

Heidegger and Gadamer on Making Phenomenology Hermeneutical

Positioning Hans-Georg Gadamer as one of Martin Heidegger's most loyal students is typical in scholarship on phenomenology and hermeneutics.¹ Such positions are justified by Gadamer's own self-understanding.² After all, he understood *Truth and Method* (1960) as a path into Heidegger's later thinking.³ Such a self-understanding makes Heidegger's tepid reaction toward *Truth and Method* all the more perplexing.⁴ Scholars who aim to clarify such perplexity tend to focus on a few themes. Most prominently they focus on Heidegger and Gadamer's diverging temporal orientation, the relationship between destruction and historical effect (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), the role of the hermeneutic circle, or the role of language in determining human meaning.⁵ Such scholars offer many insights; however, these explanations fall short in articulating Gadamer's methodological developments

¹ As Walter Lammi (1991) notes both Leo Strauss and Jürgen Habermas issue such a reading of Gadamer. Kristin Gjesdel also affirms that Gadamer and Heidegger's thought overlaps decisively in *Truth and Method*, especially concerning the question of art (2009, 81-118).

² Robert Dostal (2013) points out the tension in Gadamer's self-presentation in "Heidegger's Hermeneutics, Gadamer's Hermeneutics." There, Dostal reminds us that Heidegger drops the use of hermeneutics in his later work, and Gadamer mobilizes this term throughout his career. With this, Dostal demonstrates how Gadamer incorporates Heidegger's later view of language into Heidegger's earlier description of understanding as interpretation (285-303).

³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Reflections on my Philosophical Journey," in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1997): 46-47.

⁴ Jean Grondin writes that Heidegger "left Gadamer in suspense" as to his judgment of the latter's *Truth and Method* (2003b, 292). Epistolary evidence suggests that Heidegger had more enthusiasm for Gadamer's other works, but such a judgment did not keep Heidegger from recommending Gadamer's hermeneutic tome to Jacques Lacan (Grondin 2003b, 293), nor did it keep him from recommending it to Hannah Arendt (Dostal 2023, 230). See also Robert Dostal 2002, 254.

⁵ For his part, Robert J. Dostal emphasizes that Heidegger's phenomenology is futurally oriented and Gadamer's work remains oriented toward the ecstasy of the past and the present emerging in the future through "historically effected consciousness" (2003, 253). In his more recent work, Dostal unfolds further implications of these distinct orientations, citing "Gadamer's reclamation of humanism" as most affronting to Heidegger and drawing out political implications on the basis of such a distinction (2023, 67). David Liakos (2021) issues a similar reading of Heidegger and Gadamer, and, likewise suggests that Gadamer offers better insight into democracy and politics. Walter Lammi concludes that Gadamer "corrects" Heidegger's view of history. Gadamer seeks continuity in the discontinuity of Heidegger's later reflections on epochality (Lammi, 1991, 505). Francis J. Ambrosio highlights Heidegger and Gadamer's distinct temporal orientations in view of Heidegger's reflections on epochality, and he argues that these differences reveal more about the freedom to choose a disposition toward history in the first place (1986, 48). Differently, Jean Grondin (2003a) takes the hermeneutic circle as his starting point when distinguishing Heidegger and Gadamer from one another. What makes Gadamer's circle unique for Grondin is complex and somewhat underdeveloped. Grondin is right to note that Gadamer's hermeneutic circle is comprised by a mereological analysis that ultimately yields revisable understanding, still he fails to appreciate to what extent Gadamer's revisions have ontological import. In particular, Grondin fails to grasp the linguistic elements that differ in relation to understanding. Other scholars take stock of Gadamer's distinct contributions to conceptualizing language. Niall Keane, for example, notes that Gadamer resists Heidegger's insistence on seeking a novel "form of thinking and speaking" (2022, 267). Heidegger and Gadamer certainly share a fixation on facticity and human finitude but respond to its hermeneutic problematic in divergent ways (George, 2020).

beyond his teacher. These methodological developments best come into view with reference to “formal indication” (*formale Anzeige*).

Formal indication names the methodological shift that Heidegger makes in the Early Freiburg Lectures with respect to Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology. Formal indications accounts for the role of facticity in understanding. Methodologically, formal indication appears to give Heidegger what he wants: namely, a grasp of facticity that avoids an objectified experience of consciousness and theoretical linguistic structures, alike. Formal indication is the feature of Heidegger’s thought that Gadamer recognizes as something that holds “for the whole of his (Heidegger’s) thought.”⁶ As I will argue, formal indication fails to capture the facticity of Dasein in its full sense. Formal indication does not sufficiently grant insight into the sociality of Dasein. This is not so for Gadamer, who turns to conversation as the method for achieving understanding. With this in view, my claim is that Gadamer’s method offers a better way to account for facticity.⁷ Beyond this, the radical language that formal indication employs resists conversation and with it the historical sense of understanding that is achieved in Gadamer’s orientation to tradition.

Scholars of hermeneutic phenomenology make useful progress toward situating Gadamer’s position vis-a-vis Heidegger’s; however, they are limited in doing so precisely because formal indication poses a challenge in the literature on Heidegger’s earliest writings.⁸ Formal indication and its role in Heidegger’s phenomenology, moreover, suffers from vagueness and disputes concerning its development. For this reason, I clarify first the motivation for formal indication and its nascent

⁶ Gadamer 1994, 33.

⁷ I concur with Jerome Veith (2015) who maintains that Gadamer’s view of history possesses “an inherently social dimension” that is lacking in Heidegger’s contributions (2015, 44).

