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**Tradition and Dialogue in Hermeneutical Political Philosophy:
Three Accounts of Modernity and Human Existence in Gadamer,
Heidegger and Habermas**

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A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the meaning of tradition in hermeneutical political philosophy—in particular, in the works of Gadamer, Heidegger and Habermas. The premise of my analysis is this: Gadamer’s dialogical vision of tradition challenges two very influential modes of thinking within twentieth-century European philosophy, which are exemplified in Heidegger’s early thought (an ethics of *polemos*) and Habermas’s project of communicative action (an ethics of unlimited communication). By drawing on Gadamer’s work, with particular emphasis on his notion of fusion of horizons, I hope to show that Gadamer’s hermeneutics entails a modern articulation of tradition which suggests that living traditions are sites of ongoing debates, internal revisions and critical turns. In this respect, Gadamer’s interpretation of tradition goes beyond the caricaturised account of tradition that is bandied about in liberal/modernist thought and in the conservative outlook—both of which either tend to overemphasise the boundedness, distinctness and internal homogeneity of traditions or fetishise them in ways that put them beyond the reach of critical discussion. Moreover, it points to the relevance of tradition to political theory and practice in a manner that is critical of the “excesses of the Enlightenment,” which oftentimes become manifest as Jacobin fanaticism and social engineering. Gadamer’s perspective can equally be seen as a corrective to radical culturalism and blood-and-soil tribalism. Unlike Heidegger, Gadamer does not present the self-assertion of cultural

identities and struggles of different traditions, peoples and nations as *the* most authentic way of living or doing politics in the age of globalisation, technology and cosmopolitanism. Nor does Gadamer, in contrast to Habermas, regard traditions as irrelevant to moral and political philosophy. Gadamer acknowledges that the hermeneutical approach towards traditions is a rational, historically oriented one, with the understanding that in the modern world one cannot simply swallow traditions but has to enter a reasonable dialogue with them. This is ultimately what Gadamer means by one of the vital concepts of his hermeneutics, namely, “interpretation.” My thesis tries to capture this dialogical thrust of Gadamer’s post-traditional, modern understanding of tradition with the concept of “weak tradition.”

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Among my teachers in Turkey and England, I owe a special debt of gratitude to Fatma Mansur Cosar, Cem Deveci, H. Ünal Nalbantoglu and Janet Coleman. Not only have they taught me that the most important thing in the study of social and political philosophy is acknowledgement and respect for every thinker's thought. Moreover, they have shown me the import of dialogue in human existence—both in our pursuit of knowledge and meaning, and in social and political experience.

Emre, as Tanpınar says: "*Ask...Hayatın içimizde gülümseyen yüzü.*"

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
CONTENTS.....	vi
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1 The Meaning of Tradition and Its Political Relevance.....	1
2 Weak Tradition?.....	7
3 Scope of the Inquiry.....	13
CHAPTER 1: THREE VARIETIES OF HERMENEUTICS.....	20
1-1 Disputes over Enlightenment and Tradition: Situating Gadamer's Vision.....	20
1-2 Three Varieties of Hermeneutics?.....	38
CHAPTER 2: HEIDEGGER'S COMMUNITARIANISM: AN ETHICS OF AUTHENTICITY AND <i>POLEMOS</i>	50
2-1 Introduction: Heidegger on Tradition and Community.....	50
2-2 Human Existence as Care and Historicity.....	55
2-3 Publicity versus Authenticity.....	61
2-4 Anxiety and Resoluteness: The Tension between Past and Future	76
2-5 Authentic Political Community.....	94
2-6 <i>Polemos</i> against Modernity.....	118
CHAPTER 3: GADAMER'S HERMENEUTICS AS A PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY OF FINITUDE: AN ETHICS OF CONTINUITY AND DIALOGUE.....	130
3-1 Introduction: Gadamer's <i>Philosophia Practica</i>	130

3-2 The Fundamental Concepts of Hermeneutics: Finitude, Tradition, Dialogue, <i>Bildung</i> , Political Reason.....	139
3-3 Gadamer's Conception of Tradition.....	154
3-4 <i>Horizontverschmelzung</i> and the Hermeneutical Experience.....	174
CHAPTER 4: HABERMAS ON MODERNITY AND TRADITION: AN ETHICS OF UNLIMITED COMMUNICATION.....	194
4-1 Introduction.....	194
4-2 The Project of the Enlightenment.....	196
4-3 Modernity versus Tradition.....	206
4-4 The Idea of an Unlimited Communication Community?.....	225
4-5 Hermeneutics of Recollection or Hermeneutics of Suspicion: Gadamer or Habermas?.....	238
CONCLUSION.....	249
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	257

INTRODUCTION

"The *theoros* is a spectator."

Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 124.

"The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion."

Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 304.

1-The Meaning of Tradition and Its Political Relevance

This study attempts to explore conceptions of tradition contained within the works of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Martin Heidegger and Jürgen Habermas, with a view to shedding light on the meaning of tradition in the modern world. The most general question I hope to come to grips with is, "What does it mean to be situated within a shared context of meaning and experience in the modern world?" Indeed, what is it that we call tradition? The purpose of my inquiry is to raise this question by focussing on the works of these three inspiring thinkers who are widely considered to be the leading representatives of twentieth-century hermeneutics.¹

¹ It must be noted that hermeneutic philosophy is largely associated with Gadamer's thought. Concerning Heidegger's foundational role within twentieth-century hermeneutics there is a widely shared consensus. Habermas's place within twentieth-century political philosophy is in some ways more difficult to pinpoint because there are many different philosophical components to the eclectic system he has constructed. Nonetheless, Habermas's work can also be considered within the hermeneutical tradition broadly considered. This is the reason why most of the leading anthologies (Mueller-Vollmer, 1985; Ormiston, 1990) and scholarly works on hermeneutics (Grondin, 1994; Hoy, 1978; Ricoeur, 1973; Vattimo, 1997) include these three thinkers. While I am aware of the fact that Habermas's philosophical work, which Habermas himself regards primarily as a contribution to the tradition of Critical Theory, cannot be exhausted merely within the context of hermeneutics, there are, as I will show in the next chapter, undoubtedly some important family resemblances, common concerns and shared

The term tradition comes from the Latin *tradere*: to hand down, to transmit. Its etymological root reminds us of the continuity of generations, what is handed down by one generation to another. But we, as moderns, often take it for granted that tradition is intrinsically opposed to modernity and rationality; and that its medium is essentially the unreflected and binding existence of social norms. Or alternatively, we tend to think of modernity in terms of a continuous decline of tradition, as a story of disenchantment, a story of unstoppable march of modern technology and global homogenisation. There is perhaps nothing particularly surprising in these characterisations of modernity. Max Weber once defined the emergence of modernity as a process of increasing rationalisation and disenchantment. But we sometimes tend to go even further and erroneously contrast, in a rather nostalgic manner, the corrupted present with the so-called splendour of the past.

