection. Unlike the case of technical knowledge which underlies a clear distinction of subject (i.e. the producer) and object (i.e. the product) the subject/object-distinction is impossibly to be maintained in case of the self-understanding of human Being as human Being: The subject simply cannot completely objectify itself. It is ultimately the peculiarities of

¹⁰⁸The parallel to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant writes: "Gedanken ohne Inhalt sind leer, Anschauungen ohne Begriffe sind blind." (Cf. Kant (1995a), A 51, B 75.) is intended here.

¹⁰⁹*SuZ*, p. 153.

¹¹⁰It is not only for this that an overbearing air of unassailability must be noted with respect to the concept of human Being as an applying Being. The dialectic of enlightenment that endangers the integrity of the whole conception becomes clearly manifest also in the following: Questioning the worth and significance of the concept has to be regarded as upright confirming the correctness (i.e. applicability) of the conception, because questioning is in Gadamer's concept the same as applying: Qua examining its own Being, Being comes to itself. -Gadamerian hermeneutics ultimately excludes then the possibility of criticism, which turns an essentially non-dogmatic and open -i.e. critical- conception into a closed and doctrinairian affair. This is a danger that this conception shares with Heidegger's philosophy.

self-reflection that do not allow for an execution of the human self-concept in the way a craftsman realizes a technical concept.

Yet, the point whether self-application is a matter of technical or practical knowledge is indeed debatable and not immediately decidable, for both types of knowledge qualify as possible candidates: In both application figures as a central notion. This is pointed out by Gadamer in the following characterization of practical knowledge and technical knowledge, where he remarks: “Beide sind vorgängiges Wissen und wollen ein Handeln bestimmen und leiten. Sie müssen mithin die Anwendung des Wissens auf die jeweilige konkrete Aufgabe selbst in sich enthalten.”¹¹¹

And actually, with regard to the concept of human Being it seems those approaches are dominant that take it as a concept of technical knowledge. Indeed, the installment of a ‘new’ human Being presents an ever occurring historical project. Good intentions and atrocious results aside it may be considered a household feature of many political, economical, and religious ideologies. Yet, the overall failure of any such project should one make already skeptical about the feasibility of the idea of an anthropological determinism of this kind.¹¹²

When Gadamer denies the suitability of technical knowledge for the self-application of the concept of human Being, he explains his objection as follows: “Es liegt auf der Hand, daß der Mensch nicht dergestalt über sich verfügt, wie der Handwerker über den Stoff verfügt, mit dem er arbeitet. Er kann sich offenbar selber nicht so herstellen, wie er etwas anderes herstellen kann. So wird es auch ein anderes Wissen sein müssen, das er von sich selbst in seinem sittlichen Sein hat, ein Wissen, das sich abheben läßt gegen solches Wissen, mit dem man ein Herstellen leitet.”¹¹³ And he continues, drawing now the parallel to Aristotle: “Aristoteles formuliert diesen Unterschied in einer kühnen, ja einer einzigartigen Weise, indem er dieses Wissen ein Sich-Wissen d.h. ein Für-sich-Wissen nennt [...]. Damit wird das Sich-Wissen des sittlichen Bewußtseins gegen das *theoretische* Wissen auf eine Weise abgehoben, die für uns sofort etwas

¹¹¹ *WM*, p. 320. The problem actually marks a point of demarcation: While Gadamer regards the hermeneutical task to be a question of practical knowledge, the notion of interpretation that underlies e.g. Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics and Grice’s theory of communication may be regarded to represent forms of technical knowledge.

¹¹²It is a debatable point whether the humanistic campaign for a renaissance of classical anthropological ideals may be regarded an example of such ambitions. The problem with such an ideal is -this had been touched upon already before- that it suggest an objectivity or definiteness of the conception in question. (How could you otherwise identify it as an ideal?) But if it is a definite concept, then it may be regarded as realizable in the schematic way of a technical concept.

¹¹³ *WM*, p. 321.

Einleuchtendes hat. Aber auch die Abgrenzung gegen das *technische* Wissen liegt darin, und eben um die Abgrenzung nach beiden Seiten zu formulieren, wagt Aristoteles den eigenartigen Ausdruck des Sich-Wissens.”¹¹⁴

What Gadamer emphasizes here, and what eventually distinguishes moral knowledge from the other two types of knowledge is that the subject cannot completely objectify itself. Human Being -moral Being in this respect- is not in command of itself in the way the craftsman oversees the material as well as the process of production. The craftsman’s technical knowledge is strictly *goal-rational*: Its ends determine its means. The result of her/his labor follows intention and scheme. Application of technical knowledge (production) is a *teleological* process. This contrasts sharply with the procedural aspects of practical knowledge: Application here is a *teleonomical* phenomenon.¹¹⁵ It is directed, but without intent. The sole purpose of application is the maintenance of the conceptual integrity of the self-concept as a human Being. It is an ends in itself.¹¹⁶ When human Being is conceived as a practical Being, the notion of application describes an *Existenzial*. It is an aspect of Being, and as such inevitable: In Gadamer’s existential philosophy human Being that is not an applying Being is not conceivable, just as a ‘pure’ consciousness does not exist: Consciousness is always consciousness of something. -It is directed, and the notion of application signifies this directedness. Self-knowledge is self-application. Thus, human Being as a self-conscious Being is always already in a situation of application. -You do not chose to apply yourself. Consequently, application cannot be acquired by learning. In this respect self-knowledge is fundamentally distinct from technical knowledge, which is a matter of learning and intention.

Compared to the technical concept (conceptualized in a plan) that the skilled worker sets out to manufacture, the self-concept of Being is intrinsically limited, and thus principally imperfect: There is no blueprint of Being. The self-

¹¹⁴ *WM*, p. 321. Italics in the original. Gadamer refers to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (Eth. Nic. Z 8, 1141 b 33, 1142 a 30), and the *Eudemian Ethics* (Eth. Eud. Θ 2, 1246 b 36) in a footnote here.

¹¹⁵ For the notion of *teleonomy* cf. Pittendrigh (1958).

¹¹⁶ This is a theme that in a certain sense is similar to one of the formulations of the categorical imperative: “Handle so, daß du die Menschheit, sowohl in deiner Person, als in der Person eines jeden andern, jederzeit zugleich als Zweck, niemals bloß als Mittel brauchest.” (Kant (1995b), BA 66/67.) Further parallels to the conception sketched here may be found earlier there: “[D]er Mensch, und überhaupt jedes vernünftige Wesen, existiert als Zweck an sich selbst, nicht bloß als Mittel zum beliebigen Gebrauche für diesen oder jenen Willen, sondern muß in allen seinen, sowohl auf sich selbst, als auch auf andere vernünftige Wesen gerichteten Handlungen jederzeit zugleich als Zweck betrachtet werden.” (BA 64/65.) (Orthography as that.)

transcending powers of ourselves are bounded.¹¹⁷ I am not available to myself in the way the material is available to the skilled worker. This defines the specific difference between practical knowledge and technical knowledge. The goal of self-application is not as determinate as the goal at which technical knowledge is directed. And this indeterminacy of the concept of the self directly influences the concept of application's potential: Application seems to be only possible when either its ends, or its means are known and well-defined, and within the powers of control and feasibility of the subject. (This is a rather household idea that conforms to the technical notion of application.) Furthermore it seems a precondition on the possibility of application that what is to be applied (knowledge) is in command of the one to apply it. To apply something means to execute a (pre-determined) scheme, to be in command of it. But in case of self-knowledge this knowledge is never fully determined: The concept of Being cannot find application in a technical sense, because there is nothing like a well defined, static concept of Being (when we are talking about actual Being, not some ideological concept of Being). So, how is something to be applied, that only through application gains contour at all? This is the dilemma of universal hermeneutics. This is why the notion of application in connection with practical knowledge is so challenging: -No object(ive), no method. Summarizing Gadamer remarks: "Darin zeigt sich eine grundsätzliche Modifikation [*sic*] des begrifflichen Verhältnisses von Mittel und Zweck, durch die sich das sittliche Wissen vom technischen Wissen unterscheidet."¹¹⁸

Gadamer debates this complex at hand of a concrete example, a case study so to say: The self-application of moral Being. It actually presents an already pretty general case, as the following large quote exemplifies. Gadamer writes: "Man lernt eine Techne - und kann sie auch verlernen. Man lernt aber nicht das sittliche Wissen und kann es auch nicht verlernen. Man steht ihm nicht in der Weise gegenüber, daß man es sich aneignen kann oder auch nicht, so wie man ein sachliches Können, eine Techne, wählen kann oder nicht. Man ist vielmehr immer schon in der Situation dessen, der handeln soll (wenn ich von der Phase der Unmündigkeit absehe, in der der Gehorsam gegenüber dem Erzieher die eigene Entscheidung ersetzt), muß also immer schon das sittliche Wissen besitzen und anwenden. Eben deshalb ist der Begriff der Anwendung in hohem Grade problematisch. Denn anwenden kann man nur etwas, was man schon vordem für sich besitzt. Das sittliche Wissen aber besitzt man nicht so

¹¹⁷One may argue that in this respect we are boundedly rational beings. And indeed, the notion of 'bounded rationality' will gain more importance later on.

¹¹⁸WM, p. 326.

für sich, daß man es schon hat und dann auf die konkrete Situation anwendet. Das Bild das der Mensch von dem hat, was er sein soll, etwa seine Begriffe von Recht und Unrecht, von Anstand, von Mut, von Würde, von Solidarität usw. (alles Begriffe, die im aristotelischen Tugendkatalog ihre Entsprechung haben), sind zwar in gewissem Sinne Leitbilder, auf die er hinblickt. Aber es ist doch ein grundsätzlicher Unterschied von dem Leitbilds [*sic*] erkennbar, das etwa der Plan eines herzustellenden Gegenstandes für den Handwerker darstellt. Was recht ist z.B., ist unabhängig von der Situation, die das Rechte von mir verlangt, nicht voll bestimmbar, während sehr wohl das ‚Eidos‘ dessen, was ein Handwerker herstellen will, voll bestimmt ist, und zwar durch den Gebrauch, für den es bestimmt ist.”¹¹⁹

Although in the following Gadamer concedes that e.g. the idea of justice appears in codices and laws to be as definite and elaborate as any concept of technical knowledge that finds specification in blueprints and manuals, he argues that still the application of a moral norm is fundamentally different in character from the application of a technical concept.

Consider first the situation of the craftsman when it comes to the application of a technical concept: Having a particular idea (a purpose, a function, a use, etc.) in mind, the artisan/engineer devises a method, or scheme (let’s call it *Plan A*) of how to realize the matter. But while carrying out the project, the situation may be such that it does not allow for a 1:1 realization of the objective as *Plan A* foresees. -Indeed, the conditions may force a revision of plans¹²⁰: In order to reach the intended ends (i.e. to guarantee functionality), *Plan A* has to be abandoned in favor of an *ad hoc*, and provisional arrangement: The notorious *Plan B*. Now, what is important to note here is that any alterations necessitated by the circumstances concern only the means, but not the final cause. In fact, the purpose marks a static idea. It is not up for discussion. What may have to find modification are solely the practicalities of application. Gadamer remarks in this respect that the handcrafter’s possibly flexible handling of events does not mean “daß sich dadurch sein Wissen um das was er will, vervollkommnet. Er macht vielmehr lediglich Abstriche bei der Ausführung. Insofern handelt es sich hier wirklich um Anwendung seines Wissens und um schmerzliche Unvollkommenheit, die damit verbunden ist.”¹²¹ The point may be explained further

¹¹⁹ *WM*, p. 322/323.

¹²⁰The idea of the ‚plan‘ signifies here the details of the know-how. This includes also the instruments and procedures that the realization or application of the knowledge in question involves.

¹²¹ *WM*, p. 323.

as follows:¹²² Imagine you face the task to construe a calculating machine that commands basic arithmetics. This means that you know arithmetics, and that you come up with the idea of mechanizing it. But due to insufficient means the plan is at the moment not realizable. It fails. (Think of Babbage's *Analytical Engine* for example.) Only later, after advancements in technology have been made, is it possible for you to realize a functional computer. Does this mean that your knowledge of arithmetics increased? Most certainly not. Was your overall knowledge of mathematics effected negatively by the failure to realize such a machine in the beginning? Again: No. Insofar Gadamer is right in the above: In the case of technical knowledge application appears to be, so to say, epistemically neutral. -The application of technical knowledge figures as a secondary aspect only. Both are ultimately distinct. But this means also that although technical knowledge represents the driving force of the process of production, this kind of knowledge cannot sanction the particularities of its own realization.

Contrast this now with the application of moral knowledge: The guiding motif here is unlike in the above case not goal-rational deliberation. It is not only the situation of application, but also (and essentially so) moral knowledge itself, which guides and determines the ways of its own application. Any moral decision that is reached, is reached on grounds of moral considerations itself. In a situation in which e.g. an ethical norm demands application, it is our understanding of this maxim that forces a certain interpretation of the situation, and leads us to behave this way, and not another way. It is not because the situation does not allow for another decision, but because acting a different way would be unethical. In other words, moral behavior is itself sanctioned by moral standards: The application of a moral concept is itself a moral decision.¹²³ And these standards are practical standards, without any theoretical appeal: While technical knowledge maintains its theoretical and conceptual significance even in spite of possible practical blunder (the weight of the circumstances), in case of moral knowledge such practical failure immediately impairs the concept of morality itself. In fact, proof of having moral knowledge (of understanding the meaning of a norm) can only be given through practical application.¹²⁴ And

¹²²This is an illustration not given by Gadamer, but should exemplify the point. In addition to this it further gives reason to regard technical knowledge as a form of hybrid knowledge with strong theoretical and practical elements.

¹²³The analogy to understanding: What can be understood is dependent on what is already understood. Understanding presupposes understanding.

¹²⁴On this account it then becomes clear that being a moral Being means being an applying Being. Furthermore, moral misconduct corrupts the notion of morality (and the concept of

while the substance of technical knowledge is not affected by the circumstances of its application or realization, in case of practical knowledge it is the situation of its application in which this kind of knowledge gains substance at all. Practical knowledge is situation-dependent: It is our understanding of the general demands of justice in each particular situation that leads us to decide not always in the same ways. Moreover, doing so (i.e. following a moral demand not indiscriminately) does not mean to abandon *ad hoc* one particular concept of justice in favor of another one, but in fact only reassures and increases our general knowledge of the meaning of what is just and what is unjust. That moral knowledge describes not a static concept, but actually necessitates its modulation is brought by Gadamer to the point in the following, where he describes the demands that the moral ‘agent’ has to meet: “Er wird zwar in der konkreten Lage von der Strenge des Gesetzes nachlassen müssen. Aber wenn er das tut, geschieht das nicht, weil es nicht besser geht, sondern weil es sonst nicht recht wäre. Indem er am Gesetze nachläßt, macht er also nicht etwa Abstriche am Recht, sondern er findet im Gegenteil das bessere Recht.”¹²⁵ In this case it is not only the situation that determines our actions, but in addition it is our self-understanding of what it means to be a moral Being that guides our actions. -Being and knowledge, i.e. action and morality cannot be separated here.

Now, although it is debatable, whether the examples describe a happy contrast, or whether the analogy that Gadamer draws here is slightly off center, in the above nevertheless an essential point has been made: It is only through application that the applicability of the interpretandum (just as the self-concept of the interpreter) perpetuates itself. Only through application can the interpreter prove that the interpretandum is understood, that s/he knows what it means. And only through application is the meaning of the interpretandum realizing itself. It then becomes evident that in case of practical knowledge application is an end in itself. It is both, effectuated by itself, and effectual for itself.¹²⁶ Indeed, conceived in this way, the hermeneutical task (and the moral task discussed here represents already the general case in this respect¹²⁷) is explained

the moral Being) to the degree that eventually the meaning (or normative significance) of the concept of morality itself must be questioned. The question as to when the conceptual integrity of norms is influenced negatively by ‘misconduct’ is actually rather interesting. Is there a measure of e.g. morality? What defines a conceptually negligible case of transgression, and when is the point of no return reached (the critical mass, so to say), at which a concept disintegrates and becomes void of meaning?