⁸ Nevertheless, several philosophical contributions have been made with reference to both Heidegger and Gadamer’s insights. Dennis Schmidt (2008 and 2012), for example, develops an original ethics on the basis of Heidegger’s later essay “The Letter on Humanism” and on Hans-Georg Gadamer’s emphasis on life, application, and understanding. Following Schmidt, Theodore George (2020) emphasizes that imperative that hermeneuticists have to understand. Others, like Günter Figal (2010) rethink hermeneutic-phenomenology as oriented around the question of exteriority, although with rigorous textual reference and creativity..

development during “The War Emergency Semester” in 1919, where Heidegger is concerned to capture factual life in response to Paul Natorp’s criticisms of Husserlian phenomenology.⁹ In the second section of this paper, I analyze the role that formal indication plays in Heidegger’s treatment of tradition during the 1923 *Ontologie: Hermeneutik der Faktizität / Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, where a young Gadamer is in the audience. In the third section, I demonstrate that Gadamer improves upon Heidegger’s phenomenology in two distinct respects. Where for Heidegger formal indication is the place of understanding as self-understanding, for Gadamer conversation is the place of understanding the self, what is outside the self, and tradition. With this methodological shift to conversation, Gadamer also deflates the destructive position that Heidegger develops so as to account for the social role that tradition plays. Gadamer’s phenomenology, then, is more attuned to its proper object, namely, being understood in relation to factual life. Section three relies on a reading of Gadamer’s 1924 “On the Idea of System in Philosophy” as well as *Truth and Method*.

Subjectivity and Objectivity: The Problem for Early Phenomenology

In the 1919 “War Emergency Semester,” Heidegger addresses Paul Natorp’s criticism of Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology.¹⁰ For Husserl, consciousness can be investigated within a self-related modification of consciousness; Husserl calls this reflection (*Reflexion*). Reflection occurs by means of the *epoché* and gives one direct access to pure consciousness. In other words, reflection is the process by which phenomenology achieves any knowledge claims about consciousness and its relation to the world. As Husserl puts it in the Cartesian Meditations: In transcendental reflection “there is left us,

⁹ Paul Natorp (1912).

¹⁰ I am not the first to recognize that Natorp was instrumental in motivating Heidegger to reformulate Husserl’s phenomenology. Dan Zahavi (2003) highlights Heidegger’s response to ultimately suggest against Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann (2000) that hermeneutic phenomenology is still reflective but not objectifying (169). As Ted Kisiel (1994), puts it “Starting from Husserl’s ‘principle of principles,’ [Heidegger] describes the phenomenological intuition that attuned itself to the inner expressivity of life as a hermeneutic intuition which understands experience out of the motivational structure of its inner historicity” to avoid Natorp’s critique of reflective phenomenology (199). Recently, Stefano Cazzanelli (2020) emphasizes Heidegger’s rehabilitation of intuition as sympathetic with life understood as facticity (16).

on the noetic side, openly endless life of pure consciousness and, as its correlate on the noematic side, the meant world, purely as meant.”¹¹ Reflection, then, is the activity that allows phenomenology to make knowledge claims with unprejudiced intuition.¹²

For Natorp, however, no such knowledge is possible, especially through Husserl’s method. His criticism of Husserlian reflection is twofold: (1) reflection does not give direct knowledge of the subject but rather objectifies it; (2) the theoretical disposition necessary for expressing any subjective insight obscures the object of investigation. In Natorp’s view, Husserl’s framework requires that the reflective phenomenological subject would not be grasping their consciousness qua subjectivity but qua objectivity. In Natorp’s own words: subjectivity can be grasped only “in concepts, because there is absolutely no other organon of knowledge”; however, “when it is grasped in concepts it is no longer absolutely immediate and subjective, but has always already been objectified.”¹³ Further, given the necessity of concepts for expressing subjectivity, even if intuition could provide sufficient evidence for the reduction, pure consciousness and its findings could never be expressed without theory. That is, even if the experience is immediate it can only be determined with universal concepts.¹⁴ Natorp, thus, concludes that phenomenology fails to yield knowledge of subjectivity qua subjectivity.¹⁵

¹¹ Husserl 1982, 37.

¹² Husserl 1982, 36. The two forms of reflection are central to Husserl’s earlier work in *Ideas* as well. As Tobias Keiling describes the role of reflection: “it brings the correlation of immanent cognition and transcendent being in intentional consciousness into view” (“weil sie die Korrelation von immanentem Erkennen und transzendtem Sein im intentionalen Bewusstsein in den Blick bringt”) (2010, 289).

¹³ Paul Natorp “On the Objective and Subjective Grounding of Knowledge” translated by David Kolb *Journal for the British Society of Phenomenology* (2021) 12:3, 263. As he puts it more colorfully elsewhere: “would not one be forced to artificially still and interrupt the continuous stream of becoming, which surely is how inner life presents itself, to isolate the individual findings, to fixate it with the isolation in mind, to sterilize it, like the anatomist does with specimens?” Natorp 1912, 102-103.

¹⁴ Natorp, “Subjective Grounding,” 261.

¹⁵ Dan Zahavi nicely formalizes Natorp’s critique: “(1) experience is a relation between a subject (qua experiencing) and an object (qua experienced), (2) if the subject is to experience itself, it has to take itself as an object, (3) if the subject experiences an object, it does not experience itself, and (4) it is impossible to experience true subjectivity” (2003, 156).

