

heidegger's understanding as ontological ground for phenomenological hermeneutics

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Abstract

Understanding, in Heidegger's view, is ontologically fundamental and prior to every act of existing. Understanding is a basic constituent of the way in which humans encounter and unravel the world of experience. Understanding is not simply a method for grasping psychological or historical meaning; it is the way that humans exist in the world. A second side of understanding relates to the future; this is its projective character. It is a disclosure of one's concrete potentialities for being within the horizon of one's placement in the world. Hermeneutics therefore is a matter of ontology rather than a method, that is, ordinary interpretations. These interpretations variously called as "propositions" "assertions" or "judgments" about texts or "state of affairs" are themselves dependent on an antecedent hermeneutical act, man's self-understanding as a "thereness" in the world. For Heidegger, the facticity of being is still a more fundamental matter than human consciousness.

Keywords

Heidegger, hermeneutics, understanding, historicity, facticity of being



Introduction

The fundamental truth about man is that he is never born without a historical situatedness. He is a being by way of a specific history and therefore identity. Man is not a free-floating being lacking of any established ground whereby he perceives reality, instead he is a being bounded by particular time and place. As a finite being he is in some way determined by geographic conditions, culture, and tradition that give him a seal of distinctiveness and specific way of looking at things and himself. Furthermore, he is a rational being deeply involved in worldly human affairs. He makes an assessment of his own historicity and endeavors to come up with a distinct understanding of his own self. The task of interpreting is then a constitutive part of his being.

From this vantage point, hermeneutics asserts the importance of the historicity of understanding wherein the discernment of truth cannot be attained through a presuppositionless apprehending of essences. Instead, grasping of truth is a historical process whereby the finite perspectives on a topic afforded by a particular historico-cultural standpoints must be gradually complemented, if there is a need, be corrected through a process of ongoing situated inquiry.

The phenomenological turn in hermeneutics started as a shift away from the Romantic hermeneutical approach to the ontological due to Romantics attempt to outline procedures of interpretation as the sole ground for social and historical studies. The difficulty in Romantic hermeneutics is that the principles being established by the proponents are too radically ahistorical to comprehend vis-à-vis the historicity of understanding in the human sciences. The phenomenological movement as founded by Edmund Husserl had influenced Heidegger, a key hermeneutical thinker who made possible the phenomenological turn in hermeneutics. In this regard, Husserl's phenomenology serves as an important point of reference in how hermeneutics assumes its significance in the milestone of philosophical research. On Gadamer's view, Husserl's phenomenology resolves the latent positivism in Dilthey's analysis of *Geisteswissenschaften*,¹ which is valuable to Heidegger's own investigation.² In fact,

¹ This is the epistemological problem of the status of the social sciences, that is, the problem of justifying the *Geisteswissenschaften* in the face of the *Naturwissenschaften*. According to the former, it has equal validity with the latter is one which we inherited from Dilthey. For Dilthey, as child of Enlightenment, it is hard to see how it can effectively counteract the persistent naturalistic tendencies in social sciences, the attempt, that is, to explain consciousness or human life forms in purely natural, causal terms. It does not suffice simply to decree that "explanation" has no place in the social sciences. If a science of man is at all possible, it must surely attempt to explain as much as it can. The famous English anthropologist E. Evans-Pritchard, who clearly did not advocate reductionist explanations has nonetheless observed: "Even in a single ethnographic study the anthropologist seeks to

Gadamer pointed out that the use of Dilthey's concept of *Erlebnis* in his later work is borrowed from Edmund Husserl. *Erlebnis* signals that which is immediately given to consciousness as a meaningful unity and thus has a cognitive function. Dilthey and Husserl maintain that primary consciousness is already structured and coherent, that what is present to consciousness are the "things themselves," to use Husserl's language. Dilthey employed this notion of immediacy to consciousness to distinguish the *Geisteswissenschaften* from the natural sciences. The latter are directed "outward" toward the physical world and the "constructions" necessary to master its laws while the former are directed "inward" toward experience itself. Dilthey was concerned to show the equal validity of both orientations as forms of science. However, Husserl goes beyond Dilthey in this regard in using the concept of *Erlebnis* not to posit two equal forms of science but to trace the natural sciences back to the "life-world" from which they evolve. In other words, the objective sciences have their own basis in subjective modes of givenness. This is the point at which Husserl's conception of the life-world becomes relevant. The "life-world" is the subjective modes of givenness upon which the objectified world of the natural sciences is founded.³