¹²⁵ *WM*, p. 323.

¹²⁶ Or, in other words, understanding presupposes understanding.

¹²⁷ This is arguably not quite right: While *applying* a moral principle is a matter of morality, its *understanding* is not a matter of morality -at least when there exists something like a

as a self-referential and self-generating task.

Summarizing his considerations Gadamer brings the complex as follows to the point: “Der Sinn von Applikation, der in allen Formen des Verstehens vorliegt, hat sich jetzt etwas geklärt. Applikation ist keine nachträgliche Anwendung von etwas gegebenem Allgemeinen, das zunächst in sich verstanden würde, auf einen konkreten Fall, sondern ist erst das wirkliche Verständnis des Allgemeinen selbst, das der gegebene Text für uns ist. Das Verstehen erweist sich als eine Weise von Wirkung und weiß sich als eine solche Wirkung.”¹²⁸ But how are knowledge and effect related? This is the major question for the following.¹²⁹

When it comes to explain how knowledge, application and its portent belong together, a rather simple argument delivers a first superficial answer. At the heart of the matter lies a rather basic fact: We understand ourselves as understanding beings. -We know that there are things that we do understand, just as we know that there are things that we do not understand. And when understanding turns to non-understanding, or non-understanding turns eventually to understanding, we realize this -we know this- just the same. Thus, understanding and the import of understanding are always already understood. Understanding is an immediate phenomenon. It is a matter of us being self-conscious, i.e. self-knowing, self-understanding beings. Understanding is a self-reflection¹³⁰ on the ‘results’, or purpose of application. It is the conscious realization of the demands and the turn-out of application. It is a correlate of self-written code of moral conduct. (Just think of the Ten Commandments.) In case of language, both *-understanding* and *application-* are matters of (knowing) language.

¹²⁸ *WM*, p. 346. Although it is only in the following that we will see in how far this quote and the following actually connect, but it shall already now be pointed out that the objective of application is to fulfill the imperative demands that the interpretandum imposes on the interpreter qua being a meaningful expression. The purpose of application is the maintenance of the conceptual integrity of the object of interpretation (and, it must be added, of the self-concept of the interpreter herself). But speaking of maintenance here, one has to be careful to understand the notion correctly, for ‘maintaining’ your (practical) knowledge through application means to increase your (practical) knowledge. Indeed, the notion of maintenance in this context does not describe a concept of static preservation of the *status quo*, but designates a real gain. (The scheme that is described here is not confined to the idea of practical knowledge. The same holds also for the maintenance of (self-)understanding, or the maintenance of the meaning of any other concept that has occurred in the discussion so far.)

¹²⁹ While in raising this question I follow Gadamer (cf. *WM*, p.346: “Wir müssen nun fragen: Wie gehören Wissen und Wirkung zusammen?”), I at times will not follow him directly in answering this question, but rather approach the issue in more comprehensible ways.

¹³⁰ The problem with the notion of Self-reflection here is that it implies an intentional aspect which is not there: The concept that Gadamer describes is self-reflexive, not self-reflective. Self-consciousness is not intentional behavior. It is teleonomical.

consciousness.¹³¹ Or, in the term that Gadamer coined, it is *die Konkretisierung des wirkungsgeschichtlichen Bewußtseins*. And with this we have reached the core notion of Gadamer's hermeneutics.

4.3.3 *Die Konkretisierung des wirkungsgeschichtlichen Bewußtseins* and the hermeneutical concept of experience

When in the following with the analysis of the concept of the *wirkungsgeschichtlichen Bewußtseins* the notion of application is studied further, a new topic takes central stage. It is the notion of experience. For, as Gadamer points out: “[...] was wir für die Analyse des wirkungsgeschichtlichen Bewußtseins festhalten müssen [ist]: es hat die Struktur der *Erfahrung*.”¹³² With that pretty much the last essential of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is finally introduced, and, considering the rich history and plethora of notional variations of the concept, a rather wide terrain is entered.

Considering the notion of experience, one might first think of experience as some form of individually acquired competence. Taking this view, the notion is understood as the mastery of some vital, everyday practical matter, which may span every aspect of life, and for which phrases such as e.g. *S/he is an experienced carpenter* stand exemplary.¹³³ Typically, knowledge of this kind results from an individual's prolonged occupation with the matter of experience.¹³⁴ It is neither conformable, nor transposable to others, but -even though of general significance- strictly individualistic and derives from personal history. Actually, if one regards one such definition of experience as “familiarity with some matter of *practical concern*”¹³⁵ the topic seems indeed an -if not inevitable- at least quite natural theme to appear in a discussion on problems of *practical* knowledge. Yet, one has to be careful, not to be taken away by the seeming fit of the definition, because the perspective that Gadamer takes is another one. While Gadamer conceives the notion of experience as a matter of *practical* knowledge, the quote

¹³¹On this account the hermeneutical task (more precisely: understanding) becomes conceivable as a non-intentional phenomenon (note that Gadamer does not make any reference to an epistemic subject), without giving up on the hermeneut: Since the interpreter is a self-conscious interpreter, and understanding is a correlate of self-consciousness, there is no need in postulating interpretation as an intentional, willful phenomenon, for self-consciousness (self-understanding or self-knowledge) is (as opposed to introspection) not willful intentional behavior.

¹³²*WM*, p. 352. Italics in the original.

¹³³Implying here that as an accomplished carpenter the job will be done well, such expressions always allude to ideas of technical knowledge.

¹³⁴Cf. for this Kessler, Schöpf & Wild (1973), pp. 373-386.

¹³⁵Heath (1967), p. 156. My emphasis.

given here alludes to the practical concerns of *technical* knowledge. Indeed, a warning is in order: What Gadamer formulates as the hermeneutical concept of experience is rather distinctive, and stresses aspects of experience as essential that, although being rather striking, the prevailing approaches and theories of the notion of experience neglect, or cannot capture. Accordingly, Gadamer attests that despite the notions commonality and theoretical importance the concept of experience happens to remain a vastly unenlightened notion.¹³⁶

When Gadamer focuses in particular on the scientific concept of experience as the main adversary to his conception, than not only because of the overall dominance and esteem of the scientific approach, but also because the scientific account of experience accentuates aspects of experience that also most other conceptions emphasize in one way or the other -only less rigorously. It is mainly for this reason that Gadamer takes the empirical sciences and its inductive routines to be responsible for the notion of experience's fate. He remarks: "Weil er [the concept of experience] in der Logik der Induktion für die Naturwissenschaften eine führende Rolle spielt, ist er einer erkenntnistheoretischen Schematisierung unterworfen worden, die mir seinen ursprünglichen Gehalt zu verkürzen zu scheint."¹³⁷ And actually already the initial naive definition of experience may be regarded as exemplary for the unduly schematizing and narrowing of the notion that Gadamer criticizes, because in its full experience is here defined as "familiarity with some matter of practical concern, *based on repeated past acquaintance or performance*."¹³⁸ It is exactly the crude positivism that the quote emulates for which Gadamer criticizes the common accounts of experience. He argues that the ideal of an ahistorical, repeatable experience that figures as the methodological warrant for the objectivity of scientific inquiry represents a misbalanced and one-sided account of the notion of experience.¹³⁹

Considering this criticism one of course expects Gadamer's conception to be more balanced, but at first sight these expectations seem to be thoroughly

¹³⁶Cf. *WM*, p. 352. Gadamer writes: "Der Begriff der Erfahrung erscheint mir - so paradox es klingt - zu den unaufgeklärtesten Begriffen zu gehören, die wir besitzen."

¹³⁷*WM*, p. 352.

¹³⁸Heath (1967), p. 156. My emphasis.

¹³⁹Doing so, Gadamer critically follows in the wake of Husserl. Cf. *WM*, p. 353: "[Husserl] hat die Einseitigkeit der in den Wissenschaften vorliegenden Idealisierung der Erfahrung in immer neu ansetzenden Untersuchungen aufzuklären unternommen [...]. Husserl gibt in dieser Absicht eine Genealogie der Erfahrung, die als Erfahrung der Lebenswelt der Idealisierung durch die Wissenschaften noch vorausliegt. Jedoch scheint er mir selbst noch von der Einseitigkeit beherrscht, die er kritisiert. Denn er projiziert die idealisierte Welt der exakten wissenschaftlichen Erfahrung insofern in die ursprüngliche Welterfahrung noch immer hinein, als er die Wahrnehmung als äußere, auf die bloße Körperlichkeit gerichtete für alle weitere Erfahrung das Fundament sein läßt."

disappointed: While in the scientific conception of experience the notion of *confirmation* figures as a key-concept, it is the idea of *disconfirmation* that defines the essence of Gadamer's hermeneutical conception of experience. The center of misbalance thus seems just to be shifted to the opposite extreme, and it stands to reason to assume that the differences between the two accounts cannot be that dramatic after all. But one can hardly be more wrong about this. Gadamer's so far rather vague criticism of the scientific idea of experience, and the subsequent apparently slight alteration of perspective derives from a strong conceptual distinction: Gadamer rejects what he takes to be the scientific account of experience, because it interprets experience as a *teleological* notion, while, in fact, it is a *teleonomical* concept. Thus characterized, the distinction between a finalistic idea of experience, and a concept that describes experience as a perpetual, self-generating and self-referential phenomenon is conceived.

Actually, this assessment is not restricted to the concept of experience in the sciences alone, but describes Gadamer's bold disapproval of most common (be that naive or theoretical) approaches to the notion of experience. All these concepts underlie one basic preconception: They all explain the notion of experience in terms of its relation to knowledge. -Directed towards knowledge as its final cause¹⁴⁰, experience aims at something it itself is not, but for which it acts as a prerequisite and means to an end. But whenever the focus rests on the source/aim-relation of experience and knowledge, one postulates that the notion of experience follows an extrinsic telos. This is what defines the common characteristic of the concepts of experience mentioned so far, and this is also what dominates the semantic intuitions we have when speaking of 'experience', the phrase *to know something from experience* just being the most explicit in this. This is so fundamental and intuitive to our understanding of what 'experience' means that it is hard to grasp why this should not provide the accent of any description of the notion of experience. The paramount epistemic relevance that the source/aim-relation characterizes simply cannot be denied. -And Gadamer does not do so. (At least he does not deny that experience is a directed phenomenon.) It is just that whenever experience is described in terms of an extrinsic telos you put the cart before the horse. Focussing on the relation of experience and knowledge all you do is to predicate something about just this relation, but nothing about experience itself. Thus, a theory that accentuates

¹⁴⁰Even though the notion of a *causa finalis* and teleological explanations have been abandoned in scientific practice in favour of causal explanations, the sciences in their self-conception as a prime paradigm of inquiry maintain at least implicitly a teleological interpretation of experience. The answer of the sciences to the question *Why the (empirical) sciences?* is here *Because they deliver a far superior form of knowledge than some hocus-pocus.*

an extrinsic telos of experience is strictly speaking not a theory of experience. Indeed, it will be argued that when the analysis of the notion of experience is driven further, beyond the all too apparent, the postulate of an extrinsic telos of experience turns out to be unfounded and circular, facing more problems than it can solve. Compared to this it turns out that a teleonomical conception of experience delivers a far superior framework for the notion's description: While it maintains a description of experience as a directed phenomenon, it avoids at the same time all the explanatory shortcomings that characterize the teleological approach.

But while the explanation of experience in terms of an extrinsic telos can be motivated with a platitude, the explanation in terms of an intrinsic telos does not suggest itself as easily. Indeed, it is only in criticizing the first concept that the second one shall gain contour here.

Thus, the truism from which the first conception obtains its persuasiveness shall figure as the point of departure for the following. When it comes to justify the postulate of an extrinsic telos for experience, it seems that everything you need to point out is that after all empirical knowledge is based on experience.¹⁴¹ What significance would experience have if it was not to determine the foundation of our knowledge of the empirical world? This is so fundamental an aspect of human understanding that all other explanations seem to be immediately disqualified.

Yet, since experience is fleeting, while knowledge is just not, but is stable and persistent, the question may be asked what renders an experience epistemically significant? When discussing now the problem how general empirical concepts are generated and secured, two subsequent questions will thus be guiding. These are: (i) *How is empirical knowledge acquired?* and (ii) *What criteria of consolidation and justification of this knowledge are there?*¹⁴²

¹⁴¹Since the notion of experience is highly ambiguous as well with respect to what concept of experience is meant, as with respect to other notions such as (self-)consciousness, or (self-)understanding, it cannot be avoided that occasionally no clear distinction can be drawn. The respective context should clarify the matter sufficiently, though.

¹⁴²Two important remarks need to be made at this point and kept in mind: Note first that while it is plain that the issues that are discussed here touch upon the very fundamentals of empiricism, neither an elaborate theory of concept formation, nor a serious discussion of a principle of induction shall be attempted here. What is rather to be gained here is a perspective on the problems and motifs that lead Gadamer to develop his hermeneutical concept of experience. As such my presentation does not aim at making up for any shortcomings that might occur in Gadamer's portrayal of the issue, and in particular of what he takes to be the scientific interpretation of the notion of experience. Indeed, while there exists some natural overlap, Gadamer's account should only be understood as complementary to other approaches such as e.g. Popper's *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. -It is supposed to deliver an alter-

Turning first to the second question, the notions of repetition and confirmation take center stage: Obviously, in order to establish a reliable and steadfast -objective- knowledge of empirical things (which is the telos that Gadamer means, when he speaks of *Wahrheitserwerb* as the point of reference for scientific theories of experience in the last sentence of the quote below), something like an epistemically effective stabilizer, or contingency-filter for experience is in need. -A feature that is inherent to the process of experiencing, and for which experience provides itself that allows us to positively identify what is reoccurring and stable in what is experienced. Only thence are constant patterns in an otherwise unstructured and overwhelming stream of experiences identifiable, and hence knowledge acquired.

This feature in question is of course repetition. Whenever experience repeats itself (or is experimentally replicated) permanence starts to supplant transience, suggesting a shape (an identity) of the things that are experienced, which eventually directs the experiencer's consciousness, or at least attention. Repetition allows to detach experience from the contingency of a transient situation, and thus leads to the objectification (which means also the de-historicization, as will be stressed in a moment) of what is experienced. Hence, under the aspect of the establishment of empirical knowledge repetition and its inductive scheme represents the most important structural moment of experience.¹⁴³ This explains also the stringency of the methodological rationale of the scientific interpretation of the notion of experience, because one of its most fundamental methodological

native perspective and thus to balance our understanding of the notion of experience. Even if the following discussion may appear to the more scientifically oriented as naive in many respects, or maybe occasionally even anachronistic, Gadamer's account is in any case not just refreshingly unorthodox, but rather instructive and inspiring in this sense. Note second that what is discussed here does have serious repercussions: Answers to the questions posed in the above are of primary importance also for the problem of the justification of the postulate of a telos for experience. Since knowledge of a telos of experience can only be based on experience (any theory of experience has to be self-reflexive, if it is to be *empirical*), any problems that arise in connection with the teleological perspective on experience are immediately also problems of the teleological conception of experience itself. (The streak of circularity inherent to this is not necessarily a vicious one. It is motivated by anti-foundationalism.) Hence, on another level the questions are actually: If you assume experience to be teleological, what procedural and methodological implications with regards to the acquisition of knowledge and the idea of gaining experience are you committed to, and what problems in the conception of experience arise in connection with the teleological view? -We will see that eventually it is not just the problem of induction that translates into a problem of the justification of the teleological conception of experience. That theoretical and meta-theoretical aspects are intertwined makes the presentation more difficult. Some redundancies cannot be avoided.