Natorp provokes Heidegger to ameliorate such shortcomings in Husserlian phenomenology.¹⁶ He does so with exceptional clarity during the “War Emergency Semester” (1919). In particular, he affirms Natorp’s view that the moment Husserlian reflection occurs, lived-experience “becomes a series of individually intended objects.”¹⁷ Thus, all philosophical reflection is oriented toward objectivity and maintains a theoretical stance. It seems that phenomenology cannot escape the baggage of theory. On this point, however, Heidegger departs from Natorp and his compatriot in Marburg, Nicolai Hartmann.¹⁸

Against the positivism of the neo-Kantians, Heidegger proposes that phenomenology need not be reflective nor need it distort subjectivity with theoretical description.¹⁹ Instead, Heidegger suggests that phenomenology, explicitly take on a new feature, namely, interpretation that takes place through intuition. In relation to the assumptions made in Husserl’s phenomenology, Heidegger asks: “is phenomenological intuition a seeing to which the thing to be seen stands opposed, over against and (so to speak) outside this seeing” and “is there really this division and separation between knowledge and object, between the given and the description?”²⁰ In other words, in 1919 Heidegger is unsure that the phenomena really appear as objects ready made for universal

¹⁶ Perhaps Gadamer puts it best in “Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity, Subject and Persons,” when he writes that “Husserl meant to grasp the essence of the consciousness of time” and Heidegger critique “shows that on this conception, the primary, fundamental composition of human Dasein is misjudged” because Dasein is not constituted retrospectively and reflectively but rather its “givenness” is “on-the-way” because the future is not yet given (2000, 280-281).

¹⁷ GA 56/57 101: TDF 85. I make use of the English translations of the Vittorio Klostermann *Gesamtausgabe* and refer to the corresponding GA page number.

¹⁸ In place of phenomenology, Natorp proposes a reconstructive approach to subjectivity. Such an approach requires that the transcendental philosopher interrogate the conditions for the possibility of object-oriented investigations and, with this in view, resist any immediate reflection and retrospectively recover the “subjective dimension” of an experience (Zahavi 2003, 158). If Husserl investigates pure consciousness by way of bracketing, Natorp investigates it by reconstructing the relationship between an objectified experience and an objectified subjectivity. The reconstructive position that Natorp proposes, of course, is also guilty of objectification, as Heidegger notes (GA 56/57 104, 107: TDF 88, 90-91 and GA 56/57 101-102: TDF 85-86).

¹⁹ Zahavi 2003, 160. It is notable that Gadamer was educated by both Paul Natorp and Nicolai Hartmann. Indeed, Gadamer’s earliest publications are “Zur Systematice in der Philosophie” is in Natorp’s 1924 *Festschrift* and a book review of Hartmann’s *Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* (1921). In both texts, Gadamer solidifies his thought as phenomenological rather than oriented by the neo-Kantian search for eternal truth justified in the sciences.

²⁰ GA 56/57 111-112: TDF 94. Heidegger makes similar such statements concerning the interpretive primacy of experience GA63 74 / OHF 58-59).

description. Indeed, he concludes that the “the universality of the formally objective appropriates its origin from the in-itself of the flowing experience of life.”²¹ The flow of life, where intuitions are imbued already with descriptions, is a condition for any universal theoretical claim at all.

For Heidegger, things appear to us as already interpreted in consciousness. Moreover, they appear not as possessing a certain quality or being of a certain quantity, but they are interpreted *as* something. In addressing something as something, Heidegger’s phenomenology is concerned with the particular as it is immediately manifest. For instance, I experience my cup of tea *as* an enjoyable aspect of my day and not by its shape, color, or size. I understand and describe it as such because I do not primarily comport to my life theoretically.

Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology ambitiously captures consciousness and its relation from a significantly expanded understanding of consciousness. Heidegger calls this “facticity.”²² For Heidegger, facticity does not demand a theoretical comportment to describing experience. Instead, he expresses that “the empowering experience of living experience that takes itself along is the understanding intuition, the hermeneutical intuition, the originary phenomenological back-and-forth formation of the receipts and precepts from which all theoretical objectification... falls out.”²³ Back behind Husserlian retention and protention that constitute inner-time consciousness, and prioritize a subject intending physical objects, is our basic mode of comporting to things, that is, interpretively.²⁴

The 1919 lecture ends with an all too brief discussion of the “hermeneutic intuition.” It is clear enough that the hermeneutic intuition is meant to point to convey a pretheoretical access to the world. As Heidegger puts it, with the hermeneutical intuition, “the puzzling presence of

²¹ GA 56/57 116: TDF 98.

²² M. Jorge De Carvalho (2010) provides a conceptual history of “facticity” in relation to Fichte and Heidegger. While Fichte defines facticity as a “trait that belongs to consciousness,” which needs to be overcome, for Heidegger, facticity “pertains to the very core and root of” consciousness (225 and 255).

²³ GA 56/57 117: TDF 99.

²⁴ S.J McGrath 2010, 181.

determination prior to all theoretical description is clarified.”²⁵ Thus, I need not pause and undergo phenomenological reflection and objectify my consciousness in order to have a fulfilled or sufficiently evidenced experience. Instead, life takes place through “a fore-theoretical understanding of the whole” which occurs alongside life.²⁶ Heidegger’s movement away from Husserl via Natorp’s critique provides him with the hermeneutical breakthrough necessary to grasp facticity more aptly. Heidegger makes phenomenology decisively hermeneutical with the introduction of formal indications.²⁷

The Hermeneutics of Facticity

For Heidegger, formal indications accomplish the task of grasping factual life without theoretical baggage. As he puts it, they guide understanding “from out of the indefinite and vague but still intelligible content of the indication onto the right path of looking.”²⁸ Heidegger’s hermeneutic revision allows for philosophical claims about factual life without systematic considerations distorting the way the particular experience appears.