Heidegger found a conceptual tool in Husserl's phenomenology that might lay open the processes of being in human existence. Phenomenology has opened up the realm of the preconceptual apprehending of the phenomena. This new realm had quite different significance for Heidegger than Husserl. Whereas Husserl had approached it with the idea of 'bringing it into view' the functioning of consciousness as transcendental subjectivity, Heidegger saw in it the vital medium of man's historical *being-in-the-world*.⁴ The significance of Heidegger's work goes beyond the move from transcendental subjectivity to the *being-in-the-world*. Heidegger held that the facticity of being is still more fundamental matter than human consciousness. Gadamer in his magnum opus *Truth and Method* points this out:

But he is no longer dependent on the epistemological requirement that the return to life (Dilthey) and the transcendental reduction (Husserl's way of

understand the thought and values of a primitive people and translate them into his own culture. He seeks also to discover the structural order of the society, the patterns, which, once established enable him to see it as a whole, as a set of interrelated abstraction." E. Evans-Pritchard, *Social Anthropology and Other Essays* (New York: Free Press, 1971), 148. See also G. B. Madison, *Understanding: A Phenomenological-Pragmatic Analysis* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982).

² Georgia Warnke, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1987), 34-35.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Richard Palmer, *Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 125.

absolutely radical self-reflection) be based methodologically on the self-giveness of experience. On the contrary, all this became the object of Heidegger's critique. Under the rubric of a "hermeneutic of facticity," Heidegger confronted Husserl's eidetic phenomenology, as well as the distinction between fact and essence on which it depended, with a paradoxical demand. Phenomenology should be ontologically based on the facticity of *Dasein*, existence that cannot be based on or derived from anything else.⁵

Dilthey treated hermeneutics in the horizon of his own project of finding a historically oriented theory of method for *Geisteswissenschaften*, that is, to disclose life in terms of itself. Heidegger used the word *fundamental ontology*,⁶ the clearing or unfolding of being through understanding. "The one goal is to understand life philosophically and to secure for this understanding a hermeneutical foundation in terms of life itself."⁷ Taking this consideration, Heidegger rethought the concept of phenomenology itself, so phenomenology and phenomenological method take radically a different character.⁸ Phenomenology need not be understood as necessarily a "laying open of consciousness," it can also mean disclosing of Being.

Heidegger explicitly refers to his method as a "hermeneutic."⁹ Heidegger goes back to the Greek roots of the word phenomenology. The Greek expression *φαίνομενον* (*phainomenon*), to which the word phenomenon goes back, is derived from the word *φαίνεσθαι* (*phainesthai*) which signifies "to show itself." Thus *φαινόμενον* means "that which shows itself," the manifest.¹⁰ *Φάινω* (*phaino*) comes from the stem *φα* (*pha*), like *Φως* (*phos*) meaning the "light," that which is bright – that wherein something can

⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1989), 254. Henceforth TM.

⁶ Fundamental ontology is nothing more than the projection of that which is only vaguely understood about the meaning of existence in our everyday, uncritical world. (James R. Watson, "Heidegger's Hermeneutic Phenomenology," *Philosophy Today* 15, no. 1 (1971): 30.

⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers Incorporated, 1962), H 398. Henceforth BT.

⁸ Thus it would be a mistake to see phenomenological method as a doctrine formulated by Husserl and used by Heidegger for another purpose. Heidegger's thinking is more hermeneutical in the traditional sense of being centered on text interpretation. Text may refer to events, historical text or human person. Heidegger's philosophy becomes historical, creative recovery of the past in the form of interpretation. Husserl remains basically scientific, his goal was to make philosophy a rigorous science.

⁹ See BT H 38.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, H 29.

become manifest, can become visible.¹¹ The becoming manifest should not be taken as a secondary form of referring – as when something seems to be something else.¹² Nor is it like a symptom of something, pointing to another more primary phenomenon.¹³

Heidegger, having provided the primordial signification of phenomenon and its derivatives, goes on to show the primordial signification of “λογος”(logos). Heidegger offers a provisional word-for-word translation of λογος, that is, “the basic signification of λογος is discourse.¹⁴ It is not defined by Heidegger as something like reason or ground. “Λογος as discourse” means rather the same as “δηλουν”(deloun), “to make manifest what one is talking about in discourse.¹⁵ This points to phenomena, since it lets something be seen as something. The combination of φαινεσθαι and λογος, then, as phenomenology means letting things become manifest as they are. It is not we who point to things, rather things show themselves to us. Phenomenology is a means of being led by the phenomenon through a way of access genuinely belonging to it. Such a method would be of sublime importance to hermeneutical theory, since it implies that human interpretation is not grounded in human consciousness and human categories but manifestness of the thing encountered, the reality that comes into our encounter.