¹⁴³That memory plays a just as essential role in this process shall be mentioned only on the side here. (Cf. for this Gadamer (1966), p. 149.)

principles is that experience has to be repeatable: It must provide itself to be systematically confirmed or corroborated, if science is to generate knowledge on the basis of experience. -Hence the emphasis on method in the sciences, the doctrine being that empirical knowledge can only be obtained, when experience is standardized and succumbs to certain methodological ideals.

This is the account derivable from Gadamer's discussion of the subject.¹⁴⁴ And indeed, he does not fall short to recognize that what the scientific interpretation of experience exploits is of principal importance to the concept of experience in general. He writes with respect to this: "Die moderne Wissenschaft führt [...] auf ihre methodische Weise nur weiter, was in aller Erfahrung schon angestrebt war. Alle Erfahrung ist ja nur in Geltung, solange sie sich bestätigt. Insofern beruht ihre Dignität auf ihrer prinzipiellen Wiederholbarkeit. Das bedeutet aber, daß Erfahrung ihrem eigenen Wesen nach ihre Geschichte in sich aufhebt und dadurch auslöscht. Schon für die Erfahrung des täglichen Lebens gilt das, und erst recht für jede wissenschaftliche Veranstaltung derselben. Insofern ist es keine zufällige Einseitigkeit der modernen Wissenschaftstheorie, sondern sachlich begründet, daß die Theorie der Erfahrung ganz teleologisch auf den Wahrheitserwerb bezogen ist, der in ihr erreicht wird."¹⁴⁵ What Gadamer points out here is that the technical concepts of confirmation (or corroboration) and induction that dominate the notion of experience in the sciences cannot be regarded simply as the peculiar heuristics of a particular (i.e. the scientific) approach to the world. Rather these concepts represent indeed only the methodical refinement of an important aspect of the nature of experience itself. They are 'sachlich begründet', as Gadamer puts it here, and are thus to some degree comprehensible, as he does not fail to admit in the quote. In fact, in this respect no breach between everyday experience and the scientized concept of experience exists.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴This is also why the picture sketched of the empirical sciences is rather positivistic. That Gadamer occasionally falls subject to his own (anti-positivistic) prejudices in this was already mentioned.

¹⁴⁵ *WM*, p. 352/353. Note Gadamer's scrupulous choice of formulation, when he speaks only of experience gaining *dignity* through its principal repeatability, instead of describing its repeatability as the *essence* of experience.

¹⁴⁶This is a theme that finds another explicit mentioning later on again, when Gadamer observes: "Daß Erfahrung gültig ist, solange sie nicht durch neue Erfahrung widerlegt wird (*ubi non reperitur instantia contradictoria*), charakterisiert offenbar das allgemeine Wesen von Erfahrung, ganz gleich, ob es sich um ihre wissenschaftliche Veranstaltung im modernen Sinne handelt oder um die Erfahrung des täglichen Lebens, wie sie von jeher gemacht wurde." (*WM*, p. 356. Italics in the original) -But one needs to be careful not to be led astray by this statement. It is rather subversive: What seems to straightforwardly underline the importance of repetition for experience, actually emphasizes what exactly appears negligible in this: The

Taking this as a résumé it seems question (ii) -the question what renders an experience stable and distinguishes it as epistemically significant- has found a sound (though superficial) answer here: Under the teleological perspective that experience is to deliver ‘truth’ it is simply inevitable to emphasize the importance of repetition in an explanation of the notion of experience.¹⁴⁷ But note that also question (i) has been answered at least in its rudiments: The acquisition of empirical knowledge follows an inductive scheme. Yet, while this is obvious and follows immediately from the answer to question (ii), this is still far too vague a characterization. What idea of induction is actually meant here? More specifically, how could the ‘gain’ that is connected with the inductive step from the particularity to the generality of an experience be explained?¹⁴⁸

negative dimension of experience. The qualification that experience holds as long as it is not contradicted by new experience indeed summarizes the core of the conception with which Gadamer counters the common (positivistic) theories of experience. He remarks with respect to these approaches: “Wir werden uns [...] bei der Analyse des Begriffs der Erfahrung nicht von diesen Vorbildern leiten lassen, da wir uns auf den teleologischen Aspekt, unter dem das Problem bisher vorwiegend gesehen worden ist, nicht beschränken können.” *WM*, p. 355/356.

¹⁴⁷The argument is not as stringent as it may seem. Indeed, it is rather problematic. To see, how dangerous the naive bias towards the notion of repetition in a theory of experience is consider the following: Regarding the importance of repetition as a contingency-filter for experience, one might take the view that experience is of epistemic value only insofar it is validated, i.e. insofar it is replicated, or acts as a confirming instance of earlier experience. Actually, this seems a pretty natural suggestion, for how else could experience gain lasting substance at all? But taking this point of view a normative dimension opens up that turns out to be rather problematic. (Actually, in its upshot at this point the non-scientific, metaphysical dogmas of the scientific concept of experience and the shaky foundations of all teleology are exposed.) Committing to (an inductive scheme of) confirmation, one postulates that experience gains significance only through confirmation. This means that the validity of experience is ultimately assessed with reference to the telos of experience. But any theory that employs this assumption is not simply descriptive: Knowledge of this telos can only be achieved through experience. It precedes science. Hence, the apparent telos of experience - objectification- figures as the metaphysical instance of justification of the validity of experience itself, even before the idea of objectivity could be substantiated by experience at all. This renders the whole idea of a teleological concept of experience normative, and indeed circular (This is a position that is analogous to the position that takes as a criterion for the ‘correct’ interpretation of a norm the practical realization of this norm. But there exists no rational justification for this, neither for the one, nor for the other.): With the postulate of an (extrinsic) telos for experience you define something that precedes and conditions the very idea of its own description. This is a principal problem of all teleologies. The point polemically formulated: The concept falls subject to the epistemic pathos of objective knowledge.

¹⁴⁸Illustrating this problem Gadamer draws also an important distinction between experience and science. He writes: “Wenn uns die Erfahrung zeigt, daß ein bestimmtes Heilmittel eine bestimmte Wirkung hat, so heißt das, daß aus einer Fülle von Beobachtungen etwas Gemeinsames herausgesehen worden ist, und es ist klar, daß erst von einer so gesicherten Beobachtung aus die eigentliche medizinische Frage, die der Wissenschaft, möglich wird: die

4.3.4 *Pars pro toto*-explanation vs. the concept of the *epagoge*

That not all answers to this problem provide a satisfactory explanation becomes clear, when we consider a first account of this issue that also Gadamer discusses. This attempt tries to explain the matter with the reoccurrence or iteration of a particular experience, or observation. Think of a certain characteristic of this observation that reappears again in all ensuing observations. Would not that be proof for the initial experience containing some generality, and the ensuing observations being witnesses to this generality? Indeed, one might take the view that the confirming observations do not make any conceptual contribution to the initial observation, but that with the initial observation already a full fledged general concept has been established. Everything else would then be just an instance of this generality. Thus, one might call this a *pars pro toto*-explanation, and argue that the identification of a generality is a matter of frequency. The more often it reoccurs, the more prominence does it gain, and thus the easier will its identification be. But the problem with such an explanation is obvious: Beyond advocating the idea of a general in disguise of a particular it does not characterize the notion of experience in any substantial way. All that one ends up with is a particular that is designated to be more particular than the ensuing particulars simply by the virtue of setting the precedent to these. Thus, clearly this account remains unsatisfactory.¹⁴⁹

Hence, another explanation has to be found, for after all the generality of experience exists. Or, in Gadamer's words: "Und doch ist ja wahr, daß irgendwann das Wissen des Allgemeinen zustande gekommen ist. Wo hat es angefangen?"¹⁵⁰

A far more lucid and superior explanation of the issue is formulated by

Frage nämlich nach dem Logos. Die Wissenschaft weiß, warum, aus welchem Grunde dieses Mittel heilende Wirkung hat. Die Erfahrung ist nicht die Wissenschaft selbst, sie ist aber eine notwendige Voraussetzung für dieselbe. Sie muß bereits gesichert sein, d.h. die einzelnen Beobachtungen müssen regelmäßig das gleiche zeigen. Dann erst, wenn diejenige Allgemeinheit bereits erreicht ist, um die es sich in der Erfahrung handelt, kann die Frage nach dem Grunde und damit die Fragestellung, die zur Wissenschaft führt, einsetzen. Wir fragen erneut: Was ist das für eine Allgemeinheit? Sie betrifft offenbar das ununterschiedene Gemeinsame vieler einzelner Beobachtungen. Auf dem Behalten derselben beruht die Möglichkeit einer gewissen Vorausschau." *WM*, p. 356.

¹⁴⁹Cf. for this Gadamer (1966), p. 149/150, where Gadamer asks with Aristotle: "Wie kann eigentlich dieses Wissen des Allgemeinen zustande kommen?", and answers: "Doch sicher nicht so, daß eins nach dem anderen vorbeizieht und plötzlich an einem bestimmten Einzelnen, das da wieder erscheint und als dasselbe wiedererkannt wird, das Wissen des Allgemeinen erworben wird. Es ist doch nicht dieses eine Einzelne als solches, das sich gegenüber allen anderen Einzelnen durch die geheimnisvolle Kraft auszeichnet, das Allgemeine zur Darstellung zu bringen. Es ist vielmehr wie alle anderen Einzelnen auch."

¹⁵⁰Gadamer (1966), p. 150.

Aristotle. In order to explain the *epagoge*¹⁵¹ Aristotle conceives a classical analogy: It is the metaphor of the fleeing army over which control establishes itself again.¹⁵² With this we have reached a pivotal point, because Gadamer regards the analogy to deliver an ‘ideal’ model also for his concerns.¹⁵³ And indeed, Aristotle’s explanation of the *epagoge* provides the (critically acclaimed) blueprint for the hermeneutical concept of experience, and also inspires Gadamer’s ideas on meaning and interpretation. Roughly sketched, what the analogy of the fleeing army describes is how around a point of innovation slowly some structure or general pattern starts to crystallize. Imagine an army in a state of general confusion and total disorder. -It is fleeing. Now picture a point of innovation: Some soldiers turning around amidst the turmoil and realizing that the enemy is not as near as believed, thus causing them to halt.¹⁵⁴ Eventually this pointwise halt spreads and multiplies, representing the beginning of the end of the general run: More soldiers follow the example of their comrades and start standing their ground again, leading to the eventual cumulation of the situation: The flee comes to an end. What was a stream of running individuals has transformed, and builds a functional and uniform unit -an army- again. Or, in other words: Chaos has been replaced by order.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹The notion of the *epagoge* is very laxly understood as the concept of induction as a basic pattern of experience.

¹⁵²Cf. *Analytica Posteriora* B 19 99b ff. (See in particular B 19 100a 10 ff., where Aristotle writes: “Thus the states in question neither inhere in us in a determinate form nor come about from other states which are more cognitive; rather, they come about from perception - as in a battle, when a rout has occurred, first one man makes a stand, then another does, and then another, until a position of strength is reached. [...] And the soul is such as to be capable of undergoing this. Let us say again what we have just said but not said clearly. When one of the undifferentiated items makes a stand, there is a primitive universal in the soul; for although you perceive particulars, perception is of universals, - e.g. of man, not of Callias the man. Next, a stand is made among these items, until something partless and universal makes a stand. E.g. such-and-such an animal makes a stand, until animal does; and with animal a stand is made in the same way. Thus it is plain that we must get to know the primitives by induction; for this is the way in which perception instills universals.” (Quoted after Aristotle (1994)) For the following see Gadamer (1993) (in the following abbreviated as *WM II*), p. 200. But cf. also *WM*, p. 357/358, *WM II*, p. 150 and *WM II*, p. 229.

¹⁵³Cf. *WM II*, p. 150.

¹⁵⁴We will see that the negative element that the occurrence of someone not running, or no longer running within a stream of running individuals is of crucial importance to Gadamer’s own concept of hermeneutical experience.

¹⁵⁵Note that this transformation is an *unintended* phenomenon: The global effects of the sum of individual actions transcends the particularity of the underlying intention of an individual. It may be assumed that the individual soldier’s coming to a halt is not motivated by the intention to bring the army as a whole to a halt, but that it is strictly egotistically motivated action. Thus, what is indeed described in the analogy may be understood as a more or less

Note the fundamental difference between this explanation and the preceding *pars pro toto*-explanation: Here the point of innovation anticipates in its character the character of a generality, but *without* being this generality. The individual halting preconceives the army's coming to a halt. Yet, clearly, an individual is not an army. For the army resuming its formation, the halt has first to snowball. -The general virtually has to evolve in this.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, the categorial difference between the concepts of the general and the particular is captured rather ingeniously in the analogy: The notion of the army as a uniform unit of soldiers (to keep the martial metaphor intact) transcends the notion of the individual, just as the generality of experience transcends the particularity of a single observation. In fact, transcendence here means that the general is in a specific way independent of the particular: While any confirming (i.e. conforming) particular anticipates and indeed contributes to the eventual cumulation of a generality, the particular seems nonetheless strangely insignificant for the concept of the general: Neither one, nor two, nor three soldiers etc. that stop running form an army, while at the same time it is not necessary for the army regaining its configuration that also the last soldier is halting. In fact, as Gadamer points out, the concept of the army as a functional unit is (re-)established already long before also the last soldier starts to stand his ground again.¹⁵⁷ Thus, in summary, the evolution of the situation cannot only not be explained as willfully steered (on the contrary, as already mentioned, is it essentially of the chaos described that although order is eventually established, literally no one is in command of the situation), but moreover the situation defies the formulation of any definite (quantitative) criteria for its assessment: Neither the point of innovation, nor the point of transformation, or completion (which figures as nothing but the telos of the process) seems clearly discernible. Yet, still, the metamorphosis from the chaotic to the ordered takes place. After all, it is a fact that we empirically acquire general concepts, and that the very

self-organizing process. The structure to appear emerges *autotelically*. (Of all neologisms that describe the phenomenon, this is the most fitting in the present context. (One can find also the notion of *autopoiesis* for phenomena of this kind.)) This represents the most weighty point of Gadamer's criticism of the analogy. While Aristotle interprets the metaphor in terms of an extrinsic explanation of the notion of experience, Gadamer makes it plain that the hermeneutical description of the notion of experience rests on an intrinsic telos.

¹⁵⁶The ambiguity that is inherent to the notion of 'the general' in this context is worth to be recognized: Note that in the situation described there is no individual (no general of the army) who could command the army to transform its general structure.

¹⁵⁷Cf. *WM* II, p.150: "Man kan doch gewiß nicht sagen, daß das Heer steht, wenn eine bestimmte Anzahl der fliehenden Soldaten aufgehört hat zu fliehen, und gewiß auch nicht, wenn der letzte zu fliehen aufgehört hat."

concept of experience exists. (The problem of the indeterminacy of empirical generalities defines a main aporia of the concept of experience. And although Gadamer's argument is not explicit in this, this problem motivates also his criticism of the idea of a teleological concept of experience: Since we cannot give any definite criteria for the fulfillment of the telos, why should the teleological concept be maintained at all? We will come to this in a moment.)

Why Gadamer regards the analogy as ideal and assigns to it such great significance, becomes clear once it is realized that the metaphor of the fleeing army does not only provide a model of explanation for the acquisition of general empirical concepts, but that it straightforwardly extends also to the hermeneutical problem. Gadamer calls this to attention, when he summarizes the analogy's point as follows: "Wie das anfängt, wie es sich fortpflanzt und wie am Ende irgendwann das Heer wieder steht, das heißt: wieder der Einheit des Kommandos gehorcht, das wird von niemandem wissend verfügt, planend beherrscht, feststellend erkannt. Und doch ist es unzweifelhaft geschehen. Genauso ist es mit dem Wissen des Allgemeinen, und genauso ist es, weil es nämlich dasselbe ist, mit dem Eintreten in die Sprache."¹⁵⁸ Considered that the task of language acquisition (be that first or second language acquisition) comes down to identifying within a stream of sound waves a meaningful structure, and thus to establish a semantics for the language one confronts, it is obvious why Gadamer could assert that language acquisition is just the same as the acquisition of empirical knowledge. Under this perspective meaning is just a general empirical concept as any other empirical concept. (One might actually mention in this connection Quine's *gavagai*-discussion as exemplary.)

