"THE SYMPATHY OF EXPERIENCE WITH LIFE!" – UNDERSTANDING PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE FROM HEIDEGGER TO GADAMER AND BACK[*]

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ABSTRACT. For both Gadamer's project of a philosophical hermeneutics as for Heidegger's early understanding of facticity (*Faktizität*) as practical knowledge, the problem of application is central and is always linked to the specific conditions under which an individual decides to act within a community. Both also agree on the fact that the sciences of man do involve more than the epistemic subject, this is why the context i.e. the phenomenological concept of 'world' becomes part of the understanding process, one that cannot be ignored or transformed into an abstract matter. Understanding is therefore also in a specific way 'historical', as the application is dictated by momentary circumstances in life situations, which come before any use of theoretical knowledge and thus do not represent an appendix to theory. While Gadamer continuously insisted on the idea of a practical knowledge (*Wissen*) that surpasses the separations between theory and praxis, *sophia* and *phronesis*, Heidegger radicalized the idea of active thinking as an experience of language in connection to an essential 'perception' of Being itself, that goes beyond any subjectivity. The term by which he often characterizes this essential thinking (*wesentliches Denken*) is *Vernehmen*: a kind of receptive thinking. This conception of receptive thinking, as some conversations around the *Zollikon Seminars* and *Le Thor/Zähringen* will briefly show, lead Heidegger also to some interesting considerations on the human body.

Keywords: practical knowledge, historicity, life, body, *Vernehmen*, phenomenological hermeneutics, world.

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1. The Closeness of Practical Knowledge to Life as a Historical and Hermeneutical Stance

To pursue understanding as non-thematic orientation during simple life practices corresponds to Heidegger's early intentions, which found their first expression in his elaboration of a hermeneutical phenomenology. During the lecture of the war emergency semester 1919, Heidegger underlines an anti-theoretical and non-mechanistic intention in Husserl's principle of all principles as he explains:

> Principle of the principles of the phenomenological attitude: everything that is original in intuition is to be accepted how it is. No theory as such can change anything in this, for this principle of principles is no longer itself theoretical; in it the basic attitude and attitude to life of phenomenology is expressed: the sympathy of experience with life! That is the fundamental intention. - Nothing to do with irrationalism and philosophy of feeling. Rather, this basic attitude is inherently clear, like basic life itself. [The] phenomenological basic attitude [is] not routine -Machine Acquisition: Farce of Phenomenology. It is not a mere handle, but an attitude that is laborious and slow to acquire. (GA 56/57, 216)

In the context of Heidegger's search for original experience (one can note during the early lectures the striking repetition of expressions as 'fundamental', 'basic', 'original', see Elm, 1999) the return of the principle of all principles of phenomenology to 'life itself' refers to a special concept of practice. This means not as much the purposeful handling with objects, which is exhausted in their production and use, but rather aims at something that is 'sympathetically' acquired in habit i.e. in dealing with what is encountered by simply living in a community. Heidegger understands this in connection with the ἕξις / *hexis* in the Aristotelian sense of the word, as a kind of 'having' which aims at the permanent possession of virtue but can only be achieved momentary, through the concrete action in time, guided by the preferential choice (προαίρεσις / *prohairesis*). In an impressive passage of the lecture on the basic concepts of Aristotelian philosophy from the summer semester of 1924 (GA 18, *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie / Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*[1]), Heidegger's "probably most beautiful" lecture (Pöggeler, 1999, p. 9), the connection between *hexis*, *arete,* and *praxis* is described as follows:

> ἕξις is the determination of the authenticity of existence in a moment of being receptive to something, the different ἕξεις as the different ways of being receptive. ἕξις is fundamentally the determination of the actual being, here related to the human being: The πρᾶξις is characterized by the ἀρετή, the ἀρετή is characterized as ἕξις προαιρετική. πρᾶξις as the 'how' of Being-in-the-World shows up here as the context of Being, which we can also call, in another sense, existence. (GA 18, 176)

Practical existence is linked to an ability to be receptive and to respond with the 'knowledge' of what needs to be done in a

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[1] In the English translation of Robert D. Metcalf and Marc B. Tanzer. The next quotations refer to GA 18.

