

Ich, das Wir, und Wir, das Ich ist.

Interrogating the “I-lessness” of Hermeneutic Understanding

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Gadamer followed with passionate conviction Heidegger’s lead into that “other thinking that leaves subjectivity behind.”¹ Pejorative references to the modern subject and subjectivity occur in *Truth and Method* one hundred and seventy-five times—while, for comparison, circularity (including all variants of *Zirkel* and *Kreis*) occur only forty-five times. But there is something distinctive about the character of this anti-subjectivist polemic in the great work. *Truth and Method* takes as its target not just the familiar whipping boy, the sovereign Cartesian subject informing scientific objectivity, methodological reductionism, and technical rationalism (Gadamer’s lifelong nemeses), but equally as much romantic subjectivism—the artistic genius, the aesthete, the isolated modern soul thrust back upon itself—quite literally the cultural antithesis to the pure Cartesian Cogito stripped bare of passions. So Gadamer wages a war against *Subjektivität* on two fronts.

The aspect of Gadamer’s position on subjectivity I am concerned with in this paper is what happens to subjective experience *per se*—the uniqueness of my experience in this body, my suffering, my individual responsibility, my place on earth—in what we want to call now, after Gadamer and Ricoeur, hermeneutic experience. Asking this question of Gadamer is deceptively difficult. He talks a great deal of I and Thou as dialogic partners, but always in order to establish their relation and their mode of commerce. He is so intent on describing what this relationality is and how it works, and on discrediting the excesses of modern subjectivism, that his account of the individuating pole of experience, diminished and co-dependent though it may be, remains vague and elusive.

A useful contrast here is Hegel. The disappearance of individual subjectivity into historical spirit in Hegelianism, which Etienne Balibar labels the great sublation, is more “an *interpretation* than an *explication*” of Hegel’s point of view.² Balibar’s view that Hegel troubled such a sublation circles around a central formulation in the *Phenomenology*: “*Ich, das Wir, und Wir, das Ich ist.*”³ In Hegel’s proposition of equivalence, the exchange set in motion between the personal pronoun (*ich, wir*) and the abstract noun (*das Ich, das Wir*) animates a paradox, the “conflict and tension that constitute the paradoxical alliance of finitude and infinity in the double representation of the ‘I’ as ‘We and the ‘We’ as ‘I’.”⁴ The “question of a ‘mutation’ of subjectivity” between the individual and the collective is the question that grips the Hegel of the *Phenomenology*.⁵ The relation between the collective subject and each singular subject “entails a complexity and a reversibility that will never cease affect what Hegel, in 1807,

calls the ‘concept’ with a sort of inner aporia.”⁶ The doing of all and each (*das Tun aller und Jeder*) contains an inner aporia that nearly unmakes the advance of spirit at every turn: “Consciousness experiences both sides as equally essential moments, and in doing so learns what the nature of the Thing itself really is, viz. that it is neither merely something which stands opposed to action in general, and to individual action, nor action which stands opposed to a continuing being and which would be the free *genus* of these moments as its *species*.”⁷ What Balibar attempts to show is that the progress of world historical spirit “radically isolates subjects in their very communion,” so that such a communion “remains always again severed.”⁸ Unity is won at a great cost. The we does *not* succeed in subsuming the I, which leaves them forever in tension.

Likewise, *Truth and Method* focuses on the dialogic structure of historical consciousness as the ontological basis of a “speculative hermeneutics,” but the complexion of this Hegelian project has a distinct caste all its own.⁹ Although the engine of speculative movement works in the same Hegelian mode by the destructive rupture of subjective expectation, Gadamer generally is not at pains to weigh the cost, as Hegel does exhaustively.¹⁰ For Gadamer, the-conversation-that-we-are is a “miracle” that underwrites the essential optimism of philosophical hermeneutics. What Hegel struggles with as a nearly insuperable paradox, Gadamer harnesses as an imperfect path forward. Or at least this is my supposition, and what I want to do in this paper is fix as precisely as possible what Gadamer grants to and denies individual experience. How can I understand more precisely the harsh dismissal of subjectivity as a flickering circuit?