But although Gadamer mentions not only here the utility of the analogy as an explanation for the acquisition of language, he never fails to subsequently draw the connection with the hermeneutical problem in general. He is particularly explicit in this, when he explains that the *Zustandekommen des Allgemeinen* (i.e. the acquisition of empirical knowledge) is indeed a *Zum-Stehen-Kommen*, and continues to expound: "Was sich dabei zeigt, ist, wie ich meine, die eigentliche Vollzugsweise unserer menschlichen Welterfahrung überhaupt. Das Sprechen-Lernen ist gewiß eine Phase besonderer Produktivität, und das Genie unserer Dreijährigkeit haben wir alle inzwischen in ein karges und spärliches Talent umgewandelt. Aber im Gebrauch der am Ende zustande gekommenen sprachlichen Weltauslegung bleibt noch etwas von der Produktivität unserer Anfänge lebendig. Wir kennen das alle z.B. bei dem Versuch des Übersetzens, im Leben oder in der Literatur oder wo immer, dieses seltsame, unruhige und

¹⁵⁸Cf. *WM* II, p. 150.

quälende Gefühl, solange man nicht das richtige Wort hat. Wenn man es hat, den rechten Ausdruck gefunden hat (es braucht nicht immer ein Wort zu sein), wenn es einem gewiß ist, daß man es hat, dann ‚steht‘ es, dann ist etwas ‚zustande‘ gekommen, dann haben wir wieder einen Halt inmitten der Flut des fremden Sprachgeschehens, dessen unendliche Variation die Orientierung verlieren läßt. Was ich so beschreibe, ist aber die Weise der menschlichen Welterfahrung überhaupt. Ich nenne sie hermeneutisch. Denn der so beschriebene Vorgang wiederholt sich ständig ins Vertraute hinein. Es ist stets eine sich schon auslegende, schon in ihren Bezügen zusammengeordnete Welt, in die Erfahrung eintritt als etwas Neues, das umstößt, was unsere Erwartungen geleitet hatte, und das sich im Umstoßen selber neu einordnet. Nicht das Mißverständnis und nicht die Fremdheit ist das Erste, so daß die Vermeidung des Mißverständes die eindeutige Aufgabe wäre, sondern umgekehrt ermöglicht erst das Getragensein durch das Vertraute und das Einverständnis das Hinausgehen in das Fremde, das Aufnehmen aus dem Fremden und damit die Erweiterung und Bereicherung unserer eigenen Welterfahrung.”¹⁵⁹ Even without committing to Gadamer’s description here it is easy to see that with this extension we may indeed leave the realm of the empirically observable, and enter the abstract realm of meaning: The richness of experiences that the confrontation with the empirical world induces parallels the abundance of interpretations one faces, when confronted with text, or, more generally, the abundance of meanings language allows for. Yet, for all the excess that the two phenomena provide for, this *embarras de richesse* is nonetheless not overwhelming. -In neither case: Just as we gain a reliable concept of the empirical world, language is not white noise to us, but meaningful. (Moral maxims provide a good example for what is at stake here: For all the situational dependency of the meaning of such a norm, it is its general meaning that guides its application, and from which it gains its significance at all. (The generalization is obvious: Despite its context-dependency, the idea of the meaning of an expression remains a steadfast concept.)) And although this may seem a trivial observation, it certainly is not. Indeed, considering that we

¹⁵⁹ *WM II*, p. 229/230, (But see for this also e.g. *WM II*, p. 200/2001 following, and *WM II*, 150 following.) The importance of this quote cannot be stressed enough, because everything that characterizes Gadamer’s conception of (universal) hermeneutics is incorporated here. Entering upon details is out of question here, but note that Gadamer sketches here an idea of a generality (i.e. the idea of intersubjectivity, our understanding of world and language, etc.) in constant crisis that -if it is to maintain its conceptual integrity or significance- has to emulate an abundance of challenges that otherwise would corrupt it. Application here becomes a bare necessity of ‘survival’. And this idea of self-maintenance, or self-generation and self-referentiality is described in dissociation of the common approaches in teleonomical terms.

are neither in command of the process of experiencing, nor of the phenomenon of interpretation, this is a highly remarkable happenstance. Both things, the concept of world, and the concept of meaning impose themselves on us (i.e. establish themselves) independent of our intend: Just as we cannot force ourselves (by a set of rules or mere intention) to come to understand what we set out to interpret, or do not understand, we cannot force ourselves in gaining conceptual knowledge from our random contacts with the empirical world.

What further adds to this is that experience (in the sense of the knowledge of empirically acquired generalities), as well as meaning, seems to defy objectification: The definition of a method in form of a fixed set of rules of interpretation is as problematic, as the definition of positive or 'hard' criteria for the identification of a determinate general pattern from the stream of experiences that we endure. -While in the latter case we face the problem of induction¹⁶⁰, it is in the former case the problem of rule following that represents a big challenge.¹⁶¹

That both phenomena, the empirical problem, and the hermeneutical task, share the same general characteristics, and pose similar methodological and theoretical problems is a happenstance that supports the extension of the analogy of the fleeing army to the problem of interpretation. Indeed, the analogy's ideality as a model for the hermeneutical task seems to be confirmed by all this. Actually, all this summarized, one may take the point of view that both phenomena coincide, and that what is described here is indeed a single problem, only in different guises. -This is precisely what underlies Gadamer's idea of a universal hermeneutics.¹⁶²

But with this we have reached a critical point: The methodological problems in the description of the concept of experience that came to light may be regarded as a shortcoming of the metaphorical explanation that the analogy delivers. After all, what seems theoretically elusive, is practically unproblematic. -At least this is what our intuitions tell us: We do have a stable and structured idea of the empirical world, just as we eventually do reach a stable and structured understanding of language. In this our intuitions contrast sharply with the theoretical problems that the analogy seems to evoke. Not being in

¹⁶⁰The analogy illustrates this nicely: We cannot say how many soldiers halting it takes for the army to regain its unity.

¹⁶¹Actually the problem of rule following exemplifies the abundance of interpretations in the hermeneutical task already ideally. Indeed, solving the hermeneutical task would mean to solve (or at least to make it disappear) the problem of rule following.

¹⁶²Although rather distant, the question whether different cognitive tasks (such as olfaction, language processing, and spatial orientation) underlies a single anatomical structure, or results in a differentiate neural organization of the brain seems interesting.

command of neither interpretation nor experience, we are still inclined to regard ourselves as rather capable and competent interpreters resp. experiencers.¹⁶³ Thus, as promising a counter to Platonism as the analogy may be, the explanation seems nonetheless not exhaustive, and hence apparently remains somewhat unsatisfactory. -That is, if one does not question the validity of our intuitions. After all, since the analogy illustrates that definite criteria for the completion of the processes of experience resp. interpretation cannot be given¹⁶⁴, it might just as well be asked in what sense the phenomena at stake here may be regarded as directed. Could it be that our intuitions that describe both interpretation and experience as finalistic, as eventually reaching something as a stable and static state are misleading? Does the notion of stability really describe an essential of these tasks, and if so, what kind of stability is it at all that is to be reached? In summary, what sense does it make to speak of a telos here?¹⁶⁵

The tension between the descriptive (or suggestive) powers of the metaphor and the expectations connected to a theoretical explanation that just came to light gives apt reason to develop a serious uneasiness: Either is the analogy deficient (the methodological problems in the description of the concept of experience that came to light may be regarded to derive directly from the shortcomings of the metaphorical explanation that the analogy delivers), or our intuitions have to be questioned. Thus, in either case there is apt reason to analyze the analogy and its inherent intricacies further.

And indeed will a more detailed study reveal that that the analogy of the fleeing army is indeed based on a grave misconception, which leads to excessive and unfounded expectations about the explainability of the phenomenon that the analogy is supposed to describe. To be more precise: It is a wrong presupposition that causes much theoretical fuzz about nothing in this connection.¹⁶⁶ But as a good dialectic Gadamer regards the analogy even in its (if not to say for its) shortcoming as ideal, arguing that the metaphor's weak point is its explana-

¹⁶³On the account given one may actually wonder if it is hubris, or just functional self-deception, when we claim responsibility for something we are not responsible of?

¹⁶⁴This is just another aspect of the problem of method.

¹⁶⁵Within Christian theology the teleological idea of understanding gains a new dimension: Since human beings as finite beings cannot apprehend the diving being of God, also their understanding (of e.g. the Holy Scripture as the word of God) can never be complete. Conceiving understanding as a non-finite phenomenon is here founded in the infinite and indefinite nature of God. (Note in this connection that Gadamer delivers in *WM, Dritter Teil, 2.b) Sprache und Verbum* a for the understanding of the hermeneutical problem highly instructive discussion of hermeneutical problems of the theology of the concept of *verbum*.)

¹⁶⁶Since Gadamer's criticism of Aristotle's explanation is rather safeguarded at this point, I will take a slightly different, yet more explicit approach in the following presentation. The essence of Gadamer's criticism will nonetheless be preserved in this.

tory strong point: “Das Bild ist uns wichtig, weil es das entscheidende Moment am Wesen der Erfahrung illustriert. Wie alle Bilder hinkt es. Aber das Hinken eines Bildes ist nicht ein Mangel, sondern die Kehrseite der abstraktiven Leistung, die es vollbringt. Das aristotelische Bild von dem fliehenden Heer hinkt, sofern es eine schiefe Voraussetzung macht. Es geht ja davon aus, daß es vor dieser Flucht einen Stand gegeben hätte. Das gilt natürlich für das, was hier verbildlicht werden soll, das Zustandekommen des Wissens, nicht.”¹⁶⁷

What Gadamer points out here is so plain that he does not even bother to explain the issue: The presupposition that underlies the analogy that before chaos gained control the army was under command -was in a static state of order- does not extend to the case of the acquisition of knowledge. It is wrong, and cannot be maintained. The acquisition of empirical knowledge is (at least for the Non-Platonist) not a matter of reorganization, or the recovery of some pre-stabilized order, as the metaphor of the reconfiguration of the army suggests. It is a genuinely innovative process, without any precedent whatsoever. Acquiring experience, or knowledge of something on the basis of experience, means to get to know something that you did not know before. -Your epistemic state transforms from ignorance to knowledge.¹⁶⁸

But although the matter as such does not need any further elaboration, the broader issue is by far not yet exhausted with this. In criticizing the Aristotelian analogy for this Gadamer actually aims at the idea that in the step from ignorance to knowledge something establishes from nothing. -Being in a state of ignorance does not imply the absence of any epistemic attitude at all. When Gadamer argues that the acquisition of knowledge is not a linear phenomenon that would start from scratch, but that it is an essentially negative and context-dependent phenomenon, he aims indeed at the positivistic conception of experience as a teleological phenomenon.¹⁶⁹ He writes: “Wenn man nun, wie Aristoteles, das Wesen der Erfahrung nur im Blick auf die ‚Wissenschaft‘ denkt [- die allerdings nicht die ‚moderne‘ Wissenschaft ist, sondern ‚Wissen‘ -], dann simplifiziert man den Vorgang, in dem sie zustande kommt. Das Bild beschreibt zwar gerade diesen Vorgang, aber es beschreibt ihn unter vereinfachenden Voraussetzungen, die so nicht gelten. Als ob sich die Typik der Erfahrung widerspruchslos von selbst ergäbe! Aristoteles setzt hier das Gemeinsame, das in der Flucht der Beobachtungen zum Bleiben kommt und sich als

¹⁶⁷ *WM*, p. 358.

¹⁶⁸This seems to contradict the idea of a pre-understanding as the condition for understanding that Gadamer advocates. It will turn out that this is not the case.

¹⁶⁹This is also why Gadamer, despite the obvious impression, does not contradict the concept of pre-understanding.

Allgemeines herausbildet, immer schon voraus; die Allgemeinheit des Begriffs ist für ihn ein ontologisches Prius.”¹⁷⁰

While Gadamer is pretty explicit here, he is at the same time rather close mouthed, if not cryptic. -What Gadamer criticizes here is a subtlety. When he remarks that for Aristotle the generality of a concept is an ontological prius, he criticizes that Aristotle’s conception does not recognize the generality that eventually distinguishes an empirical phenomenon as an experience to *coevolve* with this empirical phenomenon. Rather than conceiving experience only to be inherently developing towards generality, Aristotle regards experience to be guided by generality.¹⁷¹ But if the concept of generality (resp. of order) is presupposed in an account of experience, then it is not an (empirical) epistemic concept -even though it will be empirically confirmed- but a dubious meta-physical category. (Just as the concept of the extrinsic telos.¹⁷²) As such it

¹⁷⁰ *WM*, p. 358.

¹⁷¹ Barnes’ commentary on the respective passage in the Posterior Analytics confirms Gadamer’s point of criticism in its generality. He comments on 100^a17 (that he translated as “for although you perceive...”): “This remark attempts to cope with an objection that has been in the air since 99^b35: the process Aristotle describes produces universals; but it starts from perception and perception is of particulars - how, then, can the gap between particulars and universals be jumped? Aristotle’s answer is that perception in fact gives us universals from the start (cf. *A* 31, 87^b29, [...]). He means that we perceive things *as* *As*; and that this, so to speak, lodges the universal, *A*, in our minds from the start - although we shall not, of course, have an explicit or articulated understanding of *A* until we have advanced to Stage (D). [‘Stage (D) represents concept-acquisition. But see Barnes (1994), p. 264/265 for a detailed discussion. D.B.] (It should be noted that this account is intended to hold for *all* perceivers: it is not peculiar to human perception, nor does it involve the intellect in any way. Even a fly sees an *F*.) Aristotle’s illustration is in some ways unfortunate. It is essential for him to pick an *infima species*, like *man*; for his task is to show how we climb the Porphyrean tree from *infima species* to *summum genus*. Yet it is not clear how we are to apprehend *man* in the first place. Aristotle’s theory of perception divides the objects of perception into two classes, essential and incidental (cf. *An B* 6). Essential objects are either proper to a given sense (e.g. colours to sight, sounds to hearing) or common (e.g. motion, shape, size). Incidental objects cover everything else; if *X* is an incidental object of perception, then I perceive *X* only if there is some essential object *Y* such that I perceive *Y* and *Y* is *X*. Individuals are the prime examples of incidental objects (*An B* 6, 418^a21; *Γ* 1, 425^a25). There is very little evidence for *man*, but what there is makes it an incidental object (*An Γ* 6, 430^b29); and it is in any case hard to see how *man* could be either a proper or a common sensible. *Man*, then, is not directly implanted in our minds by the senses, as Aristotle’s words in *B* 19 suggest; but in that case we need an account, which Aristotle nowhere gives, of how such concepts as *man* are derived from the data of perception.” (Barnes (1994), p. 266)

¹⁷² Note that the presupposition of an ontological prius that is assigned to the generality that characterizes the concept of a concept in the first place, the presupposition of a concept of order, and the postulate of a telos of experience (such as objectivity, stability, truth, etc.) are indeed *identical*. This is an important terminological variation that needs to be kept in mind,

is comprehended without (or before) being apprehended through experience. In Gadamer's eyes this is a misconception. Gadamer arguably takes the position that apprehension and comprehension of the generality of an experience go hand in hand with the process of experiencing. On the grounds of this idea the question that Gadamer brings up against Aristotle's conception is then how the assumption of an ontological prius -the presupposition of a concept of order- might be justified.

The criticism that Gadamer formulates at this point shall be reviewed now. Its presentation splits up in two parts: First, an evaluation of the methodological implications that are connected to the assumption of a prius, and second, an analysis of the tenability of such a presupposition itself. In both cases the conceptual framework that the analogy provides for defines the point of reference.