Ontology must become phenomenology; in other words, ontology must turn to the process of understanding and interpretation through which things appear. It must make visible the invisible structure of being-in-the-world. This means three things: (1) Only as phenomenology is ontology possible,¹⁶ (2) The phenomenology of *Dasein* is hermeneutic in the primordial signification of the word, where it designates this business of interpreting,¹⁷ and (3) Hermeneutics becomes the interpretation of the being of *Dasein*.¹⁸ Heidegger then defines the essence of hermeneutics as the ontological power of understanding and interpretation which renders possible the disclosure of being of things and ultimately of the potentialities of *Dasein*'s own being.

¹¹ Ibid. For this reason, we cannot regard appearance in the Kantian sense of phenomena since they are visible only by means of a priori forms of intuition.

¹² This is designated as “that which shows itself as something which in itself is not.” (BT H 33.)

¹³ *Hermeneutics*, 128.

¹⁴ BT H 32. The basis for provisional translation is the fact that λογος is derived from the same root as the verb λεγειν, the Greek expression for “to hold a discourse,” and since this means the same as δηλουν “to make manifest,” the function of *logos* then is to make clear that which is talked about.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., H 37.

¹⁷ Ibid., H 38.

¹⁸ Ibid. Philosophically it sets forth the basic structure of possibility for *Dasein*.

Dilthey's tendency to formulate understanding in terms of life and Husserl's going back behind objectivity of science to the *life-world*, was characteristic of Heidegger's own first approach. But he is no longer dependent on the epistemological requirement that this return to life (Dilthey) and the transcendental reduction be based methodologically on self-giveness of experience. On the contrary, all these became the object of Heidegger's critique. Under the rubric of "hermeneutic of facticity," Heidegger confronted Husserl's eidetic phenomenology, as well as the distinction between fact and essence on which it depended, with a paradoxical demand. Phenomenology should be ontologically based on the facticity of *Dasein*, existence, which cannot be based or derived from anything else.¹⁹

Heidegger regarded his own work not so much as the fulfillment of a long prepared development, but as a return to the beginnings of Western philosophy, and revival of the long forgotten Greek argument about being.²⁰ What Heidegger called the "turn" was not a new departure in the development of transcendental reflection, but the making possible and carrying out the above aims. Heidegger argued that while we may want to pose the question about the meaning of Being, one must engage in a prior step. Before one can ask about Being, one must complete the project of self-understanding of our being, what is called *Dasein*.²¹

¹⁹ TM 254.

²⁰ Ibid., 256. Heidegger revealed the essential forgetfulness of being that dominated Western thought since Greek metaphysics because of the embarrassing problem of nothingness: "Why are there beings other than nothing?" In raising the question of being thus reversing the whole direction of Western Metaphysics. Hence the true predecessor of Heidegger was not Dilthey nor Husserl, but rather Nietzsche (see TM 257).

²¹ Phenomenologically, Heidegger retrieves the ancient Greek usage of the basic meaning of truth by stating that a thing "unconceals" itself or that the hiddenness of a thing is overcome by its "unconcealment." "Heidegger recognized that the concealment or hiddenness that is necessarily connected with the experience that thinks Being as beings, namely the concealment that which first make possible every disclosure of beings as beings – what he called ontological difference. Hence he came to see the interinvolvement of disclosure and concealment as the primordial meaning of truth. Just as being is not mere presence, but rather the "clearing" itself, so in the primordial dimension of the question of being, truth turns out to be an event. (Hans Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976], 17). The first unconcealment, the first truth, or the first understanding man has of himself is the fact that he is "there" in the world; not only in the physical sense but in the sense of context where the "human" takes "shape." It is the everyday existence of man, dependent, contingent, without given meaning or sense. It is as if man is thrown down into the world; this is the facticity of man. This "being-in-the-world," the fact of being simply "there," Heidegger refers to the "there-being," or, in German, *Dasein* (better *Da-sein*), a word that has been taken directly into English.