concrete situation. Therefore, Being-in-the-World always goes hand in hand with an understanding of the part the individual has to play in a 'worldly' context as a 'hermeneutical' stance, which has passed from the beginning beyond any solipsism.[2] With this, expertise or knowledge of what to do and how to do it (*Sachwissen*) – which results in a surprising overlap between theory, practice, and technology – becomes a matter of ethics. The most important thing in practice – which differs from the mere extension of technical knowledge (*Sachwissen* or expertise) – is the stability of character; this way, the actor won't get confused by the concrete changes occurring in different situations and would still be able to get through the task (cf. ibid. 182). The attitude that Heidegger will put at the center of his analysis of the *Dasein* of *Being and Time* two years after the lecture on the *Grundbegriffe*… is resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) as a condition of actual being. (GA 2, 355 ff.) Even if the term is not introduced in *Being and Time* as an ethical term and the final form of expression has not yet been found in 1924, when Heidegger already speaks of the *prohairesis* as being-resolute (*Entschlossensein*, GA 18, 141 etc.), this still corresponds in my opinion to the elaboration of the Aristotelian ἕξις προαιρετική in the *Grundbegriffe*. Using the definition in the *Poetics* according to which the *ethos* reveals the respective determination of the speaker (see GA 18, 169 with reference to Ar., *Poetics*, 1450 b 8), Heidegger concludes: "In such speeches, in which one

doesn't want to be determined to do something or to bring others to a certain decision, there is no ἦθος." (ibid.) As a *how* (and not as consistent *what*) of Being-in-the-world, resoluteness/ *Entschlossenheit* is nothing less than the backbone of human existence. Without this decisiveness, speech would become pointless.

Still, Heidegger always underlined the fact that he never wanted to work out an ethics and certainly did not want any moral conclusions to be drawn from his plead for authenticity. Almost two decades after *Being and Time,* in his *Letter on Humanism* (1946), he delivers the thought behind this decision, by pointing out the essence of thinking as already being 'action'. Hans-Georg Gadamer also sees in the division between a 'theoretical' and an 'applied' ethical thinking the main problem of ethics:

> But it could be that Heidegger is right when, when asked: "When do you write an ethics?", he starts his Letter on Humanism with the sentence: "We still do not think decisively enough about the essence of action." Indeed, there seems to be an indissoluble difficulty in ethics itself, which became explicit through Kierkegaard's criticism of Hegel and of ecclesiastical Christianity. Kierkegaard has shown that all knowledge at a distance is not enough for the basic moral and religious situation of man. Just as it is the intention of Christian preaching to be experienced and heard at the same time, so too the ethical choice is not a matter of theoretical knowledge, but of the brightness, sharpness, and distress of the conscience. (GW 4, 177)

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2   This is the sense of Heidegger's hermeneutical turn in phenomenology which happens before the first explicit critique to Husserlian intentionality as is it shown by the *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs / Prolegomena on the* *concept of time*, 1925, GA 20, §11, 140 (Translation of the lectures by Theodore Kisiel, *History on The Concept of Time, Prolegomena*, Indiana University Press, 2009).

One could argue about the idea of an ontological thinking as action, which has already had included the ethical problem. Still, Gadamer touches here the nerve of all the problems that arise within practical philosophy (as much in ethics as in hermeneutics): Beyond a theoretical knowledge of the good of action, the application is always about the right choice of an individual and the right moment to act, or, as Aristotle would have put it, a sense for "what is possible here and now" (GW 4, 183). There are no further abstract rules for practical application. No code can serve as a substitute for the particular conditions of individual experience that arise by getting involved and participating in action: this means, one must constantly care not to get biased and to maintain a horizontal view that passes beyond the own subjective area (or the mere area of expertise). This is in the truest sense practical knowledge as a non-theoretical, participatory attitude. All of this has grown on Aristotelian soil, both with regard to the search of the early Heidegger for the original experience of existence and with regard to Gadamer's endeavors to justify the humanities as sciences of man. In each of the cases, the context of the pre-theoretical 'world' of the social and political community plays a major role. This ontological framework around the epistemic intention makes the attempt to reduce social behavior to statistic patterns very difficult because it always involves the understanding of expectations, needs and the anxieties of the community at a given time (as Aristotle shows it in in his *Rhetoric* and what Heidegger also refers to in an existential context in *Being and Time*). As Jean Grondin argues:

Perhaps more importantly, Aristotle saw that this presence of the >knower<, this proximity or attentiveness to what is at stake is a mode of >knowledge<, one, Gadamer contends, that can be fruitfully applied to the interested knowledge displayed in the human and social sciences. In short, if Gadamer's practical understanding appears less linked to Heidegger's project of a hermeneutic of preoccupied existence, he does retain its notion of reflectivity and application in order to better understand what understanding is all about. (Grondin, 2002, 41)

And with regard to early Heidegger, Rubio/Fernandez write: "The experience of practical life, subject to contingency and change, becomes the core of the Heideggerian hermeneutic of facticity". (Rubio, Fernandez, 2010). The knowledge of how to deal with the contingency of practical life must hence remain linked not to a theoretical principle, but to a special kind of hermeneutical intuition which in both Heidegger as in Gadamer primarily requires an understanding of one's situation in time i.e. a 'historical' sense.