Analyzing thus the presupposition of a concept of order in the analogy in more detail, note first that with the postulate of a positive goal for experience such as a static and definite concept of order as the analogy suggests (or, more pompous, the idea of 'objective' ahistorical knowledge that underlies the whole conception), the notion is immediately (and trivially) conceived as a finalistic concept. Now, although this coheres with our intuition of reaching a steady and stable state in experience (and in interpretation) the following consequences must not be ignored: Stipulating a positive finale of experience means to commit to a guiding ideal for the process of acquiring empirical knowledge. The idea of order (that represents the concept of generality in the analogy) has then to be interpreted as a normative absolute: To gain the status of an experience any observation would have to confirm this presupposed concept.¹⁷³ Otherwise the telos can not be fulfilled. Thus conceived experience is defined as nothing but a goal-oriented, indeed goal-rational process (which renders the process of gaining experience (resp. interpreting) a matter of technical knowledge, not practical knowledge): You can legitimately say that you gained experience only once the telos is reached. In other words the postulate of a telos is nothing but a commitment to this goal. With that one is then further committed to the concept of confirmation as the ruling procedural scheme in gaining experience.

in order to avoid confusion that might arise in the following with regards to these notions being employed indiscriminately.

¹⁷³We will see that the 'degree' of absoluteness of experience is dependent on the degree of absoluteness (i.e. dogmatism) of the postulate of a telos: what is going to be established as experience will be absolute. -As absolute (and dogmatic) as the postulate of a goal for experience itself. This is what an extrinsic teleology is about. The telos defines delivers the measure for experience.

But this imposes a rather strong economical constraint on the process of experiencing and the acquisition of knowledge: Ideally gaining experience (acquiring knowledge) describes a linear process or trajectory (and this is what the confirmation and multiplication of the point of innovation in the end actually is all about), because every deviation from the presupposed ideal -all failure to confirm the telos- has to be regarded as an unproductive aberration from the norm. Put bluntly: A positive telos allows only for a positive constitution of empirical knowledge. But this denies that the essence of the point of innovation is of a negative nature: The innovation lies in the fact that within a stream of running individuals someone is no longer running anymore.

But thus conceived, one might indeed argue that experience represents a moment of stasis: Turning the initially completely accidental (hypothetical) into the well-founded stable (the 'factual') it merely signifies a consolidation of epistemic attitudes, but no real (propositional) proliferation or increase of epistemic content.¹⁷⁴ The dynamics in the acquisition of knowledge can thus not be accounted for. All questions regarding the genesis of the actual content of an experience remain unanswered in this. Moreover this immediately commits one also to a description of the process of experience as a linear phenomenon. Because all such an explanation revolves around is based on a positivistic postulate of some foundation of experience and on an explanation of how this basis might gain epistemic significance.

What all this sums up to is that the implications deriving from the postulate of a telos for the empirical task are rather far reaching, and theoretically not really attractive. Yet, it is only when assessing the tenability of the supposition of a teleological concept of experience itself that the idea of a teleology of experience turns out to be unsound as a whole. -Though against all intuition, because intuitively the idea of a telos is completely natural: Experience/interpretation is directed towards the attainment of a state of stability in knowledge and in interpretation. (This may either be the acquisition of objective knowledge or, in case of interpretation, the establishment of intersubjectivity.¹⁷⁵) The question is only what substantiates and justifies this intuition? Regarding the domination

¹⁷⁴The implied distinction of qualitative and quantitative aspects is suggestive, but problematic. Though the distinction of qualitative and quantitative aspects probably does not deliver an adequate description of epistemic matters here, it seems yet to explain the point in a way: One might regard verification as a qualitative transformation (from the hypothetical to the factual), while proliferation involves an element of quantitative gain. It is a switch in propositional attitudes, not an innovation of propositions.

¹⁷⁵I am thinking here in particular of Grice's theory of communication. But all instrumentalistic conceptions of language are teleological conceptions. -That is if one connects to the idea of a use of instruments also a what-for, -a goal or telos- of this use that is to be achieved.

of the idea of a final stable state/cause for experience it seems a pretty daring move to question this intuition.

-After all it may be assumed that the idea of a telos in terms of reaching stability in our experiences plays a major role not only for the constitution of an identity of what is experienced, but also for the constitution of the experiencing self itself. Yet doing so is not nearly as absurd as it may seem. The following argument will show that indeed a conception of experience does good not to be build on intuition: The presupposition of a concept of order (or whatever conception the idea of an extrinsic telos may find) is not defensible. Any such positive postulate is empirically unfounded, and indeed logically circular. (Here comes a fine twist of irony in Gadamer's argument to light.) To show this, not much of argumentative machinery is needed.

How could you justify the knowledge of an extrinsic telos? Certainly, within an empiricist framework the question seems rather odd, but the answer will show that it is not, because you cannot know this from experience. As it was introduced already, it is the problem of induction that stands in the way of a justification of such assertions.¹⁷⁶ Just because everyday the sun rises, you do not *know* that it will come up again also tomorrow. -All inductive generalizations that have an empirical base are hypothetical statements. And this holds in particular also for inductive generalizations about the nature of experience itself: The assertion that experience is teleological and that the telos of experience is knowledge is inductively generated with reference to experience. In as much as our knowledge of empirical things is acquired just so, viz. through experience, it is experience that proves its own reliability. But this means that all we can say in justification of the postulate of a telos of experience is that we know from experience that experience is directed towards knowledge (be that the acquisition of knowledge, or the establishment of intersubjectivity, or whatever).¹⁷⁷ But as a justification this is circular. The difficulty here is that statements about experience can only be based on experience.¹⁷⁸ -You cannot transcend experience

¹⁷⁶The problem is that the empirical sciences cannot be justified with reference to experience.

¹⁷⁷One might actually argue that as a simple hypothesis the postulate of a telos is wrong and empirically unfounded, and that its inaccuracy is indeed proven by basic experience: Experience more often than not establishes just our ignorance. It demonstrates that we do not know, and that the things are different than we thought we knew.

¹⁷⁸The postulate of an a priori concept of order as the telos of experience renders the analogy's rationale circular (whether or not such an *a priorism* may actually be imputed to be Aristotle shall not be of interest here): Making this presupposition would mean to presuppose what after all only through experience could be acquired. Experience then would only have to confirm an already existing concept, and not generate this concept. Broadly put, the idea of world would have been established even before the experiencer would have had a chance

in such statements. But, if you postulate a general statement about experience, defining a telos for experience, and thus rendering experience a finalistic notion -a means to an end- you do transcend experience.

In this the apodictic nature of the postulate of a telos clashes with the shaky epistemic foundations that the inductive routines of experience can deliver. The absolute that the definition of a telos sets is in fact nothing more than a hypothesis, a speculation. This means that the normativity of the telos is rendered very weak, to say the least. What is a norm for, that is only a norm under proviso? The problem of induction -just as the problem of the methodological indeterminacy of the goal- touches with this upon the question whether it is reasonable at all to pursue a teleological approach in the conception of experience. In a way the formulation of the theory contradicts what it describes: The goal that a teleology defines lacks the positive base or absoluteness that is ascribed to it in theory. -Not only can we not say, what the telos actually is, and when it is fulfilled, but we moreover cannot even say with absoluteness that there actually exists some such thing as a telos at all. Certainly, the demand for objectivity in theory that seems to underlie this reproach is as misconceived as the idea of an objective of experience. -Theories are speculation.¹⁷⁹ But not every speculation delivers a good theory. And an explanation of experience in terms of a teleology is not good theory. It is the general argument against all teleologies that delivers also the knock-down argument against the approach in question: The idea of experience as a teleological phenomenon is a circular projection, the concept of stability in empirical knowledge wishful thinking.¹⁸⁰ The thesis that experience is destined to eventually result in knowledge defines experience in terms of its imputed result. Assuming before and beyond all experienceability a beginning and an end, any teleological theory of experience is at its core metaphysics. It presupposes what it sets out to describe: a finale. -Be that the concept of order or what have you, this is a theoretically indefensible ascription. This holds not only of the Aristotelian analogy, but also of the empirical sciences as a whole, revealing the non-scientific, dogmatic foundations of these.¹⁸¹

to confront the empirical world that presents itself to her. Thus, the idea of an *a priori* concept of order as the telos of experience is misconceived and disqualifies itself: It is circular. The question whether Gadamer follows Kant and pursues the general idea of a *synthetic a priori* shall be left open, but note that in Gadamer's concept tradition and prejudices, or, in Heideggerian terminology, the hermeneutical *Existenzialien*, take the place of the *a priori*.

¹⁷⁹This holds of course also for Gadamer's conception. And he is well aware of this.

¹⁸⁰That Gadamer's objections against a teleological description stresses its circularity may seem somewhat ironic.

¹⁸¹An important pattern in the self-justification of the conception of the empirical sciences is a teleological argument: The response to the question why compared to other endeavors the

4.3.5 The negative nature of experience: Hegel

That Gadamer actually makes this point becomes clear only in a critical remark about Hegel. (His discussion of Aristotle is at this point so cryptic that only after he turns to Hegel it becomes clear that indeed the same argument applies to the metaphor of the fleeing army.¹⁸²) When Hegel sets the idea of absolute self-knowledge as the goal of all experience he postulates what is only yet to be achieved through experience. Knowing for certain that absolute (self-) knowledge defines the telos of experience would actually mean to have reached absolute (self-)knowledge, and to have thus the telos fulfilled. But this is not the case. The postulate is an unfounded, speculative statement. -Like any postulate of a telos. Thus, it is not only the methodological justification that renders the teleological interpretation of experience problematic, but it is the very postulate of a telos itself that is untenable. It is exactly this feature that leads Gadamer to deny that we could justifiably assert some general statement that identifies a final cause (be that knowledge, or truth, or meaning/interpretation) for the concept of experience.

But this short critical remark aside Hegel represents in the present context the most important positive inspiration for Gadamer's approach to the notion of experience.¹⁸³ Yet, before focussing on this, a last critical point shall be discussed. While the arguments presented so far were rather general, this last point is more specific. It is the concept of order that Aristotle presupposes that will be the focus now. The fact that the notion of order is not explicated in the analogy (or in the presentation), but kept entirely vague does not represent a drawback. Indeed, the concept is highly interesting independent of the level of its description. Already in its most rudimentary form plays the notion a crucial role when it comes to explicate the difference between a teleological and a teleonomical conception of experience. In both conceptions the notion of order may be interpreted as a key concept: In either case it allows us to conceive the notion of experience as directed. -But in the teleonomical interpretation of the notion of order the fallacies of the teleological conception can be avoided. This may be explained as follows: Presupposing a concept of order (the idea

empirical sciences ought to be regarded as a superior form of inquiry, being that they deliver 'objective', empirically comprehensible results.

¹⁸²Interestingly this criticism of Hegel appears only in *WM*, and not in the other places where Gadamer also refers to the analogy.

¹⁸³Cf. *WM* p. 359: "Für das dialektische Moment an der Erfahrung ist uns nun nicht mehr Aristoteles, sondern *Hegel* ein wichtiger Zeuge. In ihm gewinnt das Moment der Geschichtlichkeit sein Recht. Er denkt die Erfahrung als den sich vollbringenden Skeptizismus." (Italics in the original.)

of objectivity) as the telos of experience is not only metaphysical speculation, but it means to conceive the notion of order (the telos) not as the result of an evolutionary process (viz. the process of experience itself.) As such the concept is conceived as ahistorical, and as objective even before its objectivity could be verified by experience.¹⁸⁴ In order to avoid committing to Platonism, or the circularity of an *a priorism* in a theory of experience, one has to make the ‘measure’ of experience dependent on experience itself. -Or else one pursues the idea of a normative absolute that cannot be empirically justified.¹⁸⁵

Since the directedness of experience is explainable in terms of the concept of order, also the notion of order must inherently be reflexive. To solve this problem you make the measure of experience dependent on experience itself. This means that the concept of order is conceived as relative to its own history or context: It is measured with respect to earlier stages of organization (earlier experience), each state being defined by simple difference (of what is experienced). Someone no longer running within a general flee is an innovation, and as such immediately distinct. The incremental increase of this pattern is distinct in quality from the preceding general situation, while -and this is important to be noted- it is also distinct (in quality) from the point of innovation itself. -Even though the general pattern that evolves from this point is perpetuated: A single man no longer running in a stream of fleeing individuals is distinct (a one-man army so to say), while a handful of soldiers no longer running is distinct from a single man not running (and from those to still run, and the initial situation of all men running), and more of an army than a one-man army, or than all men fleeing, etc. ‘Order’ is thus no longer conceived as a static, ahistorical absolute idea. Once experience is conceived as self-reflexive, as dependent on

¹⁸⁴The metaphysical assumptions that common empiricism is committed to qua describing a teleology find a clear formulation in the following, if read sensibly in this respect: “Der Erfahrungsbegriff des Empirismus erscheint als einfache und deshalb zuverlässige Bestimmung des Anfangs unseres Wissens von der Welt. Sein Eigentümliches besteht freilich nicht so sehr darin, daß er das Wissen bei der Wahrnehmung der Dinge anfangen läßt, sondern darin, daß die Relation Subjekt-Objekt darin als absolut einsinnige vorgestellt wird, in der das Subjekt ausgeklammert bleibt. Erfahrung heißt demgemäß nichts anderes, als den Gegenstand, das Ding, seine Eigenschaften so ”wissen“, daß in dieses Wissen die Strukturen des Wissens selbst nicht mit eingehen. Der Empirismus meint in der Erfahrung die radikalste Stellung des Subjekts zum Objekt vorzustellen, in der das Subjekt sich das Besondere des jeweiligen Gegenstandes ”rein“ geben läßt. Die Besonderheit ist dieserart dem ”Wissen“ Garant seiner Gewißheit und Wahrheit. Das Unmittelbare, noch Begrifflose, soll sein das Gewisseste. Als solches wird Erfahrung zum ersten und letzten Kriterium von Wahrheit und Gewißheit.” (Kessler, Schöpf, & Wild (1973), p.375.)

¹⁸⁵The problems of this conception had been discussed at length already: In order to count as an experience an experience would have to fulfill the postulated telos.

itself, its own history becomes the decisive factor in the acquisition of knowledge. The subject/object-distinction that the teleological conception of experience perpetuates is thus abandoned. When experience is characterized in terms of experience, experience is no longer described as a means to an end, but as an end in itself. -It is described as a teleonomical concept.

What the explanation in terms of the analogy builds on is the consciousness of experience of itself *and* of its own evolution or history. The dynamics of experience as an immediate phenomenon within a context finds here its theoretical impact.¹⁸⁶ -And this is exactly what characterizes the concept: Experience builds on experience. The immediacy of experience and of its history to the experiencer (which is just another aspect of the self-reflexivity of the phenomenon) translates to the most important concept of Gadamerian hermeneutics: The *wirkungsgeschichtliche Bewußtsein* and its *Konkretisierung*. In the following I turn to give a more detailed account of the concept of the *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*, and of the idea of negation as the dynamic impelling force of Gadamer's hermeneutical conception of experience.

That those issues that the discussion centered on so far remain in the focus, but only the perspective is shifted becomes clear from the quotes from *Wahrheit und Methode* that are to follow. They illustrate the hermeneutical conception of experience as an alternative to common empiricism. With the preceding discussion in mind as a preparation substance and motivation of this criticism should be more recognizable. Gadamer's criticism of mainstream empiricism and the teleological interpretation of experience peaks in the following objection: "Wird [...] Erfahrung auf ihr Resultat hin betrachtet, so wird damit der eigentliche Prozeß der Erfahrung übersprungen. Dieser Prozeß nämlich ist ein wesentlich negativer."¹⁸⁷ The idea of experience as a positive capacity finds here its antithetical answer: It is the nullifying potential of the process of experience that Gadamer emphasizes. Countering in particular positivistic tendencies in the conception of experience he continues the above characterization of the process of experience: "Er [the process of experience] ist nicht einfach als die bruchlose Herausbildung typischer Allgemeinheiten zu beschreiben. Diese Herausbildung geschieht vielmehr dadurch, daß ständig falsche Verallgemeinerungen durch die Erfahrung widerlegt, für typisch Gehaltenes gleichsam enttypisiert

¹⁸⁶When conceived as a self-referential, self-generating phenomenon, the context in which experience is embedded is of course provided by experience itself. Consequently experience is rendered a potentially (ideally) infinite phenomenon, with just one eventual bound: Time. In this respect the topic studied here complies with the basic theme that Heidegger discusses in *Sein und Zeit*.