Standing in the shadow of the catastrophic experiences of the twentieth century, we have increasingly become suspicious of dogmatic traditions, nostalgic yearnings and partisan approvals of modernity. As Leszek Kolakowski has aptly put it in his *Modernity on Endless Trial*, today it makes no sense “to be either ‘for’ or ‘against’ modernity *tout court*, not only because it is pointless to try to stop the development of technology, science, and economic rationality, but because both modernity and antimodernity may be

philosophical themes among these three thinkers. In this respect, the works of these three thinkers can be regarded as three varieties of twentieth-century hermeneutics.

expressed in barbarous and antihuman forms” (1990, 12).² How can we, then, understand the meaning of tradition without celebrating either the past or the present?

Like most studies in political philosophy, this inquiry too has grown out of a combination of perplexity and dissatisfaction. More specifically, the main motivation for this study arose from a certain unease about some fashionable orthodoxies entertained within contemporary debates about the meaning of tradition. Just as we are told that we should choose between an image of unconditioned freedom and an image of historical/habitual/communal embeddedness, so too are we made to believe that we must choose between partisan modernism and cultural relativism.³ Thus in our reflections on human existence and political experience, we tend to oscillate between freedom and community, between reason and history, between choice and habit, between right and good, between modernity and tradition, between Enlightenment and antimodernism, between Jacobin fanaticism and blood-and-soil tribalism, between McWorld and Jihad. The primary purpose of this thesis is to question

² This also seems to be the sense in which Hannah Arendt characterises the spiritual and intellectual situation of our times when she refers to the “modern ‘deaths’ of God, metaphysics, philosophy, and, by implication, positivism” (1977, 11). But we must not mistakenly conclude from Arendt’s observation that she joins the chorus of “philosophers of cheer” by simply dismissing those traditions as irrelevant and meaningless. On the contrary, Arendt says: “none of the systems... transmitted to us by the great thinkers may be convincing or even plausible to modern readers; but none of them... is arbitrary and none can be dismissed as sheer nonsense” (12). While Gadamer, whose thinking will be the major source of inspiration for this inquiry, by and large appears to share Arendt’s diagnosis of modernity, he would reject the conclusion that Arendt draws from this diagnosis when she asserts that these “modern deaths” could permit us to “look on the past with *completely* new eyes, *unburdened and unguided by any traditions.*”

³ A most suggestive and persuasive critique of twentieth-century “traditionalists” and “progressives” can be found in Iris Murdoch’s essays on contemporary moral philosophy (1997), see especially pp. 68-70.

this conventional wisdom, which is, like most orthodoxies, both comforting and limiting.

Much has been written about the tension between the Enlightenment ideals of universalism and freedom, on the one hand, and the ideals of authenticity and community on the other. The tension between these two conflicting ethical ideals has also been at the very heart of the debate between Enlightenment thinkers and their critics within Romanticism. As Charles Taylor (1989; 1994) has emphasised, contemporary disputes about universalism and communitarianism represent, to some extent, a continuation of the same controversy. My thesis, broadly stated, is that this polarity between the ideals of universalism and authenticity, when taken to its extreme, reinforces a faulty conception of tradition, and this particularly reveals itself as an intense paranoia over against both modernity and tradition.

This polarity between tradition and modernity is also taken up in today's multicultural societies and modernising nations as a struggle between the left and the right, between modernists and traditionalist conservatives. The modernists more often than not tend to view tradition as a sociological fact, or merely as an ossified relic of the past, or as something that is solely made up of dogmatic conventions unjustifiably narrowing the present. The traditionalist conservatives, on the other hand, entertain an equally deficient understanding of tradition and regard it as a monolithic, golden chain that allegedly bears witness to the superiority of their national, religious and cultural heritage.

The central argument of my inquiry is that Gadamer's hermeneutics provides us with a third alternative that is overlooked both by the dogmatic partisans of modernity and by the orthodoxy of traditionalism—that is, an ethics of continuity and dialogue that does justice to our situatedness within a shared context of meaning and experience without thereby implying a dogmatic closure to the possibility of a fusion with other traditions. Perhaps more important, Gadamer's hermeneutical account of tradition acknowledges that living traditions are sites of ongoing debates, critical turns and internal revisions, and that it would be wrong to suppose that traditions are beyond the reach of our interpretations, rearticulations and criticisms. In so doing, it not only entails a coherent ethical and political response to one of the major dilemmas of modern political philosophy and contemporary political practice—namely, how to understand the meaning of human belongingness without falling prey to either radical culturalism or Jacobin fanaticism. Moreover, Gadamer's notion of fusion of horizons plainly demonstrates that the choice facing us today is no longer between two forms of one-sidedness—that is, Jacobin modernism and reactionary traditionalism—but between dogmatism and undogmatism. Thus, in defining the *fusion* of horizons as a form of rising to a higher *universality*, Gadamer shows us that to insist on the absolute absence of tradition is as dogmatic as the obstinate insistence on the uncritical acceptance of it.⁴

⁴ In his brief essay on tradition, Theodor Adorno (1978) expresses a similar criticism of these two positions: "Both are ignorant of the past... Both are unaware of the dust and debris which cloud their allegedly clear vision" (4).

Let me illustrate my argument with a concrete example; that is, Turkey's Europeanisation over the last two centuries—an example that is relatively unknown in the Anglo-American world, and which may provide insightful evidence for my inquiry on the tension between tradition and modernity. As a country that has been going through a fusion between its Ottoman past and the cultural and political ideals of the European heritage, the Turkish cultural and political context not only exemplifies what Gadamer's conception of tradition might mean in practice. At the same time, it shows us the central weaknesses of the view, shared both by partisans and outright critics of modernity, that modernity is intrinsically opposed to tradition. This reminds us, once again, that no country in the Western or non-Western world, begins from zero with the question of modernity, that it is perfectly possible not to think of traditions as hermetic seals that are closed on themselves and separated from other horizons with insurmountable boundaries, and that our horizons, as Gadamer has aptly put it, are not rigid but mobile (Gadamer, 2001, 48). The Turkish context, therefore, draws our attention to the possibility of a fusion between the past and the present, between supposedly separate horizons, alien traditions.

But this is not to suggest that Turkey is a perfect example of a fusion of horizons without any flaws, tensions or problems. On the contrary, the controversy between positivist modernists and conservative traditionalists in Turkey is perhaps as alive as it was at the time of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and the Republican Revolution of 1923. Both partisans of modernity

and religious (or culturalist) traditionalists, by and large, still continue to entertain a deeply flawed understanding of tradition, which profoundly contributes to the polarisation of the ideals of modernity and tradition. Nor do I wish to suggest that all traditions should experience a similar version of fusion between their native characteristics and the European heritage. Whether a country can reconcile the ideals of European modernity with a restored tradition without any historical support remains an open question. (Perhaps a more important question would be whether or not different traditions could bring about their own versions of modernity solely from within their intellectual and spiritual sources. All of these remain open questions. But what is certain, if anything, is that in the modern world it seems neither desirable nor even possible to view traditions as homogeneous wholes that exist by themselves without any interaction with other traditions.) The example of various traditions, which cannot count on the historical, political experience of anything comparable to a series of Enlightenment-type moments in their history, speaks directly to the question I am raising. As Herder once put it eloquently, traditions and republics are like plants that are grown from seeds. What Herder means by this remark is that different communities, societies and civilisations always already find themselves within a history, a tradition, and that they are always in the middle of things and hence cannot start *ab initio*.

2- Weak Tradition?