Truth and Method

You are all very familiar with the idioms of hermeneutic experience and understanding inherited from Hegel, the “mode of being-historical” that adopts the conceit of human agency for works, culture, history, and things, as Gadamer puts it.¹¹ In *Truth and Method*, the modulation of attribution shifts wholly unmarked from a rhetorical to a hermeneutic perspective in the course of Gadamer’s exposition of the dialogue with tradition—We shift from “a person fails to hear what the other person is really saying” to “a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something.”¹² The shift between these two alternatives is not treated as significant—we can, in fact, speak indiscriminately of “the text or the other person”—and the transitivity soon extends to a capacious variety of substitutes for person: tradition, the human sciences, the subject matter, the text, the work of art, etc. all *address* us.¹³ Now, although this transitivity is pervasive and fundamental in Hegel, Hegel struggles mightily with the implications of this transfer and its grounds.¹⁴ Gadamer not so much. Is it that Gadamer takes this work as

already having been done in Hegel, or does the absence of struggle indicate something different? Is the double inheritance that further includes Heidegger's dislocation of agency beyond the "I" altogether (*es zeitigt, es er-eignet sich, Sprache spricht*) remove from Gadamer any need to weigh the loss, while he pockets the gain? This is the question I want to ask.

Gadamer does offer some small territorial claim to subjective experience. He acknowledges that an historical subject matter offers different aspects to view "that exist by themselves and combine only in us."¹⁵ It is in our reception that history "resounds in a new voice."¹⁶ But this is always in the context of the inter-relation—as participation, as fusion, as interplay, as circulation. Although the relation is always a relation of difference, and the jointure is as much confrontation and reconfiguration as assimilation or adaptation, in the end, Gadamer gets very close to the topos of universal community:

When our historical consciousness transposes itself into historical horizons, this does not entail passing into alien worlds unconnected in any way with our own; instead, they together constitute the one great horizon that moves from within and that, beyond the frontiers of the present, embraces the historical depths of our self-consciousness. Everything contained in historical consciousness is in fact embraced by a single historical horizon.¹⁷

We see in this formulation a decisive inflection: the movement toward an always deferred whole, and the dialectical interplay (more than tension) as a progress toward that whole. There is a definite predilection for community over the freedom of individual conscience. Gadamer carves out a theoretical space in which the resistance of subjectivity might be worked out with some precision, and that is in his close analyses of the blockage and counter-thrust of predication in Hegel's logic. This happens a bit in *Truth and Method* (pp. 353-54, 463-66), but Gadamer attends to it most thoroughly in the essay "Hegel and the Dialectic of the Ancient Philosophers."¹⁸ But even there we remain on the terrain of logical predication, and do not harvest any implications for subjective experience.

So my textual inquiry will hone in on Gadamer's antipathy to the ideology of romantic subjectivity. His deprecation of the inward experience of the solitary soul, the most complete expression of what was essentially a Christian invention, is present in his attack on the aestheticization of art, the lionization of the authorial genius and the *mens auctoris*, the fetishization of *Erlebniskult*, the Diltheyan use of autobiography as a fundamental datum, cumulatively these all feel like it is motivated by a genuine personal antipathy. Although Gadamer took fundamental direction from Heidegger's groundbreaking turn from subjectivism, a decisive and fateful *Wegkehr* for the history

of philosophy, for Gadamer there was something more. This something more is the driving theme of *Truth and Method*.

Gadamer opposes to the excess of subjectivism a sociality grounded in his sense of ancient culture—expressed in the Platonic form of the dialogue, the ideal of the Greek *polis* and the Roman *sensus communis*—and worked out in modern idioms in the sociality of play, the shared experience of performance, the priority of question and answer, the Hegelian structure of the idea, the historicity of being, the shared possession of language and tradition, the being of the work, the disorienting demand of the Thou. This accumulation of associated themes feels like the expression of a genuine affinity rather than just a philosophical commitment. Gadamer was preeminently a philosopher of the social—not of the deep ethical tinge of Buber or Levinas, but rather of the simple, gregarious generosity of the social animal.