¹⁸⁷WM, p. 358 - 359.

wird [...]. Das prägt sich schon sprachlich darin aus, daß wir in einem doppelten Sinne von Erfahrung sprechen, einmal von den Erfahrungen, die sich unserer Erwartung einordnen und sie bestätigen, sodann aber von der Erfahrung, die man ‚macht‘. Diese, die eigentliche Erfahrung, ist immer eine negative.”¹⁸⁸ When Gadamer insists here that experience (and thus epistemic progress) is to be described as non-linear, he challenges not only the conception of the acquisition of empirical knowledge as a one-dimensional linear (monotonous) phenomenon with confirmation as its essence, but also the idea that experience could directly determine a positive finale (which is just what the conception of an extrinsic telos proposes).¹⁸⁹ Everything that experience could positively generate or identify are mere hypotheses. In this it is nothing more than a mode of speculation. But a mode of speculation with a particularity that eventually distinguishes it from metaphysical speculation: Experience provides for its own corrective. -Experience itself. It not only provides for confirmation, but experience may establish negative evidence just as well. And while confirmation lacks the potential of ultimate objectification, negation is -at least for the realist (and Gadamer is a realist in this respect¹⁹⁰)- indeed determinate and absolute: It is the normative powers of the factual from which the binding force of negation derives from, and that renders negative experience as eventually irrevocable within the situational context.¹⁹¹ (Put phenomenologically, it is the things that (directly) impose themselves on the experiencer via negative experience.¹⁹² Thus, negation achieves an immediate facticity that confirmation in

¹⁸⁸ *WM*, p. 359.

¹⁸⁹What Gadamer stresses here may seem more or less a commonality. Yet, when *Wahrheit und Methode* appeared in 1960 it was not, but represented a debatable point. It suggests itself to draw the parallel from the position Gadamer sketches here to other ‘critical’ or ‘fallibilistic’ philosophical conceptions. One such is recognized by Gadamer, when he mentions Popper’s *Logik der Forschung* in a footnote (though without failing to stress the difference of his ideas with the methodologically and logically more meticulous efforts of Popper. (Cf. *WM*, footnote 299, p. 359))

¹⁹⁰Two things need to be noted in this connection: First, the question what kind of realism Gadamer adheres to cannot be discussed here in detail. It is a highly interesting, but also highly intricate issue. Second, note that it is not clear whether the supposition of a reality does or does not represent an implicit extrinsic telos for experience.

¹⁹¹We will see later, that this qualification is a necessary one.

¹⁹²Note that in this conception the role of the experiencer is completely passive: It is ultimately not in the powers of the experiencer to gain experience. Whenever reality forces itself unprovokedly on the experiencer, the experiencer actually falls subject to the objects of experience. -The idea of the experiencer as an (empirical) *agent* is thus eliminated. It suffices to be exposed to the empirical world, to gain experience. Thus, the requirements on the experiencer’s rational capabilities are less demanding, than in the case where the validity of an experience first needs to be proven via (experimental) repetition. This allows to conceive

its ongoing need for authentication could never reach.) To gain an experience means that wrong (empirical) hypotheses and expectations (for which Gadamer uses the metaphor of the *horizon*) find their (empirical) corrective.¹⁹³ Or, in Gadamer's words: "Wenn wir an einem Gegenstand eine Erfahrung machen, so heißt das, daß wir die Dinge bisher nicht richtig gesehen haben und nun besser wissen, wie es damit steht."¹⁹⁴ What is articulated here seems intuitively compelling and indeed rather conventional. But it is not. On the contrary. The issue is by far more involved than a first or superficial reading might suggest. Actually, taking this particular quote as a starting point nothing less than what might be called Pandora's conceptual box is opened up in the following discussion. -That is if one does not become oblivious to the particularities that are so characteristic of Gadamer's philosophy. Once these are kept in mind, the matter turns out to be extremely dense. Not only are major themes (and problems) of Gadamer's conception of hermeneutics derivable from this quote and the passages it is embedded in, but also large (systematic and historical) philosophical distinctions may be linked to the topics that are touched upon. In all this it is mostly epistemological and ontological issues that will have to be recalled or brought to attention.

We will depart from what is the point of concentration for Gadamer in the quote just given: The epistemological dynamics that are connected to the

the experiencer's rationality to be *bounded*. But note also that thus not only the classical phenomenological motto *Zu den Sachen selbst!* is reversed (because the things are in a certain respect inevitable anyway), but that in this the concept of experience parallels that of understanding: Both are eventually attained largely involuntarily and are not within command of the subject. (That both phenomena indeed coincide will be discussed later on.) The only aspect in which the experiencer may be regarded to be in command of experience is not a procedural, but an attitudinal aspect: It is in the responsibility of the experiencer to recognize a negative experience as such and not to ignore it. -The experiencer is in command of the attitude with which experiences are confronted. In other words, the *openness* of the experiencer for further experience is the only aspect of experience that the experiencer is in command of. This is actually pretty similar to the ethical task, with which the discussion of the hermeneutical task as a self-referential, self-generating task was opened up with. If you fail to recognize the significance of your experiences, then the concept of experience will lose its normative powers.

¹⁹³Note that here confirmation and negation as the ways of experience have to be regarded as asymmetric in their epistemic import: While the inductive schemes of confirmation generate genuine (propositional) content -though only in form of hypotheses-, negation is not hypothetical, but absolute, without being genuinely procreative (because it does not generate the propositions it applies to). -The possibility of negation is dependent on the existence of negatable content (provided by prejudices and pre-understanding).

¹⁹⁴*WM*, p. 359. Note that when Gadamer speaks here of 'objects' of experience this does not imply that he accepts just as in classical empiricism a clear subject/object-distinction. This is an issue that will be elaborated in more detail later on.

‘knowing better than before’ that negative experience generates. He continues to comment on the effects that negative experience exerts: “Die Negativität der Erfahrung hat [...] einen eigentümlich produktiven Sinn. Sie ist nicht einfach eine Täuschung, die durchschaut wird und insofern eine Berichtigung, sondern ein weitgreifendes Wissen, das erworben wird.”¹⁹⁵ But how could you explain that the epistemic impact of negation indeed goes beyond a simple ‘rectification’, i.e. revision or-reorganization, of the experienter’s knowledge, but moreover represents a real, productive (qualitative) transformation of the epistemic state of the individual? The answer is rather simple: Revealing the factual inadequacy of what was regarded to be established empirical knowledge, the individual that falls subject to (‘makes’) a negative experience actually gains knowledge: Negative experience relates always to putative knowledge, which thus undergoes a process of reflection. You get to know that you did not know, that things are different than you thought you knew. In other words, you thus acquire a more *realistic* and correct (though arguably less comprehensive) understanding of the empirical world. These are the positive (and definite) aspects of negative experience.¹⁹⁶ In this negative experience is not only true dialectics¹⁹⁷, but gains also the Aristotelian trait of *self-knowledge*. And indeed, the idea of experience as Gadamer conceives it -and with it also the idea of epistemic progress- is inevitably self-referential.

How important a feature self-referentiality in epistemological hindsight actually is becomes clear when Gadamer gives the following short summary of his concept of negative experience: “In der Tat ist [...] Erfahrung zunächst immer Erfahrung der Nichtigkeit. Es ist nicht so, wie wir annahmen. Angesichts der Erfahrung, die man an einem anderen Gegenstand macht, ändert sich beides, unser Wissen und sein Gegenstand. Man weiß nun anders und besser, und d.h.: Der Gegenstand selbst ”hält nicht aus“. Der neue Gegenstand enthält

¹⁹⁵ *WM*, p. 359.

¹⁹⁶Two remarks on this are in order here: Note first how well the Socratic *doctra ignorantia* befits Gadamer’s hermeneutics here. And secondly, note that as a consequence of negative experience the question *How are things then, if my conception of them is wrong?* immediately opens up. Ignorance -whenever consciously reflected, or is consciously realized- becomes then motivation and productive principle of understanding: It is exactly the appealing force (the imperative demands) of this open question that generates the need for further inquiry and interest. Indeed, if anything, it is this trait that defines sum and substance of Gadamerian hermeneutics. Here it comes to light that negation invokes the self-generating powers of experience. This is a matter that will concern us in a moment.

¹⁹⁷Cf. *WM*, p. 359, where Gadamer remarks on the specific character of a negation that effectuates an increase in knowledge: “Die Negation, kraft deren sie das leistet, ist eine bestimmte Negation. Wir nennen diese Art der Erfahrung *dialektisch*.” (Italics in the original.)

die Wahrheit über den alten.”¹⁹⁸ Thus conceived (negative) experience may roughly be described as the confrontation of two epistemic ‘objects’, one being a challenger to the other. The former is of course new experience (in form of an innovation), the latter being established experience (more generally: *understanding*) and the expectations that connect to it.¹⁹⁹ The ‘new’ contradicts the ‘old’, and proves it to be inadequate. Its factual insufficiency revealed, the empirical content of knowledge eventually evolves, and a new state of understanding and consciousness is reached.²⁰⁰ Referring always to what is expected and supposedly known or understood, the point of orientation for experience is experience itself.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ *WM*, p. 360. The truth of which Gadamer speaks here is that the new ‘object’ reveals the old ‘object’ to be void. See also the *Phänomenologie des Geistes (Einleitung)*, for this, where Hegel brings the issue to the point: “Dieser neue Gegenstand enthält die Nichtigkeit des ersten, er ist die über ihn gemachte Erfahrung.” (cited after Hegel (1952), p. 73) (The coincidence of formulations here shows just how indebted Gadamer to Hegel is.) The point is also discussed (and quite clearly so) by Hegel in the whole of the *Einleitung* (cf. Hegel (1952)).

¹⁹⁹ At another place Gadamer remarks about the complex: “Es kann [...] nicht ein beliebig aufgelesener Gegenstand sein, an dem man eine Erfahrung macht, sondern er muß so sein, daß man an ihm ein besseres Wissen nicht nur über ihn, sondern über das, was man vorher zu wissen meinte, also über ein Allgemeines gewinnt.” (Cf. *WM*, p. 359) The connection that Gadamer draws here between the particular and the general is an ever occurring concern of his hermeneutics.

²⁰⁰ This is an idealization in several respects: Actually the new initially just calls the old into question, and thus provokes the reassessment of the experiencer’s understanding. In either case -be it that the experiencer’s knowledge turns out to be inadequate, or that it is confirmed- the result of this reconsideration is epistemologically significant: It indicates how the confrontation of the two objects resolves. But note that if the innovation succeeds over the old in this ‘contest’, this is not a guarantee that it does have an effect on the experiencer’s understanding. In face of ignorance the so called ‘normative powers of the factual’ may turn out to be completely powerless. Besides this another issue needs to be attended to. It indeed highlights a really important point of Gadamer’s conception: The ‘nullification’ of earlier experience by negative experience does not imply that this experience becomes obsolete or epistemologically insignificant. -Gaining negative experience does not mean that you burn the epistemical bridges that you traveled on: As constitutive part of the historical dimension of consciousness it remains part of the empirical knowledge acquired.

²⁰¹ This is obvious (only the repercussions of this are not), but it still is worth to be stressed, because the difference between the self-referential concept of negative experience and the linear conception of a teleological approach is illustrated by this once more: In the latter case the telos of experience is not experience. And indeed gaining experience is only possible whenever there exists a point of reference that provides an orientation, and that thus structures the process of experience. This theme is common to both conceptions of experience that are under discussion here. Only that the classical approach explains the directedness of experience in terms of a telos that has yet to be reached, while the point of reference for experience in the hermeneutical interpretation is what is already established. Actually one might object

More precisely the innovation that represents the turning point in the process of experience is an innovation because it is an instance of negation of some generalization established by earlier experience. What Gadamer argues here for is exactly what in the analogy of the fleeing army is ignored, although it defines the actual quintessence of it too. (But sometimes what is the most obvious escapes recognition just for being all too apparent.) The metaphor disregards that the general pattern that the army's coming to a halt describes only replaces another preceding general pattern: The army fleeing. Without this context, the first man halting would not represent the point of distinction it actually does personify, and which is eventually progressively confirmed, and ultimately develops into another (dominating) general pattern itself. The innovation that represents the turning point in the process of experience is an innovation because it is an instance of negation of the empirical status quo. Certainly repetition and confirmation are absolutely necessary components in the formation of experience, but before they could even come into effect, there simply has something to be there to be confirmed: A point of distinction. And this point of distinction, this point of reference, is to be an innovation in the present, 'old' context. What the analogy wrongly suggests is that experience could be regarded independent of its own context. But experience is identifiable as such only because it negates earlier experience. In this sense experience turns out to be context-dependent. -The abstract idea of a telos cannot generate experience: There is no metaphysical concept from which the concept of experience is derivable. This means that everything experience delivers is dependent on, and influenced by, experience itself. Experience generates experience.

in favor of a teleology that the negative conception is circular, because here the foundation for experience is experience itself. But the argument backfires: While in case of the negative conception experience structures itself with reference to *facts* (in that new experience always is oriented at, and in fact *applies to* actual, already established experience), the teleological conception describes experience with reference to an abstract, hypothetical norm: Assuming that experience is directed towards the acquisition of 'knowledge', or 'truth', or 'stability' (or whatever label one might give the telos), and thus explaining the notion in terms of the source/aim-relation, nothing more than what is only a metaphysically obscure, yet to be established ideal of experience is exploited. As such it is mere speculation. Thus the classical approach may in sum be regarded as empirically weaker and theoretically even less attractive than the hermeneutical alternative. The advantages of a self-referential conception over a linear conception are plain: Not only is the foundation here a positive one, but that what a teleological conception elevates to an ideal is here immanent and in fact inevitable: The things organize and establish themselves. They do not need to be pursued. Ironically the concept of negative experience turns out to be oriented more at what is factual than the positivistic teleologies with which experience is described otherwise. -Not to mention that the positivistic teleologies are circular themselves, since they presuppose what they set out to describe.

In this it also becomes clear how negation as the driving force of experience and the concept of the *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein* are connected: Being ‘disillusioned’ by negative experience the experiencer becomes conscious of what s/he was not conscious of before. Thus not only a higher state of consciousness is activated, but also a more realistic understanding of the world is gained. Indeed, only through negation a consciousness of a before and after (and thus the consciousness of experience as a structured phenomenon) is realized at all: The induced shift in the empirical status exerts a shift in the empirical consciousness, generating thus the historical dimension of consciousness. And this immediacy of consciousness and its own history is exactly what Gadamer means when he speaks of *die Konkretisierung des wirkungsgeschichtlichen Bewußtseins*. -At least on an elementary level: Note that the portrayal of the notion of the *wirkungsgeschichtlichen Bewußtseins* so far is a reduction that does not exhaust the concept’s full ambiguity. Pointing out that negation induces the idea of a before and after in the experiencer, the description is confined to the *temporal* unfolding of experience (resp. consciousness) alone. The actual *historical* dimension of the complex is not fully captured by this and still remains to be explained.²⁰² When considering what implications the notion of the *wirkungsgeschichtliche Bewußtsein* in this respect has, it is of course the adjective *wirkungsgeschichtlich* that will take the center of attention. But note that at least with regard to the adjective’s initial constituent most of the explanatory work has already been done: Since negative experience induces a change of consciousness and a revision of knowledge in the experiencer, its characterization here as *effectual* is not idiodynamic, but indeed justified.