Heidegger clarifies formal indication decisively in his Early Freiburg and Marburg lectures. In this section I focus on *Ontology—the Hermeneutics of Facticity* (1923) with some references to *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (1918-1921).²⁹ Formal indications, simply put, are the apt type of philosophical prose for expressing the movements of life.³⁰ Expressing life, in this way, provides the

²⁵ GA 56/57 117: TDP 99.

²⁶ McGrath 2010, 181. Heidegger *Being and Time* section 32.

²⁷ “Where for Husserl intuition does not alter the intention it fulfills, for Heidegger the enactment differentiates the structure in a decisive way. Enactment-sense is the difference history makes (Risser 2002), anchoring meaning in factual life” (McGrath 2010, 181).

²⁸ GA63 81/ OHF 62.

²⁹ Formal indications are also operative in Heidegger’s 1922 “Natorp Report” collected as GA 62. As Grondin (2003b) and Figal (2010) report, the Natorp Report found its way to Gadamer while he was recovering from polio. The Natorp Report confirmed for Gadamer the import and novelty of Heidegger’s thought. Upon recovering, Gadamer and his wife made their way to Freiburg.

³⁰ Reid 2019, 177.

basis for phenomenology to make ontological claims. An ontological understanding occurs when a non-binding formal claim is made, and the phenomenologists finds that claim to be true in her independently enacted situation. Formal indications provide an indication of a phenomenon, and it serves to allow “the enactment-character” of the indication to remain free.³¹ Importantly, the indication provided does not impose a preconceived way of understanding the formal phenomenon to which it points but, instead, avoids philosophically or publicly pre-determined language. It is expressed instead through provisional language and gesture, so that that which is indicated can be existentially enacted.³²

Given that enacting a description that is not laden with theory is Heidegger’s task, formal indications are closely related to his concern to deconstruct the history of philosophy.³³ S.F McGrath

³¹ GA60 64 / PRL 44.

³² McGrath 2010, 186-187. One difficulty in the formal indication literature concerns whether or not this development remains something transcendental. Although, this is not the place to come to a judgment about it, I list some of the major contributions to this debate. McGrath suggests that formal indication functions as a kind of negative theology (2010, 186). This reading grants credence to John van Buren (1994) and Theodore Kisiel’s (1993) interpretation of formal indication as a mystical concept. As Kisiel understands him, Heidegger “looks to the mystical experience to ‘loosen’ the subject from the System and to bring out an entirely different ‘motivational context in the experiencing subject,’ which would bring into view ‘the structural character of the unity of object and subject’” (1993, 74). Such interpretations stand in contrast to Steven Crowell who understands formal indication to be a reappropriation of Husserlian reflection, rather than a rejection of it (2001, 137). James Reid offers an interpretation that accounts for the transcendental features of formal indication as well as its somewhat religious connotations, suggesting that at their core formal indications are ethical. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann and Dan Zahavi are also in dispute about the status of reflective phenomenology in Heidegger’s hermeneutical developments. Von Hermann describes Heidegger’s break with Husserl, hermeneutics seems to take the place of reflection. Indeed, where reflection suggests that phenomenology proceed with an objectifying intuition that reflectively considers intentions, hermeneutical phenomenology does not require a withdrawal from factual life (Von Hermann 2000, 23 and Zahavi 2003, 167). In hermeneutic phenomenology, one emphasizes different contours of experience and expresses these contours in a destructive manner. That is, one expresses experience in formal indications that may or may not cohere with other’s experience. I’m inclined to agree with Zahavi’s reading “that Heidegger’s real contribution might be taken to consist in an analysis of this special type of non-objectifying reflection; a type of reflection that can exactly provide us with an access to lived subjectivity” (Zahavi 2003, 170). Indeed, elsewhere, Heidegger explains that “The way in which the self is unveiled to itself in the factual Dasein can nevertheless be fittingly called reflection,” if we take the expression to mean an “interconnection such as is manifested in the optical meaning of the term ‘reflection’” (GA 24 / BPP 159). He continues that “To reflect means, in the optical context, to break at something, to radiate back from there, to show itself in a reflection from something” (GA 24 / BPP 159). It is worth noting that Gadamer’s interpretation of formal indication hues more closely to the mystical reading and associates it with Mister Eckhart. Gadamer suggests that formal indication has some resonances with mystical theology. In 1923, he witnesses Heidegger’s enthusiasm about Meister Eckhart’s *Opus tripartitum* getting published (1994, 28).

³³ GA63 82/ OHF 63. As Günter Figal reminds us, even though “Heidegger’s thought may develop and change, the notion that the truth of philosophical tradition lies in its beginning remains determinative for his thinking” beginning in 1922 (2009, 8).

rightly articulates that “by exacerbating the living and fore-theoretical meaning of philosophical terms,” formal indication “invites us to live the subject-matter for ourselves, to think it through in terms native to our own lived experience, and thus allow it to be historically refracted by the facticity of our situation.”³⁴ Thus, formal indication demands that the phenomenologist abandon her commonplace theoretical structure that has hitherto enabled her understanding. Indeed, formal indication requires her to revise the structures of her understanding in order to investigate her subject-matter.³⁵ By dismantling prior structures of her understanding, formal indications enable the phenomenologist to revise her understanding of her own being in relation to life such that she no longer merely inherits her understanding of being but enacts it and appropriates it for her own.³⁶

So understood Heidegger’s destructive project relies on formal indications.³⁷ In undertaking a formal indication, I engage with a formal contentless expression. In 1923, Heidegger’s example is “being-in-the-world” (*in-der-Welt-sein*). With this expression, I consider what it means to be in as a human Dasein. I, then, have to consider what it is like for my particular Dasein to be in something like a world. I consider what being looks like “at the particular time” of my investigation.³⁸ This process enables me to come to a fuller, perhaps more authentic, meaning of my ‘being-in.’³⁹ In contrast to theoretical language, like *Animal Rationale* “the animal with reason,” and sedimented everyday ways of speaking, like “human being,” this formal indication brings the phenomenologist

³⁴ McGrath 2010, 182.