Dasein is an entity which does not occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very being, that Being is an issue for it.²² But in that case, this is a constitutive state of *Dasein's* Being, and this implies that *Dasein*, in its Being, has relationship towards that Being. And that means further that there is some way in which *Dasein* understands itself in its Being, and that to some degree it does so explicitly. It is peculiar to this entity that with and through its Being, this being is disclosed to it. Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of *Dasein's* Being. *Dasein* is ontically distinctive; hence, it is ontological.²³ Here "being-ontological" is not yet tantamount to developing ontology. So if one should reserve the term "ontology" for theoretical inquiry which is explicitly devoted to the meaning of entities, then what we have in mind in speaking of *Dasein's* "Being-ontological" is to be designated as something "pre-ontological." It does not signify simply "being-ontical," however, but rather "being in such a way that one has an understanding of being."²⁴

The danger in any beginning of philosophical inquiry is that one is already removed from the object of reflection. That is, the "theoretical" aspect of reality does not do justice to one's actual experience of reality. Heidegger argued, "*Dasein* is thrown in such a way that, as being in the world, it is "there,"²⁵ It means we are always already in the world, a notion he called thrownness. Heidegger's concept of thrownness suggests that whenever we begin reflection, we already detached ourselves from reality. The primordial state is to come to reality unreflectively. This unreflective attitude of our "being-in-the-world" Heidegger called "ready-to-hand." Things never show themselves proximally as they are for themselves, so as to add up to a sum of *realia* and fill up a room. What we encounter closest to us is the room, and we encounter it not as something between four walls in a geometrical spatial sense, but equipment for residing.²⁶ Or, for example, when we use a hammer, we don't think "I am going to use hammer"; instead we reach for it and begin hammering. We only reflect on the hammer as a hammer when we reach for it and it breaks.²⁷ Analogously, if we wish to begin with our direct experience of the world, as guided by phenomenological approach, one must come to a knowledge that our pre-

²² The fact that being is an issue for *Dasein*, that is distinguished from all other beings by its understanding of being, does not constitute the ultimate basis from which transcendental approach has to start. There is a quite different reason why understanding of being is possible at all, namely, that there is "there," a "clearing of being" – i.e., a distinction between Being and beings. Inquiry into the fundamental fact that this "exist" is. Inquiry into the being of beings – that was indeed concealed by metaphysical inquiry.

²³ BT H 12.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., H 135.

²⁶ Ibid., H 69.

²⁷ See *ibid.*, H 69.

reflective consciousness is a more authentic orientation to the world than ones reflective philosophical consciousness which Heidegger called presence-at-hand. As such, one needs to investigate what we always-already find ourselves in, our thrownness.²⁸

Heidegger asserts that the significance of our "being-in-the-world, which we could say equiprimordial with consciousness as such, involves interpretation. In his terms, significance is that on the basis of which the world is disclosed as such.²⁹ In this sense, then understanding does not mean competent at task but it is a precondition for the possibility of the worldhood of the world. He then claims that "understanding is the existential being of *Dasein's* own potentiality-for-being; and it is so in such a way that this being discloses in itself what its being is capable of."³⁰ This suggests that a futurally temporal state of understanding-oriented projection characterizes *Dasein* as such. Heidegger then argues:

Any *Dasein* has, as *Dasein*, already projected itself; and as long as it is, it is projecting. As long as it is, *Dasein* always has understood itself and always will understand itself in terms of possibilities. Furthermore, the character of understanding as projection is such that the understanding does not grasp thematically that upon which it projects – that is to say, possibilities. Grasping it in such manner would take away from what is projected its very character of possibility, and we reduce it to the given content which we have in mind.³¹

Heidegger, as one might observe in *Being and Time*, took a further step and was able to make a completely fresh beginning because Husserl made it an absolute universal working method to go back to life and hence abandoned for good the narrow approach of simply inquiring into the methods of human sciences.³² In legitimating the special methodological nature of the historical sciences, Heidegger follows Husserl in that historical being is not to be distinguished from natural being, as Dilthey does. On the contrary, the natural sciences mode of knowledge appears, rather, as sub-species of understanding that has strayed into the legitimate task of grasping the present-at-hand in

²⁸ This is a critique of Husserl's mindset. The question of being that Heidegger raises in *Being and Time* no longer refers to the question of how the objective world is constituted in consciousness. The focus is rather on the question of what the human being is or, rather, how human life itself is a process and product of interpretation. The question of being, as Heidegger poses it, breaks into an entirely different dimension by focusing on the Being of *Dasein* that understands itself. And this is the point at which the Transcendental schema must finally be founded.