This last point brings us to one of the major arguments of this inquiry. It is fundamental to my thesis to show that far from conveying a traditionalist or

premodern account of tradition, Gadamer's hermeneutics relies on an explicit acceptance of the moral and political ideals of European modernity. To explicate why this is so, I would like to suggest that Gadamer's hermeneutics involves both a "bold" and a "modest" account of tradition. The former entails, as Gadamer argues in his Foreword to *Truth and Method*, an ontological argument—namely, that human existence is essentially characterised by finitude and historicity, and that human beings are first and foremost storytelling beings who make sense of existence through dialogue. As Gadamer says, this hermeneutical account "embraces the whole experience of the world" (Gadamer, 1993, xxx).⁵ This is the sense in which Gadamer attributes a claim to universality to his hermeneutics: "It is the *physis* of humankind that human beings have language—and history" (Gadamer, 1994a, 221).

Precisely because of this bold ontological claim regarding human historicity and finitude, Gadamer finds fault in the radical Enlightenment motto that we can become fully transparent to ourselves; that we can make and remake the world, if necessary through acts of terror; that we can accept and reject traditions as we like; and that we can completely free ourselves from our interwovenness into our "effective history" (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). The ideal of total enlightenment, Gadamer argues, is based on a false assumption—one that is modelled after the natural sciences and modern technology. In this sense, the hermeneutic universality, Gadamer contends, provides a useful

⁵ This is the reason why Gadamer says: "My real concern was and is *philosophic*: not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing" (1993, xxviii, emphasis added).

corrective to the “excesses of the Enlightenment” and “enlightens the modern viewpoint based on making, producing, and constructing” (Gadamer, 1993, xxxvii-xxxviii).⁶ We can conclude from this that the ontological (or bold) dimension of Gadamer’s hermeneutics aims at alerting us to our embeddedness within traditions: “We stand in traditions, whether we know these traditions or not; that is, whether we are conscious of these or are so arrogant as to think that we can begin without presuppositions—none of this changes the way traditions are working on us and in our understanding” (Gadamer, 2001, 45).

This is not traditionalism. Gadamer has in fact expressed significant resistance to being labelled as a romantic or a traditionalist. But perhaps the more substantive reason for resisting the straightforward categorisation of Gadamer’s hermeneutics as a romantic traditionalism is the ready inference that, as a philosopher who has shown considerable interest in tradition, the significance of cultural heritage and the past, he is *ipso facto* hostile to the Enlightenment and the humanistic values of European modernity. I would

⁶ This is perhaps one of the central theses of Gadamer’s hermeneutics: the ideal of objective knowledge and manipulative control, which dominates our technological conceptions of science, knowledge and truth, needs to be supplemented by the ideal of “participation.” As Gadamer says: “The humanities and social sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) bring something different into our lives through their form of participation in what has been handed down to us, something that is not knowledge for the sake of control, yet it is no less important. We customarily call it ‘culture’... We participate in the essential expressions of human experience that have been developed in our artistic, religious, and historical traditions—and *not only in ours but in all cultures*” (Gadamer, 2001, 40-41, emphasis added). Gadamer’s insistence on our participation “in all cultures” plainly shows that his argument with the Enlightenment and with a certain kind of rationalism does not make of him an anti-Enlightenment traditionalist. Gadamer’s stress on the need to recognise the plurality of traditions and hence the partiality of one’s tradition, as I will show, directly speaks to my argument that Gadamer’s conception of tradition is a post-traditional, modern interpretation of tradition.

argue that in the case of Gadamer, this assumption is misplaced. Moreover, this critique is directed against a bogeyman because there is nothing in Gadamer's hermeneutics that excludes the fruits of European modernity.

It is also important to realise that just as Gadamer questions the excesses of the Enlightenment project, he likewise categorically dismisses any suggestion that one tradition is as good as another as a vulgarised distortion of his conception of tradition. In this respect, even a superficial reading of Gadamer's work can easily recognise that his vision of tradition does not represent an uncritical defence of traditions or traditional ways of life. What are commonly defined as "traditional" societies are in fact those that are devoid of tradition in the hermeneutical sense. And this brings us to my claim that Gadamer's hermeneutics, in particular his hermeneutical conception of tradition, also involves a historical dimension which acknowledges the contributions and moral ideals of European modernity.⁷ For Gadamer, we belong to a tradition hermeneutically only if we belong to it *creatively* and *critically*, which can take place only under the conditions of modernity where "every renewed encounter with an older tradition is no longer a simple matter of appropriation" (Gadamer, 1981, 98). Thus, far from presenting us with a premodern conception of tradition, Gadamer fully recognises that the hermeneutical approach towards traditions is a rational, historically oriented

⁷ Beiner's (1997, 86) contention that Gadamer's hermeneutics "presupposes a prior fusion of Aristotelian and Kantian horizons" is an eloquent way of expressing what I try to capture by the term "weak tradition" in my analysis of Gadamer's conception of tradition. It may well be argued that precisely this fusion—this recognition of the ethical and political horizons of European modernity—makes Gadamer's account of tradition modern and post-traditional, i.e., weak. I shall come back to this point in Chapter 3.

one, with the understanding that in the modern world one cannot swallow traditions, but has to enter a reasonable dialogue with them.⁸ To reject all tradition because of its claim to authority, a view that Gadamer characterises as an “anarchistic utopia,” is in fact no better than to accept uncritically all tradition. The latter, Gadamer repeatedly emphasises, is the mistake of the Romantics who have opposed the Enlightenment’s abstract notion of reason by embracing an equally ambiguous and prejudiced account of tradition. Gadamer’s hermeneutical conception of tradition repudiates precisely such a polarised view of tradition and reason, which treats traditions purely as quasi-natural forces beyond our interpretations.

It is vital to stress in this connection the importance Gadamer attaches to one of the crucial concepts of his hermeneutics: “interpretation”—that is, the reflexive position concerning all that is handed down by traditions. By contrast with traditional societies, modern societies are those in which traditions are not seen as natural facts, but as products, not wholly to be sure, of our interpretations. In modern societies, and in some measure in every society touched by modernity, the significance of interpretation is an historical achievement. It is this sensitivity towards interpretation, portrayed so eloquently within Gadamer’s hermeneutics, which makes his conception of tradition post-traditional and hence modern. This hermeneutical understanding of tradition, as Gadamer continually states, is a result of historical learning,

⁸ Gadamer clearly distinguishes his hermeneutical account from the traditional understanding of tradition: “Even the naïve appropriation of tradition is a ‘retelling’ although it ought not to be described as a fusion of ‘horizons’” (Gadamer, 1993, xxxiv).

which is an accomplishment made possible with the breaks initiated especially by the Reformation and the French Revolution in European history: “This was the hour of universal hermeneutics...The past as such had become alien. Every renewed encounter with an older tradition now is no longer a simple matter of appropriation.” This new hermeneutical sensibility alludes to “a full awareness of the historicity of everything present and the relativity of all opinions” (Gadamer, 1981, 97-98).