2. Phenomenological Hermeneutics of Ancient Philosophy from Heidegger to Gadamer: The Intuition of the Useful Good and the Self-Interpretation of Life

Both Gadamer's search for an 'understanding of understanding' and the Heideggerian early project of an understanding of facticity acknowledge that the problem of application has to remain central. As far as the sciences of man do involve

more than the mere epistemic subject, the context (the phenomenological concept of 'world') cannot be ignored or transformed into an abstract or subsequent matter. Understanding is primarily historical, as the application is dictated by the actual need to act, which comes before and not after any use of theoretical knowledge and thus does not represent an appendix to theory. So, before any subjective will to understand it is 'life itself' that dictates when the understanding of the subject is needed, or, simply said: Knowing what and how to do it only makes sense if the action is understood as contextually and situationally motivated. As Heidegger puts it in the lecture from the war emergency semester 1919:

> "If you look into life intuitively, to its motivation and tendencies, then the possibility to understand life as such arises. Then, that absolute comprehensibility of life itself becomes apparent. Life is not irrational. (This has nothing to do with rationalism!!) (…) The phenomenological intuition as the experience of experience, understanding life is a hermeneutical intuition (understandable, meaningful). The inherent historicity of life itself is the core of the hermeneutical intuition." (GA 56/57, 219)

Neither knowledge of what is true nor the knowledge of what is truly 'good' (for me) can be understood as 'mechanic' of application, as a transfer from 'abstract' theory or a code of behavior to the contingent conditions offered by 'practice'. Nor can they be seen as part of a rationalization process that has as an ultimate purpose the objectification, the dissolution of the individual and the particular into an abstract or general goal.

For Gadamer, the phenomenological intuition as hermeneutical reflection acts as a parallel to (Aristotelian) ethics, which runs first of all through this easily ascertainable commonality: Both the desire to understand and the reflection on the good are not initially desired for themselves but have the purpose of being directly applicable to something i.e., to be *useful* to something (other than themselves.) All knowledge results from practice, as Gadamer repeatedly states, and even *theoria* as the highest practice of thinking is knowledge that remains applicable as far as it is eventually aimed at praxis. It is this, and not some kind of objectifying knowledge that gives 'hermeneutic relevance' of Aristotle:

> For moral knowledge, as Aristotle describes it, is clearly not objective knowledge—i.e., the knower is not standing over against a situation that he merely observes; he is directly confronted with what he sees. It is something that he has to do. (*Truth and Method*, [TM] 312)

But long before the philosophy of hermeneutics presented in *Truth and Method* had been drawn up, in his writing from 1930 *Practical Knowledge*, Gadamer comments on *Nicomachean Ethics* (EN 1155 b ff.) as follows:

> What is useful is aimed at because of a prior distance from the next best (ἡδύ). In order to be able to strive for something useful, a sense of time and a prior design for something more distant are required. In this further lies the reason for the choice of the closer that is useful for this purpose. This distant relation to its use makes beings addressable and expressible from the basis of their being. (…) But it is meant to be use-

ful for this purpose, its usefulness is understandable, and so there is a *logos* that makes it evident. *Logos* also means 'calculation'. (GW 5, 233)

It is easy to get the idea that, for the Greeks, practical knowledge is about the correct calculation of usefulness, a combination between ethical intellectualism (according to the Socratic formula "virtue is knowledge") and a kind of technical utilitarianism (which also has its roots in the Socratic orientation towards the craft). Gadamer, however, avoids this reading and shows that in the process of using things, the purely manual aspect (craft) of the *techne* must always aim at something that is beneficial for all i.e., generally useful. This means that in view of the possibility of transferring technical and general knowledge, the knowledge of useful things always tends to be linked to concerns about the ethical and moral dimension of use, which the manufacturer no longer controls:

> Knowledge of useful things is therefore knowledge of an individual in the general determination of its usefulness, that is, in disregarding its individuality. Precisely with this, however, a prior disposition of the individual from the foresight of the desired benefit is made possible: *Techne*. It is precisely in the distant tension of the useful to its benefit that this provision can be made independent for the precautionary production for general use. (...) Because *techne* is a knowledge of the manufacturability of the useful before all use. But it is precisely this precautionary procuring of the useful that separates the useful from the useful use. One is the manufacturer, another is the user. (GW 4, 233)