This orientation to a kind of historicized sociality is behind Gadamer’s decisive, even emphatic, turn toward Hegel and away from Schleiermacher in his proposal for a philosophical hermeneutics, a turn that is decisive to the argument and through-line of *Truth and Method*. Whereas communication, for Schleiermacher, “is really rooted in its own soil” and “belongs to a ‘world’ that alone determines its full significance,” for Hegel, the meaning of a text sums the profit and loss of the situations through which a communication travels, but more than this, and as a result of this loss and gain, “is transformed into a thinking relation to the past.”¹⁹

This Hegelian preference is, in a way, an odd choice, given that Gadamer attaches his career and thought so emblematically to the hermeneutic tradition per se. But I think the choice comes back to Gadamer’s antipathy to subjectivism. At a glance, it is easier to understand his zealous struggle against objectivist methodologism in an age of bureaucratic technique (given the trajectory of the German university system he had come up in), than his privileging of social experience (*Erfahrung*) over personal experience (*Erlebnis*), which he describes so evocatively (*Truth and Method*, pp. 63-70), and then turns against (pp. 70-81). Is there not something incongruous or at least ambivalent in this renunciation? Gadamer repeats endless variations of the following formula (expanded beyond art to the whole of experience): “[T]he experience of the work of art always fundamentally surpasses any subjective horizon of interpretation, whether that of the artist or of the recipient.”²⁰ But what does that actually *mean*? How does *any* experience surpass subjectivity? Experience would seem to have an irreducibly personal aspect. Gadamer’s self-proclaimed allegiance to classical antiquity is largely tied to his assertion that the Greeks would not have understood at all the strange modern invention of the subject, so we might look there for a model. Or we could look

to the exemplar of the medieval world on Gadamer's thinking. Discard the paradigm of the solitary artist, the individual reader, the Cartesian thinker, the autonomous agent, the modern subject, and substitute for all this the shared patrimony passed down through artisan guilds in the closely integrated political, cultural, economic life of the cathedral town. But I wonder if the formative communal experience of the reading circle described in Gadamer's autobiographical writings is also not a clue here.²¹ Whatever the causes, his affinity for shared social experience attains the deepest ontological consequence in his conception of hermeneutics, a conception that demands of us that we move resolutely away from the authority of inner intuition.²² If I want to understand Gadamer's fundamental commitment to *Mitsein* over *Dasein*, I have to wrestle with this constitutive preference for *Erfahrung* over *Erlebnis*.

As I do this, the thing I most struggle to come to grips with in Gadamer's push for desubjectivization is its dissonance with the phenomenological commitment to and feeling for sense-perception—the fundamental datum of phenomenology—that was such a strong ally in the claim of the *Geisteswissenschaften* against positivism. I think in this regard even more of Merleau-Ponty's poignant existential description, even in its chiasmic form, than of Husserl's rather arid phenomenological demonstrations.²³ A sympathetic imagination can go some distance toward appreciating someone else's suffering, but it cannot experience it directly. A fundamental difference—a gap, if you will—remains, because subjectivity is simply irreducible. I acknowledge that the Gadamerian objection is justified—the off-loading or dispersion of subjectivity when the subject “loses itself” in play, and is in consequence reconstructed or transformed by the process. I am no longer the person I was. But there is also this vast kingdom of my own private experience. I think this is why there will always be a fundamental difference between the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Ricoeur. So I want to fix this difference, because I do not think it is a simple one.

Gadamer's position on the modern notion of subjectivity is clear because he has written about it so pointedly. The thrust of his allegiance to the linguistic turn is precisely to move “beyond subjectivity.”²⁴ The less obvious question is how this happens. What kind of ontology is it that demands that we “let the Other come freely into one's own being self” (*den Anderen in sein eigenes Selbstsein freizugeben*)?²⁵ Self in this formulation is made processive (*Selbstsein*), and it is in this space of processivity that I will suggest Gadamer modulates the sense of hermeneutic identity.