I would like to suggest that, precisely because of this recognition of the relativity of one’s tradition, its openness to other traditions and further fusions, Gadamer’s hermeneutics signifies a “weak” account of tradition.⁹ As Gadamer writes: “Today no one can shield himself from this reflexivity characteristic of the modern spirit” (Gadamer, 1974, 110). This reflexivity, I argue, not only demands that our allegiances to traditions be weak, with the understanding that “every encounter with what has come down to us in history is a historically different encounter” (Gadamer, 2001, 48). But it also calls for a different vision of tradition—a vision which recognises that traditions in the modern world emerge from infinite dialogues, interpretations and fusions, and that they are essentially constituted by the ideas and interpretations that underlie them. Gadamer’s contention is that to be aware of this is to be modern.

⁹ As is well-known, the term “weak thought” or “weak ontology” has been coined by the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo who is one of Gadamer’s students, the translator of *Truth and Method* into Italian, and one of the leading hermeneuticists of contemporary Continental philosophy. But it must be noted that Vattimo uses this term in a slightly different context in order to convey his analysis of the political and cultural implications of what he calls, following Nietzsche and Heidegger, “European nihilism.” See Vattimo (1988, 1997 and 2003).

Gadamer argues that a creative, hermeneutical rearticulation of tradition is not a slavish reproduction of the past or a defence of the so-called communal values of the folk. Thus, by the term weak tradition, I simply mean that Gadamer's account expresses a modern interpretation of tradition, which depicts traditions as ongoing conversations and a chain of interpretations. From this it also follows that every attempt to rearticulate traditions contributes to their ongoing constructions. Though Gadamer himself has never uttered the notion of "weak tradition," this certainly seems to be a justified extrapolation from Gadamer's hermeneutics. This is the only sense we can make of both Gadamer's aforementioned historical-philosophical narrative regarding the emergence of hermeneutical consciousness in Europe and his assertion that "we understand in a different way, if we understand at all" (Gadamer, 1993, 297).¹⁰

3- Scope of the Inquiry: Gadamer, Heidegger, Habermas

A crucial issue in understanding Gadamer's hermeneutical conception of tradition is its complicated relation to Heidegger's early thought. It makes no sense to underestimate Gadamer's indebtedness to Heidegger who, as Gadamer continually emphasises, is the founder of twentieth-century hermeneutics. Nonetheless, in Heidegger's early writings, we encounter an account of tradition which, despite some striking similarities it has with

¹⁰ This certainly does not mean that we just make up traditions as we please. Gadamer passionately rejects this view and regards it as one of the unrealistic and hubristic claims of the ideal of total enlightenment. Gadamer, therefore, certainly does not think that "we are such stuff as dreams are made on." Rosen's (2002, 257-277) essay on Gadamer's hermeneutics directly addresses this issue.

Gadamer's, is essentially rooted in a radical critique of modernity. True, Gadamer's strong emphasis on human historicity, as well as on the constantly shifting horizons of living traditions, has its roots in Heidegger's *Being and Time*. But between Heidegger's account of authentic political community and Gadamer's conception of tradition, as I will show, there is an enormous chasm.

Heidegger presents the self-assertion of *völkisch* particularities and struggles of different traditions, peoples and nations against the homogenising forces of modernity as *the* most authentic way of living or doing politics in the age of globalisation, technology and cosmopolitanism. Gadamer's hermeneutics radically departs from Heidegger's politics of authenticity and his attack on ancient and modern enlightenment. This is not, as one might suspect, due to a lack of philosophical radicality on Gadamer's part. Rather, it stems directly from Gadamer's determination to combine the horizons of the ancients and moderns without sacrificing the fruits of modernity. As Gadamer says in one of his essays on Hegel: "The principle that all are free never again can be shaken" (Gadamer, 1981, 37). In this respect, what Gadamer has to say about the meaning of tradition and the excesses of the Enlightenment is written out of a forward-looking belief in the value of modern freedoms, as well as out of acute awareness of the manifold problems the modern world engenders.

The difference between Gadamer and Heidegger particularly becomes manifest in Heidegger's ethics of *polemos*—i.e., a form of political existence

emanating from a communal struggle under the leadership of great creators. Heidegger presents this not only as an authentic political community in which a people can creatively reappropriate its communal destiny, its tradition, but also as a way of overcoming the forgetfulness of being that characterises the modern age in its entirety. Needless to say, Heidegger's ethics of *polemos* is a world apart from Gadamer's account of tradition. But it is important to realise that this radical departure cannot be understood solely in terms of a comparative analysis of Gadamer's and Heidegger's ontologies. Rather, it is only explicable in terms of their approaches to modernity, for the political implications and philosophical presuppositions of Heidegger's conception of tradition can only be comprehended in the context of his diagnosis of modernity. I shall present my analysis of Heidegger's interpretation of modernity and tradition in Chapter 2, but a more exhaustive account of the differences between Gadamer and Heidegger will be given in Chapter 3.

The famous Gadamer-Habermas debate has misled many critics and commentators into overlooking the commonality between them and the actual complementarity of their contributions to an adequate understanding of tradition in the modern world. Indeed, my analysis of Gadamer's ethics of continuity and dialogue in terms of a weak, post-traditional account of tradition aims at highlighting this common ground between the two thinkers. But this does not mean that, as one of the leading commentators of Gadamer's hermeneutics suggests, the controversy between Gadamer and Habermas concerns only "secondary matters" (Grondin, 1994, 130). It would be a mistake

to conclude from the commonalities they share that their assumptions, proposals and conclusions are indistinguishable.

There are several basic issues dividing them. First of all, Gadamer follows Heidegger in advocating a universally valid hermeneutics of human finitude and historicity. Habermas's ethics of unlimited communication moves towards a different kind of universality in which the universality of hermeneutics is supposed to be superseded either by ideology critique (Habermas's early response to hermeneutics) or by the universality of the "moral point of view" understood in the Kantian sense (Habermas's most recent formulation of an ethics of unlimited communication). What is particularly telling is Habermas's insistence to retain the hermeneutical moment or dimension, both in his early debate with Gadamer and in his theory of communicative action, without recognising its universality. Paul Ricoeur (1973) expresses this point vividly when he says that the contrast between Gadamer and Habermas can be defined as two types of hermeneutics: a hermeneutics of recollection versus a hermeneutics of suspicion.

Many reasons can be given for contrasting these two perspectives, but one of the most basic one is concerned with their conflicting views about the authority of reason and the meaning of tradition. For Habermas, from his early dispute with Gadamer in the 1960s to his most recent reformulation of the theory of communicative action, "critique" or "reflection" means "emancipation from the quasi natural forces of history and society" (Habermas, 1966, 295)—i.e., liberation from all ideological distortions and coercive traditions through

the power of reflection. But, as Gadamer has repeatedly stressed, in defining tradition as a historical givenness of a quasi-natural kind, Habermas, like the Enlightenment and its critics within Romanticism, thinks of the authority of tradition too abstractly—that is, as the radical opposite of rational freedom and communicative action. Gadamer shows us that Habermas, perhaps unbeknownst to himself, still clings to a historically and philosophically outdated notion of tradition and freedom, which is reminiscent of Romanticism. The commonalities and differences between these two versions of hermeneutics will be fully spelled out in Chapter 1 and Chapter 4.