Technology in itself has indeed nothing to do with the ethical dimension of its application. But the fact that *it is designed for* the purpose of application, is part of a practice that must be considered and for which technology is no longer responsible. The separation of technology and ethics is at the same time the reason for a strange, indissoluble bond between the manufacturer's practical knowledge (which basically differs from purely theoretical knowledge only in that it depends on the manufacture of something that can be used for another purpose, and not about the knowledge for oneself) and the practical knowledge of the freedom of application, a situational knowledge that aims at general use (the practice of practice, so to speak). What is useful in a particularly given fact situation and what is generally to be used are neither interchangeable nor fixed, since the importance of such objects is not so much connected with the technique of their manufacture as with the concern for the whole. Furthermore, "fact", as Gadamer puts it, "is a hermeneutic term, that is, [it is] always related to a connection of the assumption or expectation, a connection of the inquiring understanding of a complicated kind." (GW 4, 47). What is useful can become harmful in the hands of the ignorant or the ill-intentioned. Practical knowledge is not exhausted in technology, and the problem of application remains the constant task of this knowledge, which ultimately - including the Aristotelian criticism of Plato's idea of the good - is a knowledge of what is always *good for someone* (cf. GW 4, 238). The practical knowledge or the expertise (of both the good craftsman and the good statesman) cannot be split into two separate moments as it is neither directed

theoretically towards something good in itself, nor are the skills that create good works merely mechanic. Before any separation and remaining as a constant interaction between theory and practice a 'sense of the whole', a hermeneutic sense accompanies every task with a knowledge of oneself, an understanding of oneself in one's world. One cannot be surprised that the conclusion Gadamer draws here can sound very much like Heidegger's affirmation of the 'absolute comprehensibility of life itself'.

> "So it is always a self-interpretation of life, on which follows the generalizing, schematizing, typifying concept formation of practical philosophy and on which it is based." (GA 10, 264)

3. The Theory within the Praxis. Gadamer's View on Practical Knowledge as Participating Distance

By defining the root of what theory is as "seeing what is" (GW 4, 47), Gadamer names in the next breath the complicated facts about the theoretical object, which is not just an existing or perceived one, but also something to meet or contradict expectations and assumptions. "Not quite as complicated, but more difficult to achieve," Gadamer adds, "it is in everyone's life practice to see what is, instead of wishing what it is." (Ibid.) This calls for a step back from personal and collective foremeanings and prejudices, which inevitably arise by belonging to a community. The distance required for the confrontation with something that remains hidden in everyday' s life, is, however, something that must be achieved momentarily, as prejudices arise

only during one's involvement in concrete events or situations. Participating distance? Distance in the midst of events? Since the concept of a theoretical experience evidently represents a paradox (only the repeatability of an experience in an experiment removes it from the particular and situational and thus also from its character of event), it can initially appear surprising that Gadamer is so much interested in the possibility of practical knowledge as a universal hermeneutical knowledge. How is such a knowledge conceivable, considering the variability in social interaction? This question, which involves the one on the consubstantiality of ethics and politics, leads Gadamer back to the beginnings of philosophical self-reflection before Aristotle's separation between philosophy and politics to its Socratic-Platonic roots. (see Fr. Renaud's account on Gadamer's interpretation on Plato, *Die Resokratisierung Platons*). For Gadamer, understanding the Socratic gesture consists in the reversal of sheer negativity (the insistence on the ignorance regarding the good, just, etc.) and the positive recovery of the ethical - as practical, not as metaphysical - quantities in the concrete knowledge of the right action i.e., what contributes for oneself *and* for the community (the *koine sympheron*). This is what the anti-theoretician Socrates stands for, while Plato's theory of ideas goes beyond his aporetic knowledge. But is such a natural connection between one's own and the general well-being, the knowledge of what is useful for me and what is generally good, so easy to assume? Was not the discrepancy between a general knowledge at a distance ("the good itself, the good for all") and the individual conscience regarding the indefensible choice and action not previously identified