A word here about how Gadamer distinguishes subject and subjectivity from self and consciousness. In this twin attack, Gadamer's chief polemical target was always the *philosophical* concept of the subject and its spillage into the cultural reaction of romantic subjectivity.²⁶ Common language outside of specialized academic discourse

has no place for talk of “the subject,” but vernacular speech has easy commerce with notions of personhood, individuality, selfhood, or consciousness.²⁷ Gadamer had no intention to undermine these commonplaces, and certainly held a place for the integrity of the individual in the traditional sense—an issue about which so many continental theorists are still preoccupied.²⁸ He did, however, insist on giving the ontological dignity to text, work, and tradition as a genuine Other and Thou, so he was happy to blur these boundaries, and in doing this he was not trafficking merely in metaphor. As Walter Brogan recently pointed out, unlike Heidegger who invented neologisms because commonly available language was inadequate to his purposes, Gadamer “translates and transforms” the commonly used language of philosophy directly in consequence of his own philosophical commitments.²⁹ Gadamer himself relates this intention to his most famous locution (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*): “The fact that I make use of the concept of consciousness at all, a term whose ontological bias Heidegger had clearly demonstrated in *Being and Time*, to me only represented an accommodation to what seemed a natural usage of language.”³⁰

That is the common usage side of Brogan’s caution, but we also have to attend to the translation and transformation side. Gadamer’s positive use of terms such as “self-understanding,” “self-consciousness,” and “self-reflection” takes us to this transformative side.³¹ The “self” in these locutions is precisely not the self of the individual soul, the sovereign “I,” or the subject thrown back upon itself. “Self” here is an inclusive term that involves the mediation of text, of history, and community. To be sure, Gadamer was suspicious of a collectivist social identity. Here he is in conversation with Carsten Dutt, who asks him, “Would it perhaps have been more Gadamerian to say the house of human beings rather than the house of the human being?” Gadamer answers: “Nevertheless I still favor the singular! Only the individual human being has a thou [*ein Du*]. The plural sounds too collective to me.”³² Nor did Gadamer, as some of his French contemporaries *did*, mean to suggest that the self, the person, or the individual were deluded figments or moribund casualties of the modern imagination. For him such modern ideals were simply fetishized and overrated. He was always careful to use qualifying phrases such as “It is not really” “it goes far beyond” in describing private individual experience.³³ Gadamer’s transformative intention was to see the hermeneutic self as communal, probably something like a *polis*, but extended into past traditions and future possibilities. So if we put the two parts of Brogan’s advice together—the commonplace and the transformational—my sense of Gadamer’s view is that our individualist manner of thinking is not entirely illegitimate, but incomplete and inexact. Individual self-consciousness is real, but it is only a facet (a flickering as he

famously characterized it) of the long flow of culture and history: “Understanding too cannot be grasped as a simple activity of the consciousness that understands, but is itself a *mode* of the event of being” (emphasis added).³⁴

Beyond *Truth and Method*

With this concept of modality, we start to see what Gadamer may be saying about a communal sense of understanding as something exceeding the property of any individual, one that nevertheless acknowledges the existence of private experience and understanding. To clarify what he is saying, I will point to a Gadamerian text that contains the following proposition: “It is not really [*überhaupt*] we ourselves who understand.”³⁵ We want to parse what he means by this negative qualifier.

The text is the 1962 essay “On the Problem of Self-Understanding.” The thrust of this essay is to reinterpret the idea of self-understanding in social terms. To do this Gadamer has recourse, as he does in *Truth and Method*, to the model of Protestant theology, developing a sense of this term “that goes beyond the individual’s self-understanding, indeed, beyond his individual being.”³⁶ Neither self, nor understanding, nor the reflexivity that is implied by the compound are to be construed to reinforce a subjective individualism. Quite the opposite. Here Gadamer is on the side of Droysen, who conceived of “the historical mind” as a composite of the subjective and the objective, against Dilthey, who promoted the division of the spheres of subjective understanding and objective knowledge.³⁷ Gadamer rings the changes of anti-subjectivist phrases such as “selfless,” “loss of self,” “selfless witnesses,” and “I-lessness” in service of the ontological “priority of the ‘relation’ over against its relational members.”³⁸ In a way that I have to confess is not natural to me at all, he really wants to invest infinite meaning and value and worth in a being-understanding that is outside the grasp of the insight that the Christian West has taught us most to prize: “It is not really we ourselves who understand.”³⁹ This admonishment all comes to a head in what amounts to the thesis statement of Gadamer’s essay:

Just as the relation between the speaker and what is spoken points to a dynamic process that does not have a firm basis in either member of the relation, so the relation between the understanding and what is understood has a priority over its relational terms.⁴⁰

The way that Gadamer conceives this idea of an historical between is worked out in various ways—the most famous being the analogy of play—but in “On the Problem of Self-Understanding,” which is an indirect defense of Bultmann (that never mentions Bultmann) by holding up the Protestant idea of the Word as a composite of an historical event and its reception and exegesis in the life of the faithful. The Christian ‘self’ unfolds in the

history of its being: “In the last analysis, all understanding is self-understanding, but not in the sense of a preliminary self-possession or of one finally and definitively achieved . . . The self that we are does not possess itself; one could say that it ‘happens’.”⁴¹ Gadamer suggests that this idea is the model for Heidegger’s explanation for “the way in which the historicity of Dasein is itself carried out.”⁴² We are not sovereign subjects who direct the course of history, but dialogic partners in a history that is always happening to us beyond our willing and doing. Understanding, in the Gadamerian sense of the term, is “a presentiment of the meaning of the whole, which is concealed from us,” which means that understanding does not lie *in* any one of us, but spread out between us and our history, “the common world in which we live and to which belongs also the whole great chain of tradition reaching us . . . living as well as dead.”⁴³

The real being of language is that into which we are taken up when we hear it – what is said . . . the being of language seems to be its I-lessness . . . To speak means to speak *to* someone. The word should be the right word. That, however, does not mean simply that it represents the intended object for me, but rather, that it places it before the eyes of the other person to whom I speak.⁴⁴

To get to Gadamer’s sense of the We, we have to put together these two incongruous things; the other person to whom I really speak when I find just the right word, and the dead. The right word unlocks the treasure house of meaning that has constructed the community into which we are born. This is what Gadamer means by “I-lessness” [*Ichlosigkeit*].⁴⁵ Such a striking neologism makes us more conscious of a locution that Gadamer has been using all along, but that we can easily misunderstand as a mere writerly convention. When he says “we” he means specifically “the sphere of the ‘We’” (recall the hermeneutic invocation of Hölderlin’s “We are a conversation”) as a collective that gathers up not just the solidarity of a social community at any point in time, but the blend and overlap of history, culture and human beings that is manifest in language.⁴⁶ Here we should remember the German word *Sprache* conveys better than any English word the unity of the event of speaking with the lasting availability of a language.

But this unity is somewhat in tension with a separation that Gadamer insists on when he separates what he calls “the sphere of the ‘I’” and “the sphere of the ‘We’.”⁴⁷ To explain such a “We,” Gadamer invokes not just the 19th century notion of the historical mind but the classical and Christian terminology of the *Pneuma*. These are all precursors and prologue to Gadamer’s own more prosaic sense, which is an ontological commitment that he wants to express in the common ordinary language of dialogue or conversation. Gadamer’s gambit in this very non-

Heideggerian move was to effect a change in the meaning of the common idiom itself, so that we could more generally share in this recondite and obscure insight of metaphysical and theological origins.

Gadamer's shift of pronouns clearly intends the so-called I-lessness to stand as the categorial opposite of Husserl's transcendental ego.⁴⁸ But to have a clearer sense of what this opposition is, we have also to probe what Gadamer means by "sphere" [*Sphäre*].⁴⁹ This is not merely a figure of speech: He intends a definite passage, even a transcendence, from the one to the other, as we learn in the course of things when he says: "In speaking with each other we constantly pass over into the thought world of the other person."⁵⁰ So what I want to ask is what we do and "we" are when we "pass over" from the one sphere to another? Where are "we" in this liminal space that "is always out beyond us"?⁵¹

And here is where we confront Gadamer's characterization of subjective awareness as "a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life." What he privileges, instead, is what he calls linguistic being. In his 1966 essay "Man and Language," Gadamer becomes very precise about what linguistic being is. He makes four moves in his formulation, three of which limit the relevance of individual consciousness to its understanding. The limiting conditions are that (a) individual consciousness is not its model, (b) no individual consciousness could contain the fullness of a spoken language, and (c) it is not merely the sum of all individual consciousnesses. The concession he makes is that linguistic being requires individual consciousness:

The consciousness of the individual is not the standard by which the being of language can be measured. Indeed, there is no individual consciousness at all [*überhaupt*] in which a spoken language is actually [*wirklich*] present. How then is language present? Certainly not without the individual consciousness, but also not in a mere summation of the many who are each a particular consciousness for itself [*jede für sich*].⁵²

If we take these stipulations together, and draw upon our general understanding of Gadamer's teaching, a clearer picture comes into view. There is some kind of relation of participation he is describing here, in the Platonic sense. The double negation of the last sentence introduces a play between the many and the one that can be rephrased in positive terms: In every act of speech, a finite individual consciousness draws upon the great well of linguistic traditions bequeathed to her, and in the very process adds something to that legacy in each application to a new and different situation. By depositing something there she augments the linguistic being that is passed along and made available. Every performance is an act of interpretation that alters the whole. So the demotion that Gadamer has so

rudely visited upon individual subjective consciousness is a rebuke to its false pride, so that he may recalibrate its positive contribution. And we may characterize that contribution as a participation: We are all, all of us, always contributing to this ongoing project of understanding. Neither do any of us grasp the whole, nor is the whole every fully realized. Linguistic being is precisely this formally indicative process that is finite from both ends—from the point of view of the person’s self awareness, and from the point of view of the collective project.

But because linguistic being *requires* individual consciousness, and is not linguistic being without it, linguistic being is never without this flickering circuit. We have to have recourse to the chiasmic structure of that underlies every hermeneutic insight into factual human temporality. We cannot escape it. If Gadamer demotes individual subjective consciousness, he never lets go of it. That is a key piece of the answer to the question of this paper that we will want to keep in view.

So then I want to know what weight is apportioned to each side of the chiasm. Gadamer’s preoccupation is with the common side: The “common world in which we live and to which belongs also the whole great chain of tradition . . . is that into which we are taken up when we hear it.”⁵³ The precision I am seeking resides in the phrase appended to the end of this familiar explanation; the phrase “when we hear it.” If “to speak means to speak *to* someone,” as Gadamer’s dialogic hermeneutics always instructs us, this sociality has the specific requirement that the word we speak “should be the right word.”⁶⁵ This so-called right word—in the most iconic instances, an undying phrase from Ecclesiastes, the hypothetical final touch of Leonardo’s portrait, Orff’s solitary classic *Carmina Burana*—is the nexus or intersecting point of a perfectly registered expression, a formulation somehow attuned to wider and wider communities outside the orbit of the speaker, a touchstone or common chord that unites across tradition. This is what qualifies, as the most obvious case, as an event of language. It activates what Gadamer called the resonance chamber of tradition.

The key thing about this point of intersection is that, wherever and whenever it is sounded, it unites each particular consciousness with every consciousness across time *in that word*. It takes up residence there. Gadamer’s insistence that the real being of language is “what is said in it,” but this does not mean something separate from the expression. What is said *in* it is precisely the resonance. The sounding is a present event *and* a resurrection *and* an augury.⁵⁴

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Über den Humanismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1949), 17.

² Étienne Balibar, *Citizen Subject: Foundations for Philosophical Anthropology*, trans. Steven Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 4.

³ *Ibid.*, 125. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* §785, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 111; *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1988), 127.

⁴ Balibar, *Citizen Subject*, 130.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁷ Hegel, *Phenomenology* §417, 251.

⁸ Balibar, *Citizen Subject*, 171.

⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 3.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 476; *Phänomenologie*, 512.

¹¹ 287; *eine Weise des Geschichtlichseins selbst* WM 292

¹² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 269.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹⁴ See footnote 7.

¹⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 284.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ He continues: “Our own past and that other past toward which our historical consciousness is directed help to shape this moving horizon out of which human life always lives and which determines it as heritage and tradition.”

Ibid., 304.

¹⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegel’s Dialectic: Five Hermeneutic Studies*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 16-19.

¹⁹ Schleiermacher in Gadamer, TM, 166; Gadamer, TM, 168.

²⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd, Revised edition, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1993), xxviii.

²¹ Gadamer believed that “solitude is essentially a discovery that was brought into the general consciousness by Rousseau.” Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Culture and Word: Speeches and Essays*, trans. Chris Dawson (Cambridge: Yale

University Press, 1998), 102. His meditation on this topic is instructive: “Indeed, it really isn’t obvious that anyone would want to go for a walk alone. Perhaps that’s just peculiar to the age of introspection.” *Ibid.*, 103.

²² For the connection between Gadamer’s personal sociability and his philosophy, see Dennis Schmidt, “Socrates With a Cane,” *Duquesne Studies in Phenomenology* 1:1 (2020), 1.

²³ I have only have ever run across one comment by Gadamer on Merleau-Ponty, and it was disparaging. I suspect this is the reason. Merleau-Ponty heightens the cost of discounting the phenomenological dimension in a hermeneutic direction.

²⁴ Hans-George Gadamer, “Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity, Subject and Person,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 33 (2000): 275-87; here 286.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 284; GW 10, 96.

²⁶ In everyday life and in common conversation, we do not refer to or think about ourselves as subjects, although ordinary language regularly has recourse to concepts such as individual, self, and person.

²⁷ Here is Gadamer in conversation with Carsten Dutt: CD: “Would it perhaps have been more Gadamerian to say the house of human beings rather than the house of the human being?” HHG: “Nevertheless I still favor the singular! Only the individual human being has a thou [*ein Du*]. The plural sounds too collective to me.” Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, Trans. Richard E. Palmer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 8.

²⁸ We are far from the Deleuzian Body without Organs or the Latourian actant in Gadamer’s hermeneutic imaginary. In a transcribed conversation at one point he blurts out in exasperation “Oh, please spare me that completely misleading concept of intersubjectivity.” *Gadamer in Conversation*, 59. In a reflection on the reception of *Truth and Method*, he offered this well-known gloss: “The fact that I make use of the concept of *consciousness* at all, a term whose ontological bias Heidegger had clearly demonstrated in *Being and Time*, to me only represented an accommodation to what seemed a natural usage of language.” Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Intellectual Autobiography,” *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis E. Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), 46.

²⁹ “The language we have inherited from our tradition to speak about and understand community is oftentimes a hindrance in the attempt to appreciate the radicality of Gadamer’s thought. . . . he uses words we have inherited, but he attempts to retrieve and rescue these words, allowing them to become transformed and generate new meanings so

that we can think differently and see new possibilities.” Walter Brogan, “Basic Concepts of Hermeneutics: Gadamer on Tradition and Community,” *Duquesne Studies in Phenomenology* 1:1 (2020), 1.

³⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Intellectual Autobiography,” *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), 46.

³¹ [Omitted for blind review].

³² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, Trans. Richard E. Palmer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 8.

³³ *Ibid.*, 65, 58.

³⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 50.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 58; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986), 132.

³⁶ *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 45.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 50, 51, 58, 65, 50.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 65; GW 2, 151.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 65; GW 2, 151.

⁵⁰ Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 57.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵² *Ibid.*; GW 2, 150.

⁵³ Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 65.

⁵⁴ In our increasingly anti-subjectivist contemporary intellectual climate, theory has gone much further in the direction of a distributed and diffused social agency, one that a prominent Deleuzian scholar describes as “a depersonalized, collective form of enunciation.”⁵⁴ The critical project for decades has been to undermine, redistribute and disperse an intermittent, fragmented, fluid, ephemeral, mutating, contingent and unreal agency that is subject to ideological regimes as a pure effect of discourse, etc. In the hands of new materialist, ecological, and cybernetic models of agency, the Cartesian subject is an increasingly distant anachronism. From this current standpoint, the difference between Gadamer and Ricoeur plays out on *relatively* simple terms as the binary tension between the individual “I” and the collective “we,” between the privilege of subjective experience and the cultural history that exceeds any personal consciousness. Gadamer pressed us only to move from the self-possession of the cognizing subject to “an *enrichment* of our self,” “an elevation above oneself.”⁵⁴ Because Gadamer was so intent on illuminating the side of the spectrum from which we egoists have been so profoundly shut off in modernity’s indulgence in or obsession with the self, he had every reason to subvert its totalizing domination. He had to shout, because he was shouting in a storm. But so much progress has been made on that polemical front that we can start to ask some nuanced questions.