³⁵ McGrath 2010, 186.

³⁶ In order to revise or to be open to revision, we first have to realize tacit preconceived formal structures. Formal indication offers a tentative understanding. Much like a yellow “caution wet floor sign” is no longer relevant once the floor dries, so too do formal structure lapse in their signification once our investigation makes progress.

³⁷ Destruction in the opening to *Being and Time* refers to Heidegger’s approach to the history of ontology. He writes “the question must first be ask whether and to what extent in the course of the history of ontology in general the interpretation of being has been thematically connected with the phenomenon of time” (SZ 23 / BT 220). With a particular answer to the question in mind, Heidegger destructs prior approaches that do not sufficiently account for the temporal structure of being. Destruction methodologically undermines understandings of being that distort the centrality of temporality. Given that Dasein is the being for whom its being undetermined, destruction is applicable to all Dasein. Indeed, destruction would transform and clarify the meaning of being for all Dasein.

³⁸ GA63 85 / OHF 65.

³⁹ McGrath 2010, 187. McGrath demonstrates how the formal indication “being-in-the-world” discloses a more authentic sense of what it means for Dasein to “be-in.”

to enact and appropriate her understanding independently of pre-established universals that weigh down language. She is able to do so through interpretively ‘filling in’ the formal expression.

Heidegger describes the role of formal indication in his hermeneutic phenomenology. “Being-in-the-world,” he suggests, is not a “fixed universal proposition” that is “used to make deductions from and fantasize with in a constructivist dialectical fashion”; rather “everything depends upon our understanding being guided from out of the indefinite and vague but still intelligible content of the indication onto the right path of looking.”⁴⁰ The indication, then, makes no theoretical or systematic assumptions and its description is not taken up carelessly, rather it serves as an indication of something that the phenomenologist’s experience may affirm.⁴¹ Formal indication, then, gestures to a type of content that a phenomenologist should consider. In her consideration, however, she provides the content from her own intuitive grasp of her particular life and, thus makes formal use of the formal aspects in a non-binding way.⁴² Formal indication transforms the phenomenologist’s understanding without producing a settled concept. Understood in this way, formal indications illuminate Heidegger’s provocative claim in 1923 that “hermeneutics is destruction!”⁴³

⁴⁰ GA63 80/ OHT 62.

⁴¹ Formal indication develops in conjunction with Heidegger’s response to Natorp, however it is still making use of Husserl’s insights concerning generalizations and formalizations (Husserl 2012, 130). “Generalization” refers to the process by which some particular thing is subsumed under a broader concept (Husserl 2012, 132). For example, a camel spider is a solpuga and solifugae are arachnids. I can subsume “camel spider” under its proper genera because its general relations are always present in the material particular (Reid 2019, 188) By contrast, formalization is not tied to materiality. It focuses on an object’s categorial forms or essences. Independent of the material qualities that objects of consciousness possess, are the object’s particular formal structures where materiality is located (Husserl 2012, 131 and Keiling 2017, 413). At any given time, I am able to inquire not only about the material qualities of an object of consciousness but also about *how* it is given; that is, I can ask about what forms are present in the material qualities (Reid 2019, 188).

Heidegger summarizes his mentor’s distinctions in a 1920-1921 lecture on religious life. There, he explains: “the transition from ‘red’ to ‘color’ and from ‘color’ to ‘sensuous quality’ is a *generalization*; that from ‘sensuous quality’ to ‘essence’ is a *formalization*” (GA60 58/PRL 40) Heidegger moves away from the Husserlian use of these terms, that is, to make universal claims, and instead makes uses of the formal aspect in a non-binding way. Formal indication promotes a transformation of understanding in the phenomenologist (Reid 2019, 189).

⁴² This process offers insight into the title of McGrath’s 2010 paper. Formal indication is at risk of “saying nothing” because its material is only acquired in a phenomenologist’s choice to consider the direction toward which the indicative expression points.

⁴³ GA63 105 / OHF 81. In 1922, Heidegger writes, similarly: “the hermeneutic carries out its task only on the path of destruction” (GA62 368 / “HIS” 55).

Hermeneutics, for Heidegger, then, is located first and foremost within Dasein. Interpreting and appropriating formal indications for oneself allows Dasein to achieve greater ontological understanding by achieving a greater understanding of what it means for that particular Dasein to be. Returning to the questions I raised initially, I consider Gadamer's transformation of Heidegger's "breakthrough." In my view, formal indication as a way of destructively transforming and enabling understanding in factual Dasein falls short of accommodating the social sphere and thus does not accomplish all that it wishes, namely, a way of grasping the whole of factual life. This is not so for Gadamer, who instead achieves understanding in conversation with a transformative disposition of openness. Crucially, Gadamer's transformation allows for understanding to be settled rather than merely indicated.