as the main difficulty in ethics? The consubstantiality of ethics and politics, which is difficult to understand for modern times, is a central problem for both Plato's philosopher king and for Aristotle, who would separate metaphysics from the ethical (practical) knowledge. Despite the criticism of an independent idea of the good that is detached from practice, one thing is certain: Knowledge of what is good and beneficial, as Gadamer tirelessly repeats, can never be absorbed as practice in technology, nor can it be transferred into a form of abstract knowledge. Gadamer's writing from 1930 *Practical Knowledge* is a programmatic draft for his entire work in this direction: It is about the elaboration of the main features of an universal science without an application method. This is based on a confrontation of the political-philosophical drafts of Plato and Aristotle, a 'unity of effect' (*Wirkungseinheit)*, which Gadamer will never cast doubt on. He explains the development of the knowledge about the good in the sense of Aristotle *logicizing* (*Logisierung*) the ethos as in 'transferring the ethical problem from the dialectical paradox of the Socratic question into the analytical clarity of the [philosophical] term' (GW 5, 248). The paradox of the Socratic identification of wisdom with the good itself in the context of the difficulties in the transmission of virtue and knowledge dissolves into the identification of *bios* and *logos* in the particular case of Socrates. The Socratic-aporetic *logos* may reflect the absence of a theory, but it also remains the living representation of a movement that seeks to realize the good: the exemplified practice of love for wisdom i.e., the only mystery in which Socrates admits to having been initiated (cf. *Symp*. 177 d). But what about Plato's philosopher king? Is he the product of

a wishful thinking that the sober Aristotle will bring back down to earth in the separation of *sophia* and *phronesis*? After all: is there a gap that cannot be bridged between the idea of the good, which is considered theoretically 'and dominates everything else' and the human, practical good? Gadamer denies this would be the case:

> Plato does not pursue politics according to theoretical principles - any more than he teaches the theory of ideas. The high path to the view of the heavenly place and the deep path of the one left to worry about his own being are one and the same path. Philosophy is politics not because Plato believed in a naive-abstract synthesis of the good in the cosmos and the human world, but because the philosopher and the true politician live in the same concern. There must be true knowledge in both, that is, they must know the good. But one cannot know the good from a distance and for everyone, but originally for oneself. (GW 5, 239).

The good for oneself can only concern one particular individual and cannot be the subject of an empty generalization. It is not as much knowledge from a distance, but a hermeneutical attitude as prior distance from what promises to be the next best pleasure and permits an overview on what might be useful on the long run. It is the same training that hepls the philosopher-king abstract from what is individually beneficial and makes him turn the idea of good for the well-being of the polis into his own goal. This, however, involves a series of separate decisions on what might be the good thing to do ('now'). The only constant is his own resolute attitude, since there cannot be one separate idea of the good behind the good acting. And furthermore, it was

Aristotle who, by recognizing this fact, was able to exclude politics from philosophy and separate practice from theory:

> "Because there is the concept that determines what is meant and makes it available for all repetition (the *logos kat'auto*), this theoretical possibility of philosophy must be separated from politics. Not because there is the individual's knowledge of himself, of which there can be no theory, but because there is a theory, that is, a knowledge for all beyond the difference between such a knowledge and knowledge for oneself. This is how he differentiates between *sophia* and *phronesis*." (Ibid., 240).

Gadamer himself recognizes in it the "hermeneutical relevance of Aristotle" (TM, 309 ff.) and takes the *phronesis* as an example for what represents a truly hermeneutical ability, namely, to go through the general with regard to the individual and vice versa. Application, the hermeneutical-practical concern, is not aimed at the creation of favorable conditions under which understanding or acting for one's own benefit can be exercised as an experiment, but it is an exercise in talking and reading without prejudice. This is what real knowing of one's hermeneutical i.e., historical situation means. Therefore, at least regarding the sciences of man, practical knowledge means not the successful transfer of theory to practice as it is in the case of technical knowledge, that may allow the subordination of undesired particularities under a general working principle. It is exactly the opposite, since the goal would not be to eliminate individuality; conversely, it is about allowing the other to come into its own as a possibility of being

human that is understandable (not only to himself, but to anyone). Therefore, Gadamer speaks about (hermeneutical) distance[3] as an endeavor to distinguish between true and false foremeanings and prejudices, as time-bound and situational, but from 'within' the emersion into the historical situation. How is this possible? As Gadamer explains in "*Truth and Method*", this attempt has the logical structure of the question. Its "essence is to open up possibilities and keep them open" (TM, 298). It is not as if one could not fail in regard to the fundamental problem of hermeneutics, but rather, "a person trying to understand something", Gadamer assures us, "will not resign himself from the start to relying on his own accidental foremeanings, ignoring as consistently and stubbornly as possible the actual meaning of the text, until the latter becomes so persistently audible that it breaks through what the interpreter imagines it to be". (TM, 271)