²⁹ BT Sec. 31.

³⁰ Ibid., H 145.

³¹ Ibid., H 145.

³² TM 258.

its essential unintelligibility. *Understanding* is not a resigned ideal of human experience adopted in the old age of the spirit, as with Dilthey. Nor is it, as with Husserl, a last methodological ideal of philosophy in contrast to the *naïveté* of unreflective life. It is on the contrary, the *original form of the realization of Dasein*, which is *being-in-the-world*.³³ "Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of *Dasein's* Being"³⁴ Every act of interpretation, scientific or humanistic, is based on human understanding.

Understanding is the aspect of human being that enables us to transcend ourselves, to move outside ourselves.³⁵ This movement is not in Schleiermacher's movement of one mind into another. Nor is it Dilthey's life expression where the inner moves to outer communal form. It is a movement of grasping our own possibilities and of becoming what we are. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger develops a detailed analysis of human existence and calls this analysis a *hermeneutic understanding*.

Verstehen or understanding is a special term in Heidegger. It does not mean what English word ordinarily denotes, nor what the term meant in Dilthey.³⁶ Understanding is not a subsidiary act, as in, I see something and then I understand what it is. Heidegger clarifies this concept of understanding: "that which is understood gets articulated when the entity to be understood is brought close interpretatively by taking as our clue that something as something, and this articulation lies before our making any thematic assertion about it."³⁷ For instance, there is already an articulation in pure seeing. To see a spare tire of a car is already to understand it in a totality of involvements. This understanding is articulated but not necessarily thematically asserted. Hence, if one "understands" the world in terms of significances before one encounters it in a reflective fashion, then this type of understanding is fundamental and prior to existence. Heidegger then transformed the Dilthean "category of life," that is, a way of orienting ourselves to the world, to the way we orient ourselves to ourselves and to the world in an originary

³³ Ibid., 259.

³⁴ BT 32. For Heidegger, Understanding is the existential Being of *Dasein's* own potentiality for Being. And it is so in such a way that this being discloses in itself what its Being is capable of. As a disclosure, understanding pertains to the whole basic state of Being-in-the-world (See BT 184). For Heidegger, understanding is ontological; it is an integral part of human being.

³⁵ This is specifically explained by Heidegger in his discussion on *Sorge*. "Dasein for its ownmost Being in the world, which as something that understands, projects itself essentially upon possibilities" (BT 232).

³⁶ Ibid, 130. In English word, understanding suggests sympathy, the capacity to feel something of what another person is experiencing. Understanding suggests more than mere objective knowledge, it is something like participation in the thing understood.

³⁷ BT H 149. Literally in German, *Aussage* (assertion) is something which is said out; an *Auslegung* (interpretation) is a laying out.

fashion. Understanding is basically *Dasein's* projecting its *Being* upon possibilities. To interpret is to appropriate understandingly that which is understood. "In interpretation, we do not, so to speak, throw signification over some naked thing which is present-at-hand, we do not stick value on it; but when something within the world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world, and this involvement is one which gets laid out by interpretation."³⁸ Such interpretation is grounded existentially in understanding; the latter does not rise from the former.

Interpretation is never presuppositionless. Interpretation is always grounded in something we have in advance, in a *Vorhabe* (fore-having), in something else we have in advance, in *vorsicht* (foresight), and in something we grasp in advance, in a *Vorgriff* (fore-conception).³⁹ All understanding operates in the fore-structure. There is undisclosed assumption of the interpreter. This then brings formative moment in hermeneutics, that is, Heidegger's notion of hermeneutic circle. Whenever we seek to understand something, we always-already understand it within our signifiatory (ready-to-hand) activities. That is it comes to us unreflectively, but as part of the world. I understand a spoon when I project it as for conveying food to the mouth. Understanding therefore takes place in projection. When things are understood, they have meaning. "That which can be articulated in a disclosure by which we understand, we call meaning."⁴⁰ Meaning is an *existentiale* of *Dasein*, not a property attaching to entities, lying behind them, of floating somewhere as an 'intermediate domain'.⁴¹ Meaning is "upon-which" of a projection in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something; it gets its structure from a *fore-having*, a *fore-sight*, and a *fore-conception*.⁴² The meaning of existence then is not to be found or uncovered, as if it were something already there. Rather it comes about with an understanding that takes place when I project possibilities. *Then* we interpret the thing as something in our reflective manner. Hence, "any interpretation which is to contribute understanding must already understand what is to be interpreted."⁴³ In other words, the concept of fore-structure means that that which is to be interpreted has already been