Gadamer's Hermeneutics: What is understood when we understand?

In this section, I contribute to settling debates concerning the relationship between Heidegger and Gadamer. Focusing on formal indication is clarifying because it serves the same purpose for understanding as genuine conversation does for Gadamer. Moreover, Gadamer's earliest publication, written just after spending time in Freiburg with Heidegger highlights that formal indication left a mark on Gadamer.⁴⁴ In "On the Idea of System in Philosophy" (*Zur Systemidee in der Philosophie*) (1924) written on the occasion of Paul Natorp's seventieth birthday *Festschrift*, Gadamer makes a clear break with his neo-Kantian teachers and establishes himself as an emerging hermeneutic phenomenologist.

⁴⁴ Gadamer is present during the 1923 Summer seminar, Heidegger's last in Freiburg before making his way to Marburg. Yet, even before Gadamer travels to Freiburg he had read Heidegger, as one of the earliest readers of the so-called "Natorp Report" (Grondin 2006b, 94).

While formal indication improves upon Husserlian reflection and the neo-Kantian approach for capturing the movement of factual life, it fails to sufficiently account for factual exteriority.⁴⁵ Gadamer's conversational model is meant to do just this, as I demonstrate below. Just as formal indications achieve self-understanding independently of publicly accepted and anticipated language, conversation enables dynamic understanding between two people when neither maintain expectations about what the other person is going to say.⁴⁶ In this way, Gadamer improves upon Heidegger's hermeneutic breakthrough.

Indeed, Heidegger's phenomenology is commonly criticized for falling short in relation to sociality. "Being-with" does not allow the other to come into their particularity. Moreover, when Heidegger discusses others more explicitly, he reduces them to their averageness in the One (*das Man*).⁴⁷ Even though we are existentially being-with. For Heidegger, our sociality still obscures and interferes with our capacity to be authentic.⁴⁸ As John Haugland puts it: "the real and...sinister difficulty is that ordinary language and common sense are relentlessly homogenizing" and they have the character of absorption, redigestion, and domestication."⁴⁹ Every day public language offers Dasein inherited understandings and such public language, theoretical or otherwise, does not undergo conceptual shifts readily. Much like formal indication, in *Being and Time* anxiety and reticence (or language that is silent) breaks down language and enables a transformed understanding,

⁴⁵ As Scott Campbell usefully articulates it, Heidegger notes that objectification in reflection or in reconstruction fails incorporate the temporal component of Dasein. With this the facticity of Dasein is refuted by the process of investigation. See *The Early Heidegger's Philosophy of Life: Facticity, Language, Being* pp. 1-20.

⁴⁶ Gadamer 2016, 403. There is evidence that Heidegger view evolves in his later thought. For example, see GA77 / *Country Path Conversations*.

⁴⁷ Irene McMullin (2013) addresses more recent critiques concerning the sociality of Dasein but does not approach it in the way I do so here. Indeed, her lack of attention to Heidegger's methodology in *Being and Time* is an oversight that renders her reading of a social Heidegger tenuous at best. Given that Heidegger's hermeneutic-phenomenology requires that philosophical categories be rethought and appropriated by each Dasein, an account of Heidegger's social ontology must incorporate the methodological (Nicolai Krejberg Knudsen 2020). Nevertheless, her account provides conceiving reasons to think that *Mitdasein* is an essential component of Heidegger's phenomenological account of the self because all Dasein take part in temporality (2013, 105-140). More classical criticisms of Heidegger are found in Jean-Paul Sartre 1956, 221-430 and Emmanuel Levinas 1987, 39-56.

⁴⁸ Heidegger speaks of the relationship between language and authenticity in as early as 1922 (GA62 366-367/ HIS 54).

⁴⁹ Haugland 2013, 74.

and in this instance, it gestures to being-toward-death.⁵⁰ Given this structure, Heidegger's early phenomenology is frequently charged with solipsism and individualism. Formal indication, which enables one to enact and revise their ontological framework, is less commonly charged with such methodological a-sociality.⁵¹ As Jean Grondin suggests, however, this form of understanding is always principally a self-understanding. It always concerns how a particular self comes to understand its own relation to things, and it does so against the current of what is given.⁵²

Gadamer finds his own voice and hermeneutical approach against Heidegger's formal indications. Heidegger undermines himself because factual Dasein, the very thing taken up in formal indication, is itself always being-with. Formal indication maintains a subjectively-oriented disposition because it is principally concerned with enacting an ontological view that resists the history of metaphysics. Conceiving of formal indications always as one's own, thus, contradicts its subject-matter. Despite Heidegger's hermeneutic revision and recourse to enacting a destructive experience in Dasein with formal indications, he remains reliant on a certain subjectivism in order for that understanding to occur.

With this, I locate an underappreciated distinction between Heidegger's hermeneutic breakthrough and Gadamer's development of hermeneutic phenomenology. While many agree that the fundamental difference between Gadamer and Heidegger concerns language and understanding, few scholars see this as a distinction concerning the methodological core of hermeneutic

⁵⁰ Haugland 2013, 75.

⁵¹ Knudsen, for instance, argues that Heidegger's early phenomenological ontology is directed at incorporating social structures. He takes his point of departure from Husserl's *Mitwelt* (2020, 724). As Knudsen argues "Heidegger's argument is that our understanding in general springs from a shared space of possibilities, and that we understand ourselves, others, and our environment based on this mode of being-in-the-world. In this way, we always already have an understanding of others as engaged in and with the world that we ourselves are also engaged in and with" (2020, 732). While he provides some textual support and notes that understanding, as in the case with skillful coping, always involves a shared understanding, Knudsen's argument does not account for how understanding occurs with others, only that understanding can be shared (2020, 733; citing from GA 20, 335).