The main critical thrust of my inquiry is, therefore, directed precisely against those interpretations that tend to downplay either the differences or the commonalities between these three different conceptions of tradition, which are in turn rooted in three different accounts of modernity and human existence. My primary purpose is to demonstrate how Gadamer's hermeneutics challenges Heidegger's and Habermas's accounts of tradition. In so doing, I also hope to show the ways in which Gadamer's ethics of continuity and dialogue seems to be able to encompass some of the motives and demands voiced in Heidegger's ethics of *polemos* and Habermas's ethics of unlimited communication without embracing the pitfalls of their perspectives.¹¹ Detailed expositions and analyses of Heidegger's, Gadamer's

¹¹ I have to acknowledge that my suggestion that there are three different kinds of ethics in the writings of Gadamer, Heidegger and Habermas may seem deeply problematic, for both Gadamer and Heidegger have persistently rejected to formulate any new ethics. For a discussion of this, see Beiner's assessment (1997, 85). Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism," as is well-known, is a response precisely to an invitation to propose a new ethics. While my

and Habermas's perspectives will be provided in Chapter 2, 3 and 4, respectively.

In the first section of Chapter 1, we shall begin by looking briefly at some important works of modern and contemporary political philosophy in which we encounter radically different accounts of tradition and modernity. The fundamental task of this section of Chapter 1 is to situate Gadamer's vision within some influential disputes about tradition and modernity in modern and contemporary philosophy. In the second section of Chapter 1, I shall outline the different concerns and presuppositions that provide the focus for Gadamer's, Heidegger's and Habermas's work by sketching the biographical and philosophical relationship between them.

The works of two Turkish writers, A. H. Tanpınar and Orhan Pamuk, have not only chiefly inspired my approach to the problem of tradition, but also immensely contributed to my understanding of Gadamer's hermeneutics.¹² Like Gadamer, they emphasise that the positivist dogma that we can remake the human world as we please is just as illusory as the traditionalist appeal to tradition; that patient attention to human historicity, finitude, and tradition does not entail the withholding of reasoned criticism; and that concern for tradition, in particular for the works of great thinkers, poets, artists, writers and creators, is fully compatible with aiming at a universal human good. I would like to

proposal fully acknowledges this, I also think that both Heidegger's and Gadamer's major works have principally ethical and political dimensions. Vattimo (1997, 28-41) agrees on this.

¹² Tanpınar and Pamuk are widely considered as two of the most important figures within twentieth-century Turkish literature. The intimations of hermeneutics that can be observed in their works are yet to be explored more fully. While Tanpınar's major works have not been translated into English, almost all of Pamuk's novels and essays appeared in English.

conclude my introduction with two philosophical insights that directly follow from their novels and essays, and which have a deep affinity with Gadamer's hermeneutics—an affinity which primarily stems from their shared concern to combine the spirit of European modernity with a recognition of the hermeneutical dimensions of human existence. In very general terms, the first insight is that the articulation of a hermeneutically enlightened universalism emerges as a possibility if we give up assuming that an emphasis on the essential factor of tradition—understood as a historical process of ethical, intellectual and civic education or cultivation—necessarily implies an uncritical acceptance of the past. The second one is that we need to deny once and for all the idea of traditions as hermetic, sealed and internally consistent wholes that are beyond rearticulation and reinterpretation. Implicit in this vision of tradition is a related insight; namely, that living in the present first and foremost means assessing and reconstructing the past, discerning what can be carried on and built upon, what must be reconfigured, and what needs to be laid aside in traditions. Hermeneutical experience and consciousness, then, becomes a counterpart to modernity with its concomitant historical responsibility and openness to different, more universal horizons.

CHAPTER 1: THREE VARIETIES OF HERMENEUTICS

“The possession of self-conscious rationality...has not been gained suddenly nor has it grown merely out of the soil of the present. On the contrary, it is essentially an inheritance and, more precisely, the result of labour, the labour of all the preceding generations of the human race.

The arts of the externals of our life, the mass of means and skills, the arrangements and customs of social and political associations, all these are the result of the reflection, invention, needs, misery, and misfortune, the will and achievement of the history which has produced our life today. So too our position in science now, particularly in philosophy, we likewise have tradition to thank, *the tradition which runs through everything which is perishable...* But this tradition is not merely a housekeeper who preserves what she has received and transmits it unaltered to her successor. It is not a motionless statue; it is alive, swelling like a mighty river which grows the further it is pushed on from its source.”

Hegel, *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, pp. 9-10.

1-1 Disputes over Enlightenment and Tradition: Situating Gadamer's Vision

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Enlightenment is its juxtaposition of reason to all those sources that limit the judgement and autonomy of individuals. In this respect, the commitment to the independent authority of reason is fundamental to the modern outlook. In his well-known essay “What is Enlightenment?” Immanuel Kant specifically refers to the authority of reason as the final court of appeal and the ultimate criterion in terms of which political and moral issues secure their legitimacy in the age of enlightenment:

“Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of enlightenment is therefore: *Sapere aude!* Have courage to use your own understanding” (1970, 54).

And Kant continues:

“If it is now asked whether we at the present live in an enlightened age, the answer is: No, but we do live in an age of enlightenment. As things are at present, we still have a long way to go before men as a whole can be in a position (or can even be put into a position) of using their own understanding

confidently and well in religious matters, without outside guidance. But we do have distinct indications that the way is now being cleared for them to work freely in this direction, and that the obstacles to universal enlightenment, to man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity, are gradually becoming fewer" (1970, 58).

Kant thus insists on a fundamental opposition between what he calls the "public use of one's reason" on all matters on the one hand and tradition and religion on the other. In so doing, he denies tradition all independent status as a source of justification, thereby providing us with a distinctively modern understanding of freedom and reason. In essence, therefore, Kant's emphasis on reason should be seen principally as a challenge to all sorts of traditionalism. Reason, on this view, is defined by its power to uproot itself from tradition. The authority of tradition, on the other hand, appears only as a captivity and bondage. For the Enlightenment, reason and tradition are thus antinomous.

And yet, as one of the most important conservative political thinkers of the age of enlightenment, Edmund Burke questions precisely this vision of political existence by elevating tradition to the status of a norm. In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke uses the term "prejudice" to refer to rules of action and cultural values prevailing in a community, which are the product of historical experience and the sedimentation of belief over a long succession of generations. As Burke says: "When ancient opinions and rules of life are taken away, the loss cannot possibly be estimated. From that moment we have no compass to govern us; nor can we know distinctly to what port we steer" (1968, 172-173). It is vital to realise that Burke's attack on the

Enlightenment, in which he explicitly defends the concepts of tradition and prejudice, occurs in the context of his criticism of the emphasis placed on the rights of man by the French Revolution. For Burke, the very universality of these rational claims, as well as their unlimited nature in respect of traditions, is precisely the source of their corrosive character over established conventions and practices. Burke sums up his criticism of these claims of the French Revolution and its supporters by saying:

“You see, Sir, that in this enlightened age I am bold enough to confess, that we are generally men of untaught feelings; that instead of casting away all our prejudices, we cherish them because they are prejudices; and the longer they have lasted, and the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish them. We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations, and of ages” (1968, 183).