Ultimately, it is about an ethical choice that is prepared to let the other be in his otherness and, under certain circumstances, to let the interpreter change his mind about his claim. Gadamer opposes the tendency to have one's own fore-meanings and prejudices confirmed by the text, with nothing but the 'hermeneutic will to understand as the interpreter is prepared for it [the text] to tell him something" (ibid.). Distance is hereby required, a distance that goes hand in hand with the utmost attention and self-involvement. Firstly, this presupposes the understanding of the temporal distance, a distance that takes one's own historicity into account and allows room for maneuver to reveal the matter within a common (ontological) 'horizontal' community. Secondly, it is

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3   Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, [TM], 376

about a hermeneutical distance which, as participation in an event that is viewed purely for itself (and for no other purpose), preserves the freedom of the viewer and his speech. And thirdly, it might be important to preserve the idea of distance in practical knowledge i.e., to remain committed to an idea of practice that, as knowledge of the hermeneutically complex nature of a thing, does not only know about the production of means but also understands the further use and abuse of technology. As Gadamer puts it, it is about cultivating a kind of practical intelligence that can hardly be distinguished from wisdom. This also corresponds to the interpretation of the Platonic-Aristotelian unity of effect and Gadamer's persistent conviction that the Aristotelian separation of *phronesis* and *sophia* does not contradict the "hidden unity" (GW 10, 246) of theory and practice. On the contrary: it is precisely through his doctrine on ethics, which narrows down *logos* and *ethos*, that Aristotle avoids the sole rule of technical knowledge and, conversely, inserts the latter into a world of reason that pervades all areas of life.

> The wisdom shows itself in the theoretical as well as in the practical area and in the end consists in the unity of theory and practice. The word *Sophia* says that. But then Aristotle will remain a privileged partner in our conversation - he who, compared to the ideal of modernity of a world that can be controlled by knowledge and ability, represents the ideal of

reason for us, the ideal of a world that has become sensible, understandable, in which we have to live. (GW 10, 246)

4. Back to Heidegger: Receptivity in Perception and Corporeity in the Praxis of Thinking. From *Vernehmen*[4] to the 'Reach of the Human Body' (a phenomenological exercise in *Le Thor*)

While Gadamer continuously insisted on the idea of a practical wisdom that goes beyond the separations between theory and praxis, Heidegger radicalized the experience of language as the location (*Ort*) where Being can be ‚heard' or listened to. The term by which he characterizes the essential thinking (*wesentliches Denken*) is *Vernehmen*. In this last section, I will focus on some key passages regarding this capacity of receptive thinking. This conception of receptive thinking, as the final discussions in *Zollikon* and *Le Thor/Zähringen* will show, lead Heidegger to a very specific view on the human body[5].

Heidegger first speaks of „*vernehmen*" or „*das Vernehmen*" in the early twenties, where, in the context of Aristotelic interpretations, he uses it to supplement and partly replace the expressions *'meinen'* or *'vermeinen'* which he had borrowed from the Husserlian terminology. His goal was to establish his own translation of the Greek terms νοεῖν and νοῦς. As an alternative to

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[4] Interestingly enough, there is a big variety in the English translations of *vernehmen* regarding *Being and Time*. John Macquarrie and Edward Robison often use *awareness* and *perception* and Joan Stambaugh's main option is for *apprehension*. All these terms show that *Vernehmen* as a form of receptive thinking remains beyond the separation between

sensibility and thinking, a separation which Heidegger puts in the center of metaphysical thinking. See also "Vernehmen-Wahrnehmen-Sinngeschehen", A. Noveanu, Tübingen, 2021. My option for this short passage was to keep the original German term.

[5] See Espinet, 2012 In: Alloa, Bedorf, Grüny, Klass (Ed.), further Nielsen 2003, 2014.

the more common expressions ('thinking', 'reasoning', 'understanding' or 'mind'), this term also had the important function of distinguishing Heidegger's phenomenological approach from the strongly neo-Kantian environment. Nevertheless, these conceptual correlations were also possible due to the relatively broad conceptual sphere of both "*Vernehmen*" and νοεῖν[6], which promised unexplored possibilities for a radical rethinking of Husserl's view on intentionality as twofold (the intentional act, *noesis* and the intentional content, *noema).* A linguistically forced new beginning, as it is often the case with Heidegger, whose existential thrust against the philosophical tradition of Cartesian origin and against the generally modern tendency of the reduction of phenomenality to consciousness could not be yet interpreted in a vitalistic or irrationalistic way because of the constant reference to ancient ontology. As early as the twenties, Heidegger repeatedly emphasized the gap between his fundamental ontological approach on the one hand, and existentialism and phenomenological anthropology on the other, both equally successful in France and Germany. With the new and radical thinking of what he calls the only genuinely

philosophical question, Heidegger aims to go back where philosophy had originally begun the search for Being. Still, because of the naïve, unbroken relationship to its origin, the ancient ontology lacks in Heidegger's view the insight into its own intentions. Heidegger's new beginning, however, promises a break with the history of western metaphysics and the 'repetition/recovery' (*Wieder-holung*) of the (first) beginning, which, as such, could not experience itself and therefore had lost its original intention.[7] The first step in this recovery is putting the human being, the *Dasein* back into his living context: the Platonic-Aristotelian community becomes the *world* found in phenomenological description.[8]