⁵²2003, 83.

phenomenology, tending to view it as a difference in emphasis.⁵³ As Niall Keane points out, “Gadamer interprets and appropriates Heidegger’s early use of the term ‘formal indication’ because Gadamerian hermeneutics is also oriented toward achieving understanding beyond what is immediately given in one’s experience of the tradition and language.”⁵⁴ Pace Keane, however, I argue that Gadamer develops Heidegger’s method so that language and tradition are not necessarily destructed but understood within their proper historical context. Language and tradition do not necessarily degrade our understanding of Being, but they track a plurality of ways that Being is taken up. Beyond this, Gadamer’s phenomenology does not rely on an individual to resist the language of sociality and enact a more apt description of something, but it relies on individuals interacting with what is exterior to them and expanding the context in which something is to be understood.⁵⁵

As Gadamer understands Heidegger, formal indications demand that “each and every one of us”... “carry out individually our own fulfillment of the thing of which we are given an indication.”⁵⁶ For Gadamer, this activity is always “conversational” in some respect, because it requires grasping something that is independent of the phenomenologist. Where Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology allows Dasein to achieve self-understanding through appropriating for oneself

⁵³ Keane 2022 maintains that Heidegger and Gadamer share an emphasis on language, but Heidegger is far more concerned with overcoming “the language of metaphysics” (260). Gadamer, like Heidegger, resists language as it is immediately given, but Gadamer does not approach it in a skeptical or violent way. For this reason, my reading differs from Keane who suggests that Gadamer does use a destructive method to dismantle the language of alienating academic metaphysical concepts (2022, 263). Dostal (2002) affirms that Gadamer does not take up a destructive view of metaphysics with reference to Gadamer’s study of Plato and Aristotle (260). Indeed, while Heidegger always wanted to destruct the tradition at some point he wanted to enact a destruction so significant that we experience, what he calls in *Contributions* and his private writings, “another beginning” that would restore us to the philosophizing of the pre-Socratics. Gadamer rejects this position and, instead, reminds Heidegger that Plato and Aristotle build on pre-Socratic thought (Dostal 2002, 260). Thus, Gadamer views philosophy as always in conversation with itself. It is up to the hermeneutic-phenomenologist to recover ways of using language that yield better understanding, but this requires a certain affirmation of the tradition.

⁵⁴ 2022, 259.

⁵⁵ The distinction comes into view with Gadamer’s own consideration of destruction in “*Destruction and Deconstruction*” (1985). There, Gadamer maintains that Heidegger “restores” words to their original meaning which has significant ramifications for phenomenology and its capacity to describe experience. Differently, Gadamer does not retain Heidegger’s destruction. Rather, for Gadamerian hermeneutic understanding occurs in conversations that displace preconceptions.

Gadamer 1989, 107.

⁵⁶ 1994, 34.

deconstructed ontological concepts such that Dasein enacts their own relation to being, Gadamer maintains that prejudices in understanding always remain, and understanding is reached in a conversation wherein these prejudices are displaced.⁵⁷ Gadamer's revision, thus, touches reality in a way that formal indications do not.

Gadamer is, no doubt, influenced by Heidegger's early hermeneutic breakthrough. In 1924, Gadamer echoes Heidegger's emphasis on openness in his early method, writing that: "The philosophical attitude lies exactly in enduring the undecidability and open uncertainty of the problem."⁵⁸ The philosopher is able to persist in the tension between the particular and the universal because no philosophical system can be decided upon in advance. In this respect, Gadamer concurs with Heidegger's early critique of philosophical systematicity. Moreover, Gadamer maintains in that "Philosophy, differently, first finds its existence [Dasein] in pointing out the objective questionability of the objects."⁵⁹ Indeed, philosophical knowledge for both Heidegger and Gadamer is achieved through a particular interrogating philosopher.

Still, Gadamer gives early hints of moving beyond Heidegger, in particular with respect to tradition. Where destruction aims to uncover the covered over original meaning of philosophical claims, Gadamer addresses the present less negatively: "What is present, is nothing other than what it has come to be" and "the historical forces determining the present are the direct forces of the present day."⁶⁰ Gadamer affirms the role of history for hermeneutic phenomenology but does not suggest a path of destruction. This difference comes to full bloom in *Truth and Method*.

⁵⁷ Indeed, my reading affirms but also makes more concise Grondin's judgment that for Heidegger the hermeneutic circle is concerned with self-understanding and for Gadamer it is concerned with understanding what another says about something (2003, 83).

⁵⁸ Gadamer 1924, 57. Translations of this text were done by Fridolin Neumann and myself.

⁵⁹ Gadamer 1924, 57. "Anders in der Philosophie: hier ist es die objektive Fraglichkeit der Gegenstände, in deren Aufzeigung die Philosophie selbst allererst ihr Dasein findet."

⁶⁰ Gadamer 1924, 76. "Die geschichtlichen Mächte, die sie bestimmen, sind unmittelbar selbst die Mächte ihres Tages."