Thus Burke argues that human beings are essentially “creatures of prejudice.” One of the most important metaphors that Burke employs in *Reflections* is the metaphor of veiling by which he attempts to ridicule the leading metaphors of the Enlightenment such as light and transparency. With this metaphor Burke wishes to stress the significance of traditions as veils, as fabrics of meanings, which restrain the expression of the passions of domination and self-gratification, thereby diverting them to more elevated goals. Burke’s fundamental argument with the advocates of enlightenment therefore is that, without the restraint of tradition and prejudice, the effect of a relentless critique of inherited beliefs and institutions not only serves to delegitimize all existing political authority. But at the same time such a critique, Burke contends, inevitably leads to the destruction of the veil of tradition which

may in turn leave human beings open to act on their more primitive and destructive urges.¹

As is well-known, Kant responds to Burke's attack on the Enlightenment in the preface to his "Theorie-Praxis" essay (Kant, 1970). The thrust of Kant's reply raises the question of whether or not Burke fails to conceive the nature of moral obligation and autonomy. What makes our actions moral, Kant argues, is neither their conformity to traditions nor their consequences; rather, it consists in their conformity to principles uncontaminated by desires and traditions. Therefore, in the sphere of politics, no less than in that of morality, practice must conform to theory rather than theory to practice.²

It is not the purpose of this study to provide an exhaustive comparative analysis of Kant's and Burke's views on the Enlightenment and the concept of tradition.³ Rather, I wish to use this controversy (which has both a canonical significance in modern political philosophy and a theoretical relevance to my inquiry) to situate Gadamer's vision of tradition within the context of the history of European political philosophy. While, as we shall see more clearly in Chapter 3, Gadamer is critical of Kant's account of the moral point of view and the Enlightenment's dichotomy of reason and tradition, Burke's appeal to

¹ For a discussion of the significance of the imagery of veiling in Burke's *Reflections*, see Muller (1997, 20-21).

² For an overview of the dispute between Kant and Burke as well as its ramifications in modern German political thought, see Beiser's remarkable analysis to which I am greatly indebted: Beiser (1992, 38-39, 118, 231, 238-239, 265, 287-288).

³ Tate's (1997, 71-91) analysis of the concept of tradition provides not only a very fine comparison of Kant's and Burke's perspectives but also an overview of contemporary debates.

traditions seems to be an equally deficient interpretation of tradition from Gadamer's point of view for two main reasons.

First, according to Gadamer, and this is a crucial point because it is also related to Habermas's criticism of Gadamer's hermeneutics, the fact that we are always already situated within traditions does not mean that we can justify our ethical and political principles solely with reference to existing social and political prejudices. Thus, Burke's appeal to tradition would seem to Gadamer to be suspect, useless and dangerous. As Gadamer says: "The idea that authority and tradition are something one can appeal to for validation is a pure misunderstanding... Anyone who simply appeals to prejudices is not someone you can talk with. Indeed, a person who is not ready to put his or her own prejudices in question is also someone to whom there is no point in talking" (2001, 44).

Conveyed within this criticism is another insight, and this is my second point; namely, that the glorification of a pre-Enlightenment past where constitutive tradition is devoid of all rational reflection is the mistake of the Romantics.⁴ In this respect, Burke seems to be anticipating the mistakes of the Romantics of the nineteenth century. Gadamer's point is that such a position represents simply a reversal of the normative relation which the Enlightenment establishes between reason and tradition. While the former pleads for the old at the expense of the new, the latter celebrates *logos* against *mythos*, reason

⁴ For a more detailed analysis of why Gadamer's conception of tradition cannot be viewed as Burkean, see footnote 36 in Chapter 3. I shall also provide a brief analysis of Gadamer's critique of Romanticism's response to the Enlightenment.

against tradition, prejudice and habit. In fairness to Burke, one might argue that Burke does not attempt to reverse the Enlightenment dichotomy; rather, he aims to show that traditions and prejudices embody “practical wisdom.” Nevertheless, Burke’s analogies between nature and tradition, in which nature is characterised as “wisdom without reflection” whereas traditions are supposed to exhibit the pre-reflective certainty, are completely alien to Gadamer’s hermeneutics.⁵

It must be noted that Gadamer’s purpose is to formulate an account of tradition in which reason and tradition (i.e., truth and historicity, or being and time) is strongly linked. It is precisely on this issue that Kant’s and Burke’s perspectives, from Gadamer’s point of view, represent two equally problematic renderings of the meaning of tradition: both are one-sided; that is to say, they tend to polarise that which must in fact be considered only in terms of interdependence. In this respect, it is tempting to see a close affinity to Hegel in Gadamer’s hermeneutics. Gadamer, like Hegel, argues that freedom only posits itself by re-evaluating what has already been evaluated, and that all knowledge is recollection. On this view, human existence then appears as a perpetual transaction between the ideal of freedom and the given *ethos* of a community, with its ethical norms and institutions. To be modern, according to Gadamer, is to see the interdependence between these two dimensions. Therefore, in place of the idea of polarity Gadamer advances the idea of

⁵ Burke refers to nature as “wisdom without reflection” in his *Reflections* (1968, 119). For a criticism of Burke’s view on this point, see MacIntyre’s discussion (1988, 353).

interplay. Gadamer thinks that if we break this interdependence or (hermeneutical) circle, the ideal of freedom either remains an empty concept or turns into a fanatical demand. Thus, it would be unfair to argue, as Habermas has repeatedly and rhetorically argued, that Gadamer cannot adequately see what the Enlightenment conception of reflection or critique really means. What Gadamer objects to is a certain Enlightenment rationalism which opposes tradition and reflection as antithetical. The notion of critical reflection, on this view, is *both* a cultural inheritance and a philosophical ideal.

Alasdair MacIntyre, like Gadamer, offers a similar criticism of both the Kantian and Burkean views of tradition on the grounds that both of them subscribe to the dichotomy between reason and tradition. MacIntyre argues that the insistence of the Enlightenment on the critical independence of criticism and the autonomy of reason from all prior preconditions defines the self-understanding of modernity:

"It was a central aspiration of the Enlightenment, an aspiration the formulation of which was itself a great achievement, to provide for debate in the public realm standards and methods of rational justification by which alternative courses of action in every sphere of life could be adjudged just or unjust, rational or irrational, enlightened or unenlightened. So, it was hoped, reason would displace authority and tradition. Rational justification was to appeal to principles undeniable by any rational person and therefore independent of all those social and cultural particularities which the Enlightenment thinkers took to be the mere accidental clothing of reason in particular times and places" (1988, 6).

The Enlightenment project, MacIntyre argues, mistakenly assumes that either there are universal, traditional-neutral standards for evaluating moral and political claims or the very idea of reason is chimera. MacIntyre dismisses this view by stating that human beings are culturally-rooted beings with a given

tradition, but this, he insists, implies neither nihilistic relativism nor irrationalism. MacIntyre then attempts to provide us with a picture of human existence in which human beings are defined as story-telling, rational animals, but he reminds us that we can only answer the question “What am I to do?” if we can answer the “prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’” This necessarily implies, MacIntyre says, that what we are is to a very great extent what we inherit, and that we are the bearers of a tradition (1984, 216, 221). Nevertheless, MacIntyre argues that traditions are not, as Burke states, based upon “wisdom without reflection” (1984, 221-222; 1988, 53). Rather, they are, MacIntyre says, based upon inquiry. Furthermore, thanks to the capacity of their most gifted adherents for creative thought, traditions can make rational contact with rival, incommensurable traditions. Thus, according to MacIntyre, traditions that are “alive” and “in good order” are inherently reflective: “A living tradition then is a historically extended, socially embodied argument” (1984, 222).