However, a short comment shall be added: Realizing that one’s knowledge needs to be revised presupposes that such knowledge actually exists. This means that negation is effective only insofar it confronts a negatable background to which it could apply. Negative experience is on this account not only effectual, but is itself in a certain sense effectuated. The scheme of self-referentiality thus prevails also here: There is no consciousness (of negative experience) without consciousness (of what is negated).

This is actually a rather important aspect to be noted, because at this point the historical dimension of experience gains actual substance: Since the background that is negated is the product of the experiencer’s empirical history, (negative) experience -and thus also consciousness- is indeed conditional on its own history. -Negation thus not only structures experience (and conscious-

²⁰²The following is in parts inspired by Anacker & Baumgartner (1973), pp. 547-557.

ness²⁰³) temporally, but it actually also confirms its character as a historically conditioned phenomenon. Indeed, efficacy and historicity are inseparable in this conception. In this sense experience is thus indeed a *wirkungsgeschichtliches* phenomenon. Yet, the matter is not exhausted with this. The idea of the *Wirkungsgeschichtlichkeit* of experience is conceptually more involved than this. Conceiving experience as a historically conditioned phenomenon in the way just described means to connect to it at the same time the idea of historical continuity: Because it determines the range of what could possibly be negated -and thus what could possibly be experienced-, the empirical history of the experiencer is constitutive of (and determinate for) both, present and future of experience.²⁰⁴ In other words: Something past remains -despite being past- still effective and significant. This idea of continuity is what the description of negative experience in the temporal terms of 'before' and 'after' cannot reflect: It captures solely the dynamics that designates a change in empirical content and epistemic states. It cannot explain that the succession of these antagonistic states constitutes nonetheless a continuum: The unbroken and enduring consciousness of the experiencer.

At the end of this rather condensed discussion that was initially confined to sketch the semantic import of just the notion of the *Wirkungsgeschichtlichkeit* it is the idea of the *Konkretisierung des wirkungsgeschichtlichen Bewußtseins* that gained more clarity *in toto*. Only one last trait of this concept shall further be highlighted. It is actually the point at which the concept cumulates in its *Konkretisierung*: If experience (as a mode of consciousness) defines its own point of reference, then gaining experience -i.e. epistemic progress and evolution- turns into a moment of accomplished self-reflection. It thus becomes clear that the negative schemes of self-referentiality in connection with the idea of historicity just described gives rise to holism.

In the following quotation Gadamer gives one of the most lucid explanation of the concept of the *wirkungsgeschichtlichen Zusammenhang* in terms of experience as a self-referential phenomenon and correlative or complement to self-consciousness: "Zwar gehört zur Erfahrung, daß sie sich immer wieder bestätigt. Erst durch die Wiederholung wird sie gleichsam erworben. Aber als die wiederholte und bestätigte Erfahrung wird sie nicht mehr neu ‚gemacht‘. Wenn man eine Erfahrung gemacht hat, so heißt das, man besitzt sie. Man sieht von nun an das ehemals Unerwartete voraus. Das gleiche kann einem nicht noch ein-

²⁰³Both notions will be taken to be synonymous.

²⁰⁴One might argue that under this aspect the concept of the empirical Being correlates with Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* as a *Being-towards-possibilities*.

mal zu neuer Erfahrung werden. Nur ein anderes Unerwartetes kann dem, der Erfahrung besitzt, eine neue Erfahrung vermitteln. So hat sich das erfahrene Bewußtsein umgekehrt - nämlich auf sich selbst zugekehrt. Der Erfahrende ist sich seiner Erfahrung bewußt geworden - er ist ein Erfahrener. So hat er einen neuen Horizont gewonnen, innerhalb dessen ihm etwas zur Erfahrung werden kann.”²⁰⁵ The scheme of self-reference and self-generation that provides the conceptual backbone of Gadamer’s description here of consciousness as a reproductive ‘routine’ with the unfamiliar, or unexpected -i.e. negation, or, just as suiting, negative feedback- as its driving force had already been encountered before e.g. in the conception of being as a practical Being, and the discussion of the problem of application in the ethical task. The latter case may suffice to illustrate the apparent parallel: Just as the application of a moral norm is not only itself a moral affair, but also a matter of maintaining the concept of morality intact, experience in the hermeneutical conception not only builds on experience, but becomes the condition for maintaining the possibility to further experience at all.²⁰⁶ -Through acquiring experience the experiencer remains ‘open’ for experience, just as by behaving morally the ethical frame of reference at which future action may be assessed is maintained. In this the idea of a universal hermeneutics that is formulated in *Wahrheit und Methode* gains contour, revealing an identical structure in Gadamer’s conception of otherwise apparently rather divergent realms.

Actually, the parallel just highlighted is by far not yet exhausted with this and may be fruitfully explored further. Note that a theme from the discussion of technical vs. practical knowledge reappears in the formulation that Gadamer chooses to characterize the advancement of knowledge through negation: Just as the proper, situationally adequate application of a moral maxim will give you not simply a better, but a more *just* understanding of the concept of morality and the imperative demands it puts forward qua being an ethical norm²⁰⁷,

²⁰⁵ *WM*, p. 359. On this account it then turns out that the notion of scientific experience is a normative fiction, for, as Gadamer remarks also, it is strictly speaking impossible to have the same experience twice: “Wir sahen ja, daß die Erfahrung, die einer macht, sein ganzes Wissen verändert. Strenggenommen kann man dieselbe Erfahrung nicht zweimal ‚machen‘.” (*WM*, p. 359.)

²⁰⁶ Gaining experience may then be regarded as an empiricist *perpetuum mobile*.

²⁰⁷ Cf. again *WM* p. 323, where Gadamer contrasts the application of technical knowledge with the following remark about the peculiarities of the application of practical knowledge: “Dagegen ist die Lage bei dem, der das Recht ‚anwendet‘, eine ganz andere. Er wird zwar in der konkreten Lage von der Strenge des Gesetzes nachlassen müssen. Aber wenn er das tut, geschieht das nicht, weil es nicht besser geht, sondern weil es sonst nicht recht wäre. Indem er am Gesetze nachläßt, macht er also nicht etwa Abstriche am Recht, sondern er findet im

gaining negative experience means not just to gain a better or more realistic understanding of the empirical world, but moreover results in a more *realistic interpretation of experience itself*: Since negative experience applies to earlier experience, this earlier experience finds a more adequate assessment. And just as failing to recognize the demands of a moral principle endangers the concept of morality of becoming void of meaning (and the idea of a moral Being to perish), ignoring the normative powers of the factual, i.e. failing to recognize the significance and general applicability of an experience, endangers not only the experiencer's position in (and understanding of) the empirical world, but endangers also the self-concept of Being as an empirical Being. These are the existential aspects of the self-referential conception of experience.

In addition to this there is also an important epistemological aspect shall be pointed out briefly: When experience is defined as primarily the nullification of earlier experience, i.e. when experience is conceived as self-referential, it follows that what can be experienced is conditional on what experiences are already established. -There simply has to be something there to be negated. But this means that the empirical concepts that are possibly to be acquired become dependent on the theories that build our empirical knowledge. They define the epistemic framework the negation of which generates the dynamics of knowledge, because what cannot be negated cannot give rise to an experience.²⁰⁸ Experience becomes then context-dependent.²⁰⁹

With this we touch upon a number of essentials of classical empiricism, which the following quote summarizes (however condensed) rather well: "Der Erfahrungsbegriff des Empirismus erscheint als einfache und deshalb zuverlässige Bestimmung des Anfangs unseres Wissens von der Welt. Sein Eigentümliches besteht freilich nicht so sehr darin, daß er das Wissen bei der Wahrnehmung der Dinge anfangen läßt, sondern darin, daß die Relation Subjekt-Objekt darin als absolut einsinnige vorgestellt wird, in der das Subjekt ausgeklammert bleibt. Erfahrung heißt demgemäß nichts anderes, als den Gegenstand, das Ding, seine Eigenschaften so "wissen", daß in dieses Wissen die Strukturen des Wissens selbst nicht eingehen. Der Empirismus meint in der Erfahrung die radikalste

Gegenteil das bessere Recht." (Note that when Gadamer writes that by departing from the law a 'better' measure may be found, this implies that indeed a *nobler* measure is established.)

²⁰⁸Note that the same remark, holds also for the dogmatic position that does not allow questioning or criticism: What is not supposed to be, just cannot be. Dogmatism is in this sense a form of epistemological isolationism. Note further that in Gadamer's conception the limits of knowledge are (at least for the moment) implicitly defined by the knowledge already established.

²⁰⁹This puts Gadamer's position in a line with a number of conceptions in the philosophy of science that emphasize the theory dependency of our concepts.

Stellung des Subjekts zum Objekt vorzustellen, in der das Subjekt sich das Besondere des jeweiligen Gegenstandes "rein" geben läßt."²¹⁰ It is in confrontation with the doctrine sketched here that the import and repercussions of a self-referential conception of experience can be spread out the clearest.²¹¹ The contrast to the hermeneutical position of Gadamer turns out to be rather drastic: Indeed, every epistemological and ontological fundamental of classical empiricism that the quote maintains is abandoned in the hermeneutical concept of experience.²¹²

Turning first to differences in the respective epistemologies, it is the idea of objective knowledge that shall serve to illustrate the point once more. However, rather than recounting the contrast between the classical (teleological) empiricist doctrine which maintains the idea of objective (or exact, or certain) knowledge on one side (which is supposed to distinguish the empirical sciences from pseudo-science), and Gadamer's hermeneutical account, which revokes the idea, on the other side, the discussion will take a slightly different approach. It will focus on two topics intimately related to the issue at stake: (i) The structure of the formation of empirical knowledge, and (ii) the role that the relation of subject and object is assigned in it.

Considering first the account of classical empiricism as maintained in the quote, the following picture may be sketched: Taking experience to be the immediate manifestation of the objects of experience, the classical approach subsequently assumes that the acquisition of empirical knowledge involves no assistance, or mediation, and that it is independent of any contextual support. Rather it is the objects of experience themselves that positively determine their understanding.²¹³ This means that the structure of the acquired knowledge does not reflect anything more than purely the structure of the object of experience. (And if the empirical objects are static, ahistorical (definite) objects, then the knowledge of these objects is to be static, ahistorical (definite) just as well.) In particular, neither the structure of the process of its acquisition, nor the

²¹⁰Kessler, Schöpf & Wild (1973), p.375

²¹¹The critical scheme of the conception of experience is thus perpetuated on another level.

²¹²It is not only for this that the quote is quite remarkable: The quote appears to describe the importance that is assigned to the subject/object-distinction in classical empiricism with almost religious ardor. To see the point one needs just to substitute the term 'Erfahrung' with the notion of 'belief' in the citation, and you end up with a rather strong theological statement. This impression gains further substance, with the quote continuing as follows: "Die Besonderheit ist dieserart dem "Wissen" Garant seiner Gewißheit und Wahrheit. Das Unmittelbarste, noch Begrifflose, soll sein das Gewisseste. Als solches wird Erfahrung zum ersten und letzten Kriterium von Wahrheit und Gewißheit." (op. cit.)

²¹³This implies that what can be known is restricted by what objects there are.

conditions of this process are reflected in this knowledge.²¹⁴

-And sure enough all this eventually cumulates in the strict distinction of subject and object in this conception of experience. Indeed, the subject is relevant in this only insofar it constitutes the substrate (i.e. the material location) of knowledge. Other than that it does not play a role in experiencing: Substance, or content of the acquired knowledge are not constrained by the subject in any way. In this sense any understanding of the empirical objects is in fact immanent to the objects themselves, and the knowledge acquired really 'objective' knowledge. The relation of subject and object may then in fact be regarded as the 'most radical' as remarked in the quote.²¹⁵

Turning now to Gadamer's conception of experience as a self-referential, self-generating phenomenon the picture changes noticeably: The objects of experience are of course also under this interpretation epistemologically significant objects, but the hermeneutical conception maintains that our empirical knowledge is not defined by the objects of experience alone, but that our knowledge of empirical things is mediated: It is the confrontation of the objects of experience (i.e. reality) with what is supposedly known about these objects (i.e. what we take for reality) that generates empirical knowledge. Indeed, whenever experience is conceived as a self-referential, essentially negative phenomenon, the objects of experience cannot become positively manifest at their own. Instead, any understanding of the empirical things becomes dependent on the existence of an epistemic background that can possibly be negated in experience. (Which means that the objects cannot directly determine their understanding themselves.) -Recall that the formation of knowledge is due to the application of negative experience to already established knowledge: In confrontation with the empirical world, the experiencer consciously realizes that her interpretation of this world (in Gadamerian terminology: her pre-understanding and her prejudices) is indeed inadequate. But the loss is a gain, and epistemic regress, and epistemic progress correlate dialectically: The objects of experience gain contour in as much as the unsound epistemological background loses its normative conceptual appeal. This of course means that ultimately it is not what objects

²¹⁴Recall the quote stating: "Erfahrung heißt demgemäß nichts anderes, als den Gegenstand, das Ding, seine Eigenschaften so "wissen", *daß in dieses Wissen die Strukturen des Wissens selbst nicht eingehen.*" (My emphasis).

²¹⁵Since we are talking about the subject/object-relation with 'object' in the singular, the question is how a coherent idea of the empirical world is gained? Whenever it is isolated, dissociate objects of which experience is acquired, each experience gained will consequently also be an isolated, dissociate phenomenon. Any comprehensive knowledge of the empirical world could then only be gained through subsequent reflection.

are encountered, but on what background the empirical objects are confronted what defines the knowledge acquired. At this point it becomes clear once more, that empirical knowledge is conceived by Gadamer to be context-dependent.

Since the epistemic context that provides the background for the confrontation with the objects of experience is empirically acquired itself, ‘context-dependency’ here means that experience is conceived to build on experience.²¹⁶ It is then inevitable that it is the historical structure of experience that substantiates the thus acquired knowledge: Empirical knowledge becomes dependent on its record. Or, in other words, empirical knowledge is under this perspective rendered *relative to its own history*. This is the most important structural characteristic of the self-referential conception of experience. In this sense empirical knowledge is indeed *subjective* knowledge: The frame of reference for the interpretation of experience is defined by the individual history of the experiencer.²¹⁷ Or, formulated more pointedly: The individual’s epistemic background is what renders experience actually interpretable at all.²¹⁸ What aspects of an object can be known is dependent on what empirical knowledge the subject maintains. Without this context (or horizon), no experience could be gained. Hence, obviously, the concept of experience described is relativistic: Since any such epistemic background will be individually acquired, the experience actually gained on this background will be subjective. Yet, what form of relativism is propagated here requires some elaboration, because so far the idea of objective knowledge still remains very much compatible with what has been outlined. -At

²¹⁶If one only realizes that we are committed to the formulation of an *empirical* conception of experience, this observation is actually rather elementary.

²¹⁷But note that the experiencer figures here nonetheless as nothing more than the substrate for knowledge, because knowledge can only be acquired in the confrontation with reality, and this reality is independent of the subjects will. An instructive discussion of the complex can be found in Heath (1967), p. 157: “[T]he individual certainly does not create or invent his experience and in certain respects is powerless to alter it at will, it seems, therefore, equally undeniable that some part of it is simply “given” and is only thereafter subject to adulteration by its recipient. This given is generally referred to as the object of “bare” or “immediate” experience, in contrast to the more “solid” or developed experience of which it is held to be an essential ingredient. The legitimacy of the contrast is seldom, indeed, disputed, for though immediate experience has often been denounced as a myth, the usual motive for doing so has been to stigmatize it as a mere abstraction got by analysis and not something that could occur, psychologically, by itself. *All* experience, on this view, involves interpretation, and it is thus senseless to suppose any unvarnished, direct acquaintance with the given. But since it would be equally senseless to suppose an interpretation with nothing to interpret, it is commonly admitted that an “epistemic” given must nonetheless be present in experience, though impossible to view independently, since this would *ipso facto* be to construe it in some fashion under the auspices of thought.” Italics in the original.