As a characteristic of a fundamental belonging to the world – and not as a by-product of the metaphysical subject of consciousness – the *Befindlichkeit*/ Attunement (Heidegger, 1996)[9] in "*Being and Time*" is existentially recognized as a character of *Dasein* as Being-in-the-World. Having constantly missed this fundamental connection between world and Dasein (which had led to unfruitful debates on proofs for the reality of the world[10]) is the result of substantialist ideas, which are linked to the modern concept

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[6] In both cases, the terms switch between aspects regarding sensuality and mental phenomena. Cf. German Dictionary by Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, 16 vols. in 32 volumes. Leipzig 1854-1961. Quellenverzeichnis Leipzig 1971, *Vernehmen*, Vol.25/911 see also Passow, Leipzig 1952, ed. 2004, pp. 355, the aspects regarding *animadvertere*. Heidegger also retains the moment of attention/awareness: »Vernehmen is the translation of the Greek word νοεῖν, which means: noticing something, acknowledging it and making it present « In: *Vorträge und Aufsätze/Lectures and Essays*, Stuttgart 1954, p.134.

[7] On the meaning and concept of *repetition* in Heidegger's work, see Helmuth Vetter, In: *Denkwege* 3, (Ed. Barbaric, Koch) p. 214 ff.

[8] See for example *Being and Time*, [BT], Part One, sections II-IV

[9] *Being and Time*, translated by Joan Stambaugh, New York, 1996 [BT, 1996] Macqaurrie and Robinson [BT, 2001] translate *Befindlichkeit* as "state of mind".

[10] S. *Being and Time*, Translated by Macquarrie/ Robinson, p. 249: "The 'scandal of philosophy' is not that this proof has yet to be given, but hat *such proofs are expected and attempted again and again. (…)*

of reason. Heidegger counteracts the idea that thinking should be seen as the activity of an inherent asset of the epistemic subject by turning the relationship of *'Vernehmen'* to *'Vernunft/*reason' and transferring it from an 'inside' (the consciousness) to an 'outside'(the world). As a relationship to the world, this primary relation is a phenomenon to be traced outside the classical theoretical setting of a subject 'within' a categorically available substance of reason, that releases both the act of *Vernehmen* and its product as opposing object (*Gegen-*stand)).[11]

During the so-called turn, Heidegger focuses on the willingness to listen/to perceive as a characteristic of the essential thinking (see GA 65, GA 45). *Vernehmen* also appears in the context of the later attempts to explain human existence as Being-in-the-World also with reference to corporeality as an "area of being able to perceive".[12] The conversations with the Swiss psychiatrist Medard Boss are conducted more intensively and become subject of the famous "*Zollikoner Seminare/Zollikon Seminars[13]*". For a decade and up to seven years before Heidegger's death these seminars discuss questions of psychosomatic medi-

cine in a way that suggests that the long-rejected theme of the body certainly accompanied Heidegger's thinking. What follows are a few closing remarks about the Seminars in *Zollikon* and the late seminars in *Le Thor* and *Zähringen*[14].

Vernehmen, as Heidegger explains, would owe itself to a non-biological process, which still testifies to the corporeality of all thinking as being rooted in its Being-in-the-World. Human corporeality is determined from the beginning in such a way that, it only 'forms' in connection to the significant encounters 'out' in the world. In a dialogue with Boss in 1972, Heidegger describes it as follows:

> Everything now, what we call our corporeality, up to the last muscle fiber and the most hidden hormone molecule belongs essentially into existence; it is therefore basically not lifeless matter, but (rather) an area of that non-objectable, optically invisible *Vernehmen* of the significance of the encounterer, of which the whole existence consists. This corporeality is formed in such a way that it is to be used to deal with the lifeless and living material of the encountered.[15]

This is why a demonstration that two things which are present-at-hand are necessarily present-at-hand together, can give rise to the illusion that something has been proved, or even can be proved, about Dasein as Being-in-the-world. If Dasein is understood correctly, it defies such proofs, because, in its Being, it already *is* what subsequent proofs deem necessary to demonstrate for it."