³⁸ Ibid., H 150

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid. H 152.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid. This understanding has a certain pre-structure which comes into play in all interpretation. It is important to remember that the pre-structuredness of understanding is not simply a property of consciousness over and against an already given world. Pre-structure rests, rather, in the context of the world, which already contains the subject and object. Heidegger is describing understanding and interpretation in such a way to place them prior to subject – object dichotomy.

understood. This circle of understanding is not an orbit in which any random kind of knowledge may move; it is the expression of existential fore-structure of *Dasein*.⁴⁴ The circle of understanding belongs to the structure of meaning, and the latter phenomenon is rooted in the existential constitution of *Dasein* – that is, in understanding which interprets. An entity for which *being-in-the-world* is itself an issue, has ontologically a circular structure.⁴⁵

In Heidegger's work, the hermeneutical account of understanding is itself transformed. The question of being that he raises in *Being and Time* no longer refers to the question of how the objective world is constituted in consciousness which was the concern of Husserl. The focus is rather on the question of what human being is or, rather, how human life is itself a process and product of interpretation. In *Being and Time*, the real question was already not how being can be understood, but how understanding is being.⁴⁶ Already at this point, Heidegger does not understand being to be the result of the objectifying operation of consciousness, as Husserl's phenomenology still did. The question of being, as Heidegger poses it, breaks into an entirely different dimension by focusing on the being of *Dasein* that understands itself. And this is the point at which the transcendental schema must finally be founded. The infinite contrast between transcendental ego and its objects is finally taken up into the ontological question. In this sense, *Being and Time* already begins to counteract the forgetfulness of being that Heidegger was later to designate as the essence of metaphysics. What he calls the "turn" is only his recognition that it is impossible to overcome the forgetfulness of being within the framework of transcendental reflection: From this, all his later concepts, such as the "event of being," the "there" as the clearing of being, and so on, were already entailed as a consequence of the approach taken in *Being and Time*.⁴⁷ Heidegger focuses on the

⁴⁴ Ibid. H 153.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Gadamer points that Heidegger here argues against astounding naïveté of the subjective consciousness that in trying to understand a text, says "But that is what is written there." But in truth there is nothing that is simply there. Everything that is said and is there in the text stands under anticipations. This means, positively, that only what stands under anticipations can be understood at all, and not what only confronts as something unintelligible. The fact that erroneous interpretations also arise from anticipations and, therefore, that the prejudices which make understanding possible also entail possibilities of misunderstanding could be one of the ways in which finitude of human nature operates. A necessarily circular movement is involved in the fact that we read or understand what is there, but nonetheless see what is there with our own eyes (and our thoughts) (*Hermeneutics*, 121).

⁴⁶ Heidegger did not stop, however, with transcendental schema that still motivated the concept of self-understanding in *Being and Time*. Understanding of being represents the existential distinction of *Dasein*.

⁴⁷ Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 49- 50.

being whose "being is an issue for it."⁴⁸ In other words, he focuses on human being and their understanding of their lives. The distinctive characteristic of *Dasein* is that they relate themselves interpretively to their lives, that they understand themselves in a continuous process of self-interpretation, experience and reinterpretation. For Heidegger, this circle of interpretation indicates that "being itself" is time.⁴⁹ The meaning of this claim is twofold. In the first place, the way in which a human life understands itself is conditioned by time. The "being" that is an "issue" is not simply an entity like others to which various predicates can be attached but a life that exists as a temporal continuum. As we have seen, the past acquires its meaning in the light of the present experiences and anticipations while the meaning of the present and anticipation of the future are conditioned by the way in which the past has been understood.⁵⁰ Heidegger therefore considers self-understanding to be a "thrown projection." On the other hand, it involves projecting a future for oneself or projecting one's possibilities. The possibilities have already been determined to some extent by the way the future has already been projected in the past. Heidegger's argument here is that self-interpretation is not merely conditioned by time, but required by it. His point is not simply that human beings interpret their lives and do so within a circle of anticipation and revision imposed by the temporal structure of life itself. His claim is that they must interpret themselves, that they must live their life in certain ways, determine some future and therewith the meaning of their past. As he enunciates, "human life always has the character of its essence lies in the fact that in each case it has its being to be, and has it as its own."⁵¹ Heidegger turns to an explicit analysis of understanding in *Being and Time*, he describes understanding as "the existential being of *Dasein*'s own potentiality-for-being."⁵² In fact he insists that entities other than *Dasein* are