How would Gadamer respond to this account of tradition? Gadamer could agree with MacIntyre’s narrative vision of human life and his criticism of the dichotomy of reason and tradition. Nevertheless, there are several issues dividing Gadamer and MacIntyre. The chief among these is that Gadamer’s concern, unlike MacIntyre’s, would never be to dismiss the modern moral landscape in its entirety. In this respect, both MacIntyre’s resolute hostility to the Enlightenment project and his suggestion that we retreat into the monastic existence of small fringe groups in order to avoid the moral confusions and ills

of modern liberal democratic societies resemble in many ways Heidegger's late work in which we are advised to "stay in the provinces."⁶ A more detailed analysis of MacIntyre's perspective is beyond the scope of this inquiry, but let me emphasise that Gadamer's hermeneutical account of tradition presupposes a qualified (but explicit) acceptance of the Enlightenment project in that it presumes that hermeneutical understanding is possible only when traditions have become distantiated from our immediate frame of reference, and hence when they have lost their constitutive hold over us. In this sense, the hermeneutical understanding of tradition is directly connected to the moral and political implications of the historical moments that have shaped European modernity such as the Reformation and the Enlightenment. As Gadamer says: "hermeneutics came to flower in the Romantic era as a consequence of the modern dissolution of firm bonds with tradition...Therefore, it occurs only in later stages of cultural evolution" (Gadamer, 1977, 21).

Secondly, while MacIntyre recognises that traditions are flexible and have boundaries that are neither permanently structured nor irrevocably demarcated from other traditions, he also emphasises that distinct traditions

⁶ For an account of Heidegger's defence of the provinces, see his famous "Why do I Stay in the Provinces?" in Sheehan (1981, 27-30). This essay was written in 1934, a period in which Heidegger's disillusionment with National Socialism is said to begin. The conclusions that MacIntyre draws from his own equally provocative interpretation of the Enlightenment project can be found in the final chapter of his *After Virtue* (1984), see especially pp. 261-263. Needless to say, in pointing to this similarity between the recommendations of Heidegger and MacIntyre, my aim is by no means to suggest that their proposals and diagnosis regarding the modern age are indistinguishable. On the contrary, in many ways MacIntyre's "Thomism" is not even remotely akin to Heidegger's early *polemos* or his later *Gelassenheit*. Nevertheless, the radicality of their diagnosis—that is to say, their resolute hostility to the Enlightenment and liberal democracy—as well as their recommendation that we stay in the provinces, has a striking similarity.

are, or can be, rival and incommensurable. In his interpretation of the hermeneutical encounter between the past and the present, between the familiar and the alien horizons, Gadamer shows us that the idea of self-contained universe of meanings, which is incommensurable with other universes, is an inconsistent concept, one that is reminiscent of historicist relativism shared both by the Enlightenment and by their Romantic critics. In this respect, there seems to be a striking contrast between MacIntyre's hostility to modernity and his equally provocative "incommensurability thesis" on the one hand, and Gadamer's account of hermeneutic consciousness and fusion of horizons—the two vital concepts of his hermeneutics both of which incorporate the moral and political fruits of European modernity—on the other.

Richard Rorty, in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), also makes a compelling defence of incommensurability of traditions. Rorty, like MacIntyre, is extremely critical of the epistemological assumptions of the Enlightenment. But unlike MacIntyre, Rorty does not dismiss modern freedoms and the political fruits of the Enlightenment project, and he explicitly states his indebtedness to Gadamer's hermeneutics in the final chapters of his book.⁷ Nonetheless, like MacIntyre, Rorty defends an "assimilation model of understanding" and the incommensurability thesis when he argues that understanding or interpretation means either assimilation to one's own standards of rationality or a conversion to the rationality of a completely

⁷ It must be noted that the title of chapter VII of Rorty's book is "From Epistemology to Hermeneutics" and in the last chapter of the book Rorty makes his indebtedness to Gadamer more explicit. Concerning his thesis of incommensurability and his views on Gadamer, see especially pp. 357-365.

foreign conception of the world.⁸ The fusion of different horizons, through which we rise to a higher universality by overcoming “not only our own particularity but also that of the other,” lies at the heart of Gadamer’s hermeneutics. But this does not appear to be within the reach of human beings in Rorty’s analysis. And yet Gadamer makes a compelling case for a fusion of this kind when he says: “The horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices... Understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves” (Gadamer, 1993, 305-306).

This is not the only point of divergence between Gadamer and Rorty. Another good case in point would be the way in which Rorty defines *Bildung*. Rorty asserts that his interpretation of *Bildung* is based upon Gadamer’s account of that concept. Nonetheless, in many respects Rorty’s assessment significantly departs from Gadamer’s hermeneutics. *Bildung*, for Rorty, signifies an interest in “edification” which he contrasts with knowledge. Its point, Rorty insists, is to foster an awareness of different possibilities of “coping with the world,” of different options in life and of new modes of “subjective self-description.” To be thus educated, in Rorty’s view, is to have acquired the necessary means to redescribe the world and ourselves. Rorty contends that “redescribing ourselves is the most important thing we can do”

⁸ I have borrowed the term “assimilation model of understanding” from Habermas who regards both Rorty’s perspective and MacIntyre’s view of tradition as assimilation models of understanding (Habermas, 2003, 37) and regards Gadamer’s account of tradition as far more superior and nuanced than both MacIntyre’s and Rorty’s perspectives. Habermas provides a detailed analysis of this in *Discourse Ethics* (1993a). See especially p. 105.

(Rorty, 1979, 358-359). Furthermore, Rorty distorts some of Gadamer's vital notions such as fusion of horizons and *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* almost beyond recognition when he says: "Gadamer develops his notion of *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* to characterise an attitude interested not so much in what is out there in the world, or in what happened in history, as in what we can get out of nature and history for our own uses" (1979, 359). Or when he asserts: "The attempt to edify ourselves may consist in the hermeneutic activity of making connections between our culture and some exotic culture... which seems to pursue incommensurable aims in an incommensurable vocabulary" (360).

The notion of *Bildung* is one of the most important concepts of Gadamer's hermeneutics. Indeed, it is perhaps the essence of what Gadamer means by tradition: these two concepts are fundamentally interdependent in his thought. The main assumption underlying Gadamer's attempt to link tradition with *Bildung* is his belief that human nature is not an inexorable given, but needs to be cultivated. Gadamer's strong emphasis on *Bildung* has also become one of the central issues in his quarrel with Habermas, in which Gadamer forcefully argues, like Aristotle does in his *Ethics*, that reason—in particular political reason—is "not simply a faculty one has, but something to be cultivated" (Gadamer, 1998, 40). Moreover, for Gadamer the ethical and political significance of *Bildung* consists precisely in our having a capacity to move beyond the narrow scope of our private interests and to take up the concerns of the community to which we belong, a capacity which we can

acquire only through education or cultivation in a well-ordered political community.