²¹⁸Also here Gadamer’s historian argument applies.

least theoretically.

Now, what seems to be a paradox may be explained away rather easily. (And the matter is actually quite enlightening.) Maintaining experience as a historically conditioned, context-dependent phenomenon renders solely the interpretation of the empirical objects (i.e. the epistemic perspective on the empirical objects) relativistic, but not the objects themselves. -The conception that experience involves mediation gives only rise to *epistemic* relativism. Insofar are we talking about a comparatively weak form of relativism in connection with the hermeneutical concept of experience. Stronger forms of relativism that postulate a relativistic ontology and assume that different individuals may experience actually different realities are strongly rejected by Gadamer.²¹⁹ And as long as the underlying ontology -i.e. the objects that are experienced- are assumed to be invariant, the idea of objective knowledge could at least in principle be maintained: Once an empirical object is interpreted under all epistemological perspectives the knowledge acquired of this object may be regarded as absolute, and indeed objective. But note that solely by rejecting ontological relativism no such commitment to a particular nature of the empirical objects (and thus to the possibility of objective knowledge) has been made. Admitting the reality of one world and thus assuming the existence of a single ontology Gadamer is only committed to recognize that experience is in its directedness just oriented at, or coordinated by, this one world. -Which is quite unproblematic a statement.²²⁰ What the actual nature of the empirical entities is of which experience is gained is not specified at all by this.

Of course already the question what defines an epistemic perspective would represent a formidable problem for which a solution does not obviously impose itself²²¹, but it is even more principal (epistemological and ontological) considerations that lead Gadamer to eventually reject not only the teleological idea

²¹⁹For once Gadamer is remarkably clear and concise when it comes to demarcate his position in *Wahrheit und Methode*. This is a rather rich topic, but a short quote shall suffice here: "In jeder Weltansicht ist das Ansichsein der Welt gemeint. [...] Die Mannigfaltigkeit solcher Weltansichten bedeutet keine Relativierung der ‚Welt‘. Vielmehr ist, was die Welt selbst ist, nichts von den Ansichten, in denen sie sich darbietet, Verschiedenes." (*WM*, p. 451.)

²²⁰This is not only completely intuitive, but also has serious advantages for empirical theory: Avoiding a conceptual relativism with regards to the notion of experience itself -since we experience the world only in one way, there is only one type of experience-, allows for the formulation of harmonized empirical laws.

²²¹Not only because when talking about historical phenomena time is the essential factor that a perspective has to recognize (think of the paradox of historicism), but also because already the definition of what defines such an epistemological perspective leaves more options than theoretically desirable.

that experience could deliver (total) objective knowledge, but more generally already the concept of the subject/object-distinction.²²²

While Gadamer motivates his position with reference to Hegel, I will first sketch an alternative line of argument. This transcendental argument will remain rather vulgar, but it will render Gadamer's position²²³ (and the complex as a whole) more comprehensible. -Not only because it eventually reaches the same conclusion as Gadamer, but also because it does so for related reasons. The perspective is just slightly (though noticeably) shifted. This is where the following argument gains its merits from.

When opposing the idea of objective knowledge one may call a particularity of the subject/object-distinction into play that the classical empiricist doctrine largely passes over:²²⁴ The thesis of the subject/object-distinction renders experience implicitly a moment of self-reflection of the experiencing subject. The explanation is simple: Experiencing an empirical object means trivially (because this follows immediately from the postulate of the difference of subject and object in the subject/object-distinction) to experience the non-identity of this object with the experiencing subject. Hence, experience is immediately a reflective phenomenon.

But in how far this difference of subject and object may indeed be regarded as objective itself (and thus in how far experience may be regarded to deliver objective knowledge) is dependent on the subject's self-objectifying powers: As long as the idea that the subject has of itself remains indeterminate, also the difference of subject and object (with all its epistemological implications) remains indeterminate as well.

Going thus back to the idea of the subject in clarifying the conditions of the idea of objective knowledge as a possibility that could actually be realized absolutely, the problem at which the idea of objective knowledge ultimately fails -and this is also what Gadamer in his argumentation points out to, is that the subject simply cannot completely objectify itself. Hence, the distinction of subject and object cannot be drawn with absoluteness. And in as much as the subject's consciousness of itself -and in particular of its own epistemic horizon- is bounded, in as much is also the empirical knowledge that is acquired bounded. Thus the idea of objective knowledge eventually fails.

As was already mentioned, Gadamer takes a slightly different approach than the one just sketched. But although he falls back on Hegel as the most impor-

²²²Since both issues (the subject/object-distinction and the idea of objective knowledge) are intimately related, any discussion of these topics becomes rather involved.

²²³Gadamer is rather reserved when it comes to substantiate his position with details.

²²⁴The argument presented here is in parts inspired by Wagner (1973).

tant witness to motivate his position²²⁵, it is in its upshot exactly the idea of the boundedness of the subject's capacities that characterizes the transcendental argument, that leads Gadamer to reject the idea of epistemological objectivism. Gadamer summarizes his position in this respect with reference to Hegel's *Phänomenologie*²²⁶ as follows: "Er [so Gadamer on Hegel] hat in seiner ‚Phänomenologie des Geistes‘ gezeigt, wie das Bewußtsein, das seiner selbst gewiß werden will, seine Erfahrungen macht. Dem Bewußtsein ist sein Gegenstand das An-sich, *aber was An-sich ist, kann immer nur so gewußt werden, wie es sich für das erfahrende Bewußtsein darstellt*. So macht das erfahrende Bewußtsein eben diese Erfahrung: Das Ansich des Gegenstandes ist ‚für uns‘ an-sich [...]."²²⁷ Despite its Hegelian diction the line of argument that Gadamer adopts here remains fairly perspicuous. It may be summarized in a nutshell as follows: The idea of objective knowledge is misconceived, because the subject cannot transcend and thus objectively reflect on its own empirical history. And with the conceptual framework that defines the range of what is empirically conceivable not being objectifiable, also what is actually empirically conceived is not objectifiable. This means that experience -as the negation of the experiencer's empirical history- cannot deliver objective knowledge, because what is negated is actually subjective and cannot be transcended.²²⁸ The normative powers of the factual that the empirical objects exert are only so strong as the experiencer's conceptual horizon allows for. This means that in a certain sense the experiencer is seemingly blind to reality. -If only to the reality of its own Being to start with. This boundedness is in Gadamer's conception directly reflected in

²²⁵Gadamer remarks about Hegel's influence here: "Das ist der Punkt, an dem uns Hegel zu einem wichtigen Zeugen wird." (*WM*, p. 359)

²²⁶Cf. Hegel (1952), p.73

²²⁷*WM*, p.359/360. My emphasis. Note that it is not only in this particular connection that Hegel provides the major reference for Gadamer. In fact, the broader concept of experience as a dialectical (historical) phenomenon (this includes also the postulate of negation as *the* productive principle of experience) that Gadamer formulates is largely an adaptation of Hegelian ideas. (Cf. for this again *WM*, p. 359, where Gadamer remarks: "Für das dialektische Moment an der Erfahrung ist uns nun nicht mehr Aristoteles, sondern *Hegel* ein wichtiger Zeuge. In ihm gewinnt das Moment der Geschichtlichkeit sein Recht. Er denkt die Erfahrung als den sich vollbringenden Skeptizismus.")

²²⁸The paradoxes of historicism may successfully be adopted to support the point. The assumption that the experiencer could reach a position that actually allows her to transcend history is inherently contradictory: While this achievement would be a historical fact, it would nonetheless stand outside of the historical continuum. Under this perspective also the question *How come that each individual experiences the world the way she does?* finds a somewhat plausible answer: We simply lack the transcending powers to have much of a choice in interpretation. As long as we are not titans of empathy one person cannot experience what another person experiences, even if both share the same empirical situation.

the structure of experience: “Die eigentliche Erfahrung ist diejenige, in der sich der Mensch seiner Endlichkeit bewußt wird. An ihr findet das Machenkönnen und das Selbstbewußtsein seiner planenden Vernunft seine Grenze. Es erweist sich als bloßer Schein, daß sich alles rückgängig machen läßt, daß immer für alles Zeit ist und alles irgendwie wiederkehrt. Der in der Geschichte Stehende und Handelnde macht vielmehr ständig die Erfahrung, daß nichts wiederkehrt. Anerkennen, dessen was ist, meint hier nicht: Erkennen dessen, was einmal da ist, sondern Einsicht in die Grenzen, innerhalb deren Zukunft für Erwartung und Planung noch offen ist -oder noch grundsätzlicher, daß alle Erwartung und Planung endlicher Wesen eine endliche und begrenzte ist. Eigentliche Erfahrung ist somit Erfahrung der eigenen Geschichtlichkeit. Damit ist die Erörterung des Begriffs der Erfahrung zu einem Ergebnis gelangt, das für unsere Frage nach der Wesensart des wirkungsgeschichtlichen Bewußtseins aufschlußreich ist. Es muß als eine echte Erfahrungsform die allgemeine Struktur der Erfahrung spiegeln.”²²⁹

But in the peculiar dialectic of experience that governs Gadamer’s conception of hermeneutical experience it is exactly this immanent boundedness of experience that defines the driving force of the capacity to gain experience at all: “Die Wahrheit der Erfahrung enthält stets den Bezug zu neuer Erfahrung. Daher ist derjenige, den man erfahren nennt, nicht *durch* Erfahrung zu einem solchen geworden, sondern auch *für* Erfahrung offen. Die Vollendung seiner Erfahrung, das vollendete Sein dessen, den wir ‚erfahren‘ nennen, besteht nicht darin, daß einer schon alles kennt und alles schon besser weiß. Vielmehr zeigt sich der Erfahrene im Gegenteil als der radikal Undogmatische, der, weil er so viele Erfahrungen gemacht und aus Erfahrungen gelernt hat, gerade besonders befähigt ist, aufs neue Erfahrungen zu machen und aus Erfahrungen zu lernen. Die Dialektik der Erfahrung hat ihre eigene Vollendung nicht in einem abschließenden Wissen, sondern in jener Offenheit für Erfahrung, die durch Erfahrung freigespielt wird.”²³⁰ A more piercing formulation of the point that Gadamer makes here can be found in Feyerabend: “[A] thinker following Mill (or Hegel) regards any prolonged stability, either of ideas and impressions or of background knowledge which one is not willing to give up (realism; separation of subject and object, commensurability of concepts), as an indication of *failure*, pure and simple. Any such stability indicates *that we failed to transcend an accidental stage of research and that we have failed to rise to a higher stage of consciousness and of understanding*. It is even questionable whether we can still

²²⁹ WM, p. 363.

²³⁰ WM, p. 361. Italics in the original.

claim to possess knowledge in such a state.”²³¹ That the kind of failure that Feyerabend describes here motivates also the idea of application that Gadamer conceives to lie at the heart of the hermeneutical problem is obvious.

²³¹Feyerabend (1970), p.73. Italics in the original.

5. CONCLUSION

With the attention of this thesis lying with the notion of application and the hermeneutical concept of experience, the focus rests with topics that are usually addressed only in passing in the literature on Gadamer's hermeneutics -if at all. Nonetheless both notions define the conceptual core of Gadamer's work. An in depth understanding of the idea of hermeneutics that Gadamer formulates is only possible, if the hermeneutical concept of experience and the notion of application is understood. Indeed, it is here where the possibility to bring Gadamerian metaphors to concepts lies: In his discussion of the notion of understanding as a directed phenomenon Gadamer highlights structures and properties of understanding for which in the context of theoretical biology and cybernetics the concept of teleonomy was coined.

Thus, after having prepared the ground by presenting basic topics in the philosophy of Heidegger that Gadamer adopts in section 3, the problem of application -which Gadamer regards to be the central problem of hermeneutics- is approached in section 4. After a brief introduction in section 4.1 that delivers a general sketch of the scope and the idea of application in hermeneutics, the notion of application is described in section 4.2 in more detail. With the characterization that understanding is the application (i.e. the assessment) of some generality to a specific and concrete situation, the conception of understanding as a mediated, context-dependent, and historically situated phenomenon and an existential gains a new twist. After having pointed out that application is driven by an imperative incentive, the guiding question for the subsequent discussion is, what substantiates this formal demand? Clarifying this ontological question appears to be of special importance, if one assumes that the hermeneutical objects determine their application. Yet, the failure of Dilthey's founding project shows that the ontological question reaches a dead end. To solve this dilemma an epistemological approach in the analysis of the notions of application and understanding is taken in section 4.3. The idea that application is in its broadest sense a matter of self-knowledge becomes now important. Starting off with chapter 4.3.1 Aristotle's actuality for the discussion of the hermeneutical problem is highlighted: Not only follows the ethical task as described by Aristotle the same imperative motivation as the hermeneutical problem as conceived by Gadamer, but also Aristotle's idea of ethical Being and Gadamer's idea of human Being as a practical Being coincide in important aspects. The concepts of both are motivated by a staunch Anti-Platonism, and describe a scheme of self-referentiality and self-generation. From this self-conception it

follows that the task that the ethical, resp. hermeneutical Being faces is that of self-maintenance, and in section 4.3.2 the question whether the concept of human Being that is thus described is objectifiable and follows a static plan in its self-realization is discussed. The Aristotelean distinction of practical and technical knowledge comes into play here, because in both types, knowledge is conceived to guide practice. On the account that (self-) application without (self-)knowledge is vain, while (self-)knowledge without (self-)application is empty, it is argued with Gadamer that maintaining our self-concept is governed by practical, rather than technical knowledge. While the latter describes this process of (self-)application in static, teleological terms as goal-governed, the former allows to conceive the realization of the concept of human Being as a practical Being to be directed without intend, and to be self-governed and dynamic. It is teleonomical. In this (self-) understanding proves itself to be effectuated and effectual. Following Gadamer, who argues that self-understanding and its realization are -as a form of self-consciousness- a particular kind of experience, this scheme is studied further in section 4.3.3, with the focus now resting on the notion of experience. In discussing (Gadamer's idea of) the scientific concept of experience as the dominant concept of experience, Gadamer's argument against the idea of a teleology is elaborated. Indeed, only in criticizing the teleological idea of experience will the teleonomical concept gain contour. Taking the questions how empirical knowledge is acquired, and what criteria for its consolidation and justification are there as a starting point, two different ideas of induction are discussed. With the idea of a *pars pro toto*-explanation of induction being abandoned soon, Aristotle's concept of the *epagoge* lies now at the center of attention in chapter 4.3.4. Analyzing the metaphor of the fleeing army that Aristotle expounds in his explanation of the concept of the *epagoge*, Gadamer calls to attention a serious shortcoming of this explanation: It presupposes what it sets out to describe. Pointing out, that the source/aim-relation between experience and knowledge that the concept of the *epagoge* describes, translates to the commonly entertained idea that interpretation is directed at reaching a stable state of understanding, the strategy that Gadamer pursues here is to show that the linear teleological account of the hermeneutical problem is untenable. Indeed, it is revealed that the teleological conception is circular and poor metaphysics. When in section 4.3.5 Gadamer's criticism is further discussed in detail, a concept of experience is presented that describes experience as an essentially negative phenomenon. Within this conception the idea of application as the relentless assessment of the grounds of interpretation and understanding finally finds a satisfactory explanation. While with this a foun-

dation has been secured to conceive understanding as a directed phenomenon, and thus to conserve one of the most basic intuitions we entertain about language, all the shortcomings of a teleology that the common instrumentalistic conception of language characterizes are indeed avoided, and a perspective is opened up that finally allows for the formulation of theory of meaning in the strictest sense, because it is able to give an account of its own concepts.

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