⁴⁸ BT H 12. Heidegger revealed the essential forgetfulness of being that had dominated Western thought since Greek metaphysics because of the embarrassing problem of nothingness. In raising the question of being thus reversing the whole direction of Western Metaphysics, the true predecessor of Heidegger was neither Dilthey nor Husserl, then, but rather Nietzsche.

⁴⁹ Gadamer remarks that Heidegger's assertion that *being itself is time* burst asunder the whole subjectivism of modern philosophy – and, in fact, as was soon to appear, the whole horizon of questions asked by metaphysics, which tended to define being with what is present (TM 257).

⁵⁰ In Gadamer's term – "it is not really we ourselves who understand: it is always a past that allows us to say, "I have understood." (*Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 58)

⁵¹ BT H 12. In other words human being understands themselves in some way or another in simply living their lives, in acting out some future and in having acted in the past in one way or another. Understanding refers primarily to the necessary, practical relation one has to one's own life and is therefore nothing extraneous to, or optional for, human life at all.

⁵² BT H 144.

understood in the light of their relationship to *Dasein*, as “equipment” or, the “ready-to-hand.” Moreover, the “ready-to-hand” or things understood scientifically, in their physical and chemical structure for instance, reflects a derivative form of understanding that involves abstracting from the ready-to-hand.⁵³

All understanding is related to the self-understanding, and self-understanding is a thrown projection. Understanding begins and ends outside the subject – in a past it did not create and a future over which it has no control. Gadamer recap all these by stating:

That the structure of *Dasein* is thrown projection, that in realizing its own being *Dasein* is understanding, must also be true of the act of understanding in the human sciences. The general structure of understanding is concretized in historical understanding, in that concrete bonds of custom and tradition and the corresponding possibilities of one’s own future become effective in understanding itself. *Dasein* that projects itself on its own potentiality-for-being has always already “been.” This is the meaning of the existential “thrownness.” The main point of the hermeneutic of facticity and its contrast with transcendental research of Husserl’s phenomenology was that no freely chosen relation towards own being can get behind the facticity of this being. This existential structure of *Dasein* must be expressed in the understanding of historical tradition as well.⁵⁴

The consequence of this position for the structure of historical understanding is to show that such understanding is itself inextricably historical. This means that it cannot transcend its historical situation, that the knowledge to which it attains is always partial and revisable and, most importantly, that this circumstance is not to be seen as a limitation on its objectivity. The notion of “objective” understanding is rather itself an illegitimate importation from the natural sciences. On Gadamer’s view, an adequate account of the principle of understanding requires a break and so with both the natural sciences and with the history of modern hermeneutics itself. If this hermeneutics is characterized by the turn from the truth content of a claim to the intention behind it and thus from the question of validity to the question of method, the turn must be reversed.⁵⁵

⁵³ Gadamer claims that historical understanding is an understanding of this primary sort as well; it is not scientific understanding of the present-at-hand, not an objective understanding abstracted from the historical situation of understanding; rather it reflects an understanding of the ready-to-hand related to a practical and continuing understanding of oneself and the present.

⁵⁴ TM 264.

⁵⁵ *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason*, 40-41.

In Heidegger's philosophy, "the structure of historical understanding appears with its full ontological background."⁵⁶ Gadamer begins his philosophical development of hermeneutics with Heidegger's analysis of understanding. He proposes to demonstrate how this insight is also expressed in the understanding of historical tradition.⁵⁷ This is the task that Gadamer develops in his philosophical hermeneutics.

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⁵⁶ TM 261. Gadamer does not incorporate all of Heidegger's analysis of human existence into his own hermeneutics, nor does he use the vocabulary that Heidegger develops.

⁵⁷ Loc. Cit. That the structure of Dasein is thrown projection, that in realizing its own being Dasein is understanding, must also be true of the act of understanding in the human sciences. The general structure of understanding is concretized in historical understanding, in that the concrete bonds of custom and tradition and the corresponding possibilities of one's own future become effective in understanding itself (TM, 264).