[11] Consequently, Heidegger will not start from the intellect as an ability to understand, nor from reason as the origin of *Vernehmen*, and will also avoid to speak about 'consciousness'. Against all these metaphysically embossed

terms Heidegger competes both with the early project of the hermeneutics of facticity and with the later thinking of the event (*Ereignis-Denken*).

[12] Conversation with Boss, in *Zollikoner Seminare* [ZS], Ed. Medard Boss, Frankfurt a M. 1987, p.3

[13] The English translation *Zollikon Seminars* Protocols-Conversations-Letters by R. Askay and. F. Mayr and was published in 2001. The following quotations indicate the edition in German by Boss [ZS].

[14] *Four Seminars*, translated by Andrew Mitchell and Francois Raffoul, Indiana 2003

[15] ZS, p. 292-293.

That all physicality as part of the human Being-in-the-World would be ontologically 'formed' or 'built' due to the encounter with significance is a strong affirmation. In the same conversation, when Medard Boss expresses his fear that the thesis of the transformation of a non-material, ontologically formed ‚corporeity' (*Leiblichkeit*) into the actual body or bodily organs could meet with incomprehension on the part of his medically trained colleagues, Heidegger refers to the expression ἐνέργεια and warns against the multiple misunderstandings that emanate from the changing meanings of this term, whose history of effects would extend to Einstein's formula of the equivalence of mass and energy. As a 'very limped comparison' for human existence, Einstein's formula would be just another proof that the 'essential' matters continued to be the topics of philosophy (*ibid*).

But it would perhaps be wrong to present these late and, in part, private expressions of Heidegger as an incipient, yet very well hidden 'theory' on corporeity. I would therefore propose – as an anecdote as well as a phenomenological exercise - a short look into an examination of representation and perception concerning the phenomenological topic of "making something present". This will not serve as conclusion but as an invitation to reflect on some considerations that could make understandable why the body could for so long represent 'the most difficult problem' of Heidegger's fundamental ontology. It is fragments such as the following that puts Sartre's famous

reproach regarding the mere six lines dedicated to the body in *Being and Time* into another perspective.[16]

*

It is the 8th of September 1968 in Le Thor and Heidegger has gathered around him a few promising young people. Giorgio Agamben is among them. Jean Beaufret takes notes. They are having discussions over the day and in the afternoon, they will maybe visit Rene Char in The Busclats. They are talking about Hegel's Absolute and the way it appears to consciousness and the discussion drifts a bit during this last day's session[17]:

> The question of representation, thus taken up, is now the occasion for a sort of exercise in phenomenological kindergarten where everything all of a sudden becomes difficult because too simple, and where everyone finds themselves extremely "clumsy". (...)
> -*Repraesentatio*, that is representation (*Vorstellung*). For instance: The Louvre in Paris. For us, right now, it is a "representation". Where is it? In our heads? How can we the avoid saying, even more scientifically: in our brains? The autopsy of the brain does not reveal any representations.
> It is then said that it concerns an image. The question thus arises: when we represent the Louvre to ourselves, is it an image that we make present to ourselves? No, it is rather the Louvre itself. *Always*, and even in the "making present", even when we relate to something simply in thought, I am in relation with the things themselves, as I am now

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[16] This is what I have tried to show in my paper *Sein und Zeit und die Zollikoner Seminare*, in Harald Seubert (Ed.) *Neunzig Jahre Sein und Zeit*, Freiburg/München 2019 pp. 220-238.

[17] *Four Seminars*, translated by Andrew Mitchell and Francois Raffoul, Indiana University Press, 2003 p. 31ff.

in relation to the book here that I look at and with which I am concerned. (...) In opposition to a "making present" the relation here is that of a "perceiving".

What is the characteristic of perception? A participant says, *aisthesis*, and is then told that "with the Greeks, and precisely in the distinction between *aisthesis* and *noesis*, hell has already begun. What is important is the notion of "corporeality"[*Leibhaftigkeit*]: in perception what presences is "bodily"[*leibhaftig*]. This answer is in turn another question: what is that "body" from which the adjective "bodily" is formed"? (...)

It will take a few more steps for the sentence:

This lived body is something like the reach of the human body (last night, the moon was closer than the Louvre).

Along with the insight:

The word body that just appeared could jeopardize everything.

Shortly after a few attempts to get a grip on the dangerous subject, the group in *Le Thor* would return to Hegel.

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