And this is not the whole story. For to be an educated or *gebildete* person in Gadamer's sense is to have moved beyond the limits and interests of one's community in order to be able to adopt an interest in something other than one's own tradition. But this recognition of diversity in Gadamer's hermeneutics is not even remotely akin to Rorty's emphasis on "an interest in exotic cultures" for the sole (and banal) purpose of redescribing one's subjective set of choices and ways of life. Gadamer's interpretation of taste, judgement and *Bildung* in the first three chapters of *Truth and Matter* plainly demonstrates that these terms involve not just a "subjective" awareness of different ways of describing the world or the variety of ways of life, but more significantly a certain kind of knowledge. More important, Gadamer states that *Bildung* leads to an increase in sensitivity and selectivity; that is to say, it contributes to the formation of an ability to discriminate and judge the particulars in a well-informed and reasonable manner.⁹ As Gadamer says:

"Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something—whereby what we encounter says something to us. This formulation certainly does not mean that we are enclosed within a wall of prejudices and only let through the narrow portals those things that can produce a pass saying, 'Nothing new will be said here.' Instead we welcome just that guest whom we admit is one who has something new to say to us. Is not our expectation and our readiness to hear the new also necessarily determined by the old that has already taken possession of us?... The nature of the hermeneutical experience is not that something is outside and desires our admission. Rather, we are possessed

⁹ This last point has been made in Warnke's very fine analysis of Rorty's and Gadamer's interpretations of hermeneutics. Her discussion also involves an assessment of the political implications of their different visions of *Bildung* (1987, 139-166).

by something and precisely by means of it we are opened up for the new, the different, the true" (1993, 9).

The cultivated person is thus not an "ethnocentric person" in the sense in which this term is defined by Rorty. Rather, he or she is the one who is able to distinguish between the important and unimportant, the right and wrong, the good and bad. As Gadamer remarks in an illuminating passage: "Cultured senses: that ultimately means developing the human capacity for choice and judgement... *Bildung* requires and enables one to see things through the eyes of others" (1998, 119, 121).

I am now at a transitional moment in my argument. Let me therefore summarise my discussion to this point. As my analysis has shown, just as Gadamer's conception of tradition is critical of the Enlightenment dichotomy between tradition and reason, so too does it differ from the Burkean response to the Enlightenment. Gadamer's view of tradition implies neither traditionalism nor a Romantic approach to the past. True, Gadamer admits that all criteria for rationality are historically produced, and that the Enlightenment conception of tradition relies on a false abstraction. But, as we have seen, this does not turn Gadamer into a root and branch critic of modernity such as MacIntyre. Nor does Gadamer's conception of tradition imply a celebration of ethnocentrism or relativism.

By way of transition between the two parts of this chapter, allow me three more remarks about Gadamer's conception of tradition. The most important thing that we need to realise is that Gadamer is not interested in a

defence of provincialism or populism. Nor does he aim to preserve social stability and harmony, and subordinate the individual to the supposedly higher unity of the nation, the tradition or the closed community of traditionalists. By the same token, Gadamer does not aim to formulate a sociological definition of tradition. The main problem with sociological approaches to tradition is that most of them characteristically either view tradition as “folklore” and usually in opposition to modernity (that is, as “ancient relics” that are supposed to be eliminated from world history as a result of an unalterable social and economic process) or accept traditions merely as “facts” as if human beings are sociologically determined beings who simply have to endure a sociologically determined fate.¹⁰ Surely there are some enlightening sociological analyses. One such example also appears to have an affinity with Gadamer’s hermeneutics in terms of its ethical and political implications: Peter Berger’s (1979) account of what he calls the “heretical imperative.” More recently, Berger has articulated his view of tradition in a way that resembles Gadamer’s “weak” or hermeneutical conception of tradition. Consider the following summary by Berger in a recent interview in which he expresses his indebtedness to Schleiermacher’s hermeneutical account of tradition:

“Schleiermacher’s [vision] is a very rational, historically oriented approach within a tradition, with the understanding that one cannot simply swallow the tradition but has to enter into a reasonable dialogue with it. In one of my books I call this the ‘heretical imperative’—you have to choose. No tradition can be taken for granted any more. To pretend that it can is, in most cases, a self-delusion... Another way of putting it is to say that the modern challenge is how to live with uncertainty. The basic fault lines today are not between

¹⁰ To be sure there are numerous exceptions to this. See, for instance, Anthony Giddens’s philosophically and hermeneutically informed sociological analysis (1991), especially pp. 30-45. See also Shils’ detailed and informative analysis (1981).

people with different beliefs but between people who hold these beliefs with an element of uncertainty and people who hold these beliefs with a pretense of certitude. There is a middle ground between fanaticism and relativism... And you can build a community with people who are neither fanatics nor relativists" (1997, 978).

To realise the similarity between Gadamer's concept of tradition and Berger's remarks on the "modern challenge" is to understand that tradition, for Gadamer, is not something given that stands over against us. Rather, we contribute to its transformation and create it ourselves as long as we participate in its evolution. As Gadamer remarks: "Tradition is *not* the vindication of what has come down from the past but the further *creation* of moral and social life; it depends on being made conscious and *freely* carried on" (Gadamer, 1993, 571, emphases added). Thus, traditions are to a certain extent actively constructed from a retrospective perspective and they only continue to live only by being recapitulated. In this respect, Gadamer draws our attention to the shaky, fragile, contingent and historical element inherently present in every act of reinterpreting traditions: traditions are constantly created anew and hence reinvented.¹¹ To drop the notion of tradition as something that is beyond interpretation is, thus, to drop the notion that traditions are static, irrational sources of authority working behind the backs of human beings. This implies, or must lead to the recognition, that traditions are ongoing conversations in which human beings are active participants.

¹¹ The historian Eric Hobsbawm makes a similar claim when he argues that traditions are "invented." (1983, 4-9). By this, Hobsbawm means that far from being static and ancient entities preserved through the ages in the same form and content, traditions are retrospective reconstructions. Gadamer would agree with this interpretation, though I doubt that he could draw the same conclusions as Hobsbawm does from this initial observation. Gadamer would reject, for instance, the idea that traditions are totally fabrications serving the interests of the ruling class. The same point comes to the surface in his argument with the excesses of the Enlightenment and in his dispute with Habermas.

It is vital to note in this connection that in *Truth and Method* Gadamer often uses the phrase *in Überlieferung stehen* (which means standing in the handed over or situated within tradition), rather than the Latin term *Tradition*, in order to convey the essence of tradition as an event of understanding and interpretation, as a dynamic process in which participants in the conversation simultaneously conserve and transform tradition through interpretation: “Hermeneutical consciousness is aware that its bond to the subject matter does not consist in some self-evident, unquestioned unanimity, as is the case with the unbroken stream of tradition (*fortlebende Tradition*)” (1993, 295).¹² Conveyed in this argument is a related aspect of Gadamer’s hermeneutics; namely, that tradition in the hermeneutical sense is not a unitary phenomenon. Therefore, tradition, as a continual fusion, should rather be spoken of as *traditions* in the plural since we encounter our past within a multiplicity of sources and texts that have been handed down to us and since we are not even enclosed within the walls of only a single tradition.

Thus, it would be a grave misunderstanding, Gadamer reminds us, to conceive of traditions as monolithic. On the contrary, traditions, understood