Without explicitly destructing public language, Gadamer's phenomenology displaces inherited preconceptions. Early Heidegger argues that language degrades through history by means of theorizing and homogenizing; by contrast, Gadamer conceives of language as evidence of a conversational model of tradition that enhances language and requires further effort to achieve understanding.⁶¹ Understanding takes place when a prejudice (*Vorurteil*) is challenged. Prejudices or prejudgments comprise our horizon of intelligibility, which both Heidegger and Gadamer refer to as the "fore-structure." As Ted George puts it "as a fore-structure of understanding, prejudice always makes possible, as well as limits, every effort to understand."⁶² Heidegger takes an interrogative perspective of language with the aim of producing indications free from theoretical and public prejudices. Gadamer recognizes such an aim is impossible. For Gadamer, it is precisely because we have prejudgments that understanding is possible in the first place.

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer describes understanding in terms of "effective history" or "historically effected consciousness."⁶³ In a section dedicated to hermeneutic experience, that is, the experience of understanding, Gadamer writes that Heidegger gets understanding right when he conceives of it in terms of a Hegelian dialectic. In a hermeneutical experience, one has a "reversal of consciousness."⁶⁴ Thus, one achieves hermeneutical experiences when one no longer identifies with former prejudices. Indeed, it is an exterior displacement of one's prejudgments that enables an experience of understanding.

It is no surprise, then, that where Heidegger advocates for enacting radicalized descriptions of things by means of a destructive and formal indicative hermeneutic phenomenology, Gadamer's

⁶¹ Theodore George, "Are We a Conversation? Hermeneutics, Exteriority, and Transmittability," *Research in Phenomenology* 47, no. 3 (September 1, 2017): 331–50 and Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 278.

⁶² 2020, 52.

⁶³ 2016, 350.

⁶⁴ 2026, 362.

notion of understanding suggests that prejudgments are inextricably bound up in experiences of understanding and so would always tarry with formal indications. Gadamer recognizes the justice in Heidegger's aim to move beyond theoretical language with respect to philosophical objects. While Heidegger orients his critique toward Husserlian epistemology and "the demand for observation which is free of standpoints," Gadamer reflects that neither the neo-Kantian nor Hegelian approach to philosophical objects are legitimate because both "share the entirely unobjective prejudice that dictates that one must abstract away from one's own existence for the end of pure, unprejudiced research" and this entails abstraction "from the historicity of the own present for the sake of the problems and from the own relation to things for the sake of history."⁶⁵ For Gadamer prejudgments and their displacement by exteriority are endemic to understanding because understanding is modeled on a non-teleological dialogue. With this, there is always something irreducibly exterior to the phenomenologist and integration never reaches completion.

Understanding for Gadamer is always dialogical and historically informed. In his consideration of historical hermeneutics "the voice that speaks to us from the past—whether text, work, trace—itself poses a question and places our meaning in openness."⁶⁶ That is, the historical thinker remains open that their initial understanding of history is incorrect and that a historical text, for instance, still has more to say. In an interpersonal dialogue openness also reigns supreme. Indeed, Gadamer writes that "language is the medium in which substantive understanding and agreement takes place between two people" and "thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other, truly accepts his point of view (prejudgments) as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual

⁶⁵ Gadamer 1924, 74. The full quotation reads: "Gemeinsam ist beiden Einstellungen das ganz unsachliche Vorurteil, als ob man vom eigenen Dasein absehen müsse zum Zwecke einer reinen, vorurteilslosen Forschung: von der Geschichtlichkeit der eigenen Gegenwart um der Probleme willen, von dem eigenen Sachverhältnis um der Geschichte willen."

⁶⁶ Gadamer 2016, 382.

but what he says.”⁶⁷ Hermeneutical understanding is achieved on a conversational model wherein one is not treating exteriority destructively but openly. That is, where Heidegger assumes that the tradition as it is expressed in language gets something wrong, Gadamer assumes that the tradition and the other have something to say that will enable deeper understanding by displacing prejudices that produce such a situation in the first place.

Beyond the shift in disposition, Gadamer’s dialogical understanding bears with it the features of Heidegger’s formal indicative method. In a description of a hermeneutical conversation, Gadamer writes that “to reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were.”⁶⁸ Recall the features of formal indication: (1) a formal notion is proposed without particular content or material, (2) the notion is indicated with language that is not laden with terminology, and (3) a hermeneutic phenomenologist considers for herself the indication and in so doing enacts a more originary self-understanding which contributes to her relationship with ontology. Much like formal indication, conversation unfolds as an enactment of a transformed understanding. It does so, however, in concert with another. Understanding does not just occur within the self to indicate a new way of thinking of being. In Gadamer, when self-understanding is achieved it is with and through understanding something else.

Conclusion

Insofar as Gadamer concretizes Heidegger’s project, as Theodore George puts it, he renders formal indication an approach for reaching an understanding of self, exteriority, and tradition.⁶⁹ Gadamer’s

⁶⁷ 2016, 402-403.

⁶⁸ 2016, 387.”

⁶⁹ I take the phrase “concretization” from Theodore George’s 2020 study of hermeneutics in *The Responsibility to Understand*. George claims that Gadamer concretizes Heidegger’s thought with some justice, as I show below. Indeed,

conversational method allows the hermeneutic phenomenologist to gain understanding with reference to what is other. Beyond revising Heidegger's hermeneutic circle and rejecting the "metaphysics of language," as scholars rightfully point out, Gadamer revises formal indication, a core element of Heidegger's early project. Gadamer's revision of formal indication, on my reading, suggests that we do not achieve self-understanding at a remove from sociality or tradition but in concert with it. For this reason, Gadamer's phenomenology better captures factual Dasein.

Gadamer himself uses this turn of phrase with reference to linguisticity (2013, 389). More importantly, or so I argue, Gadamer's hermeneutics allows understanding to settle in a way that Heidegger's formal indicative process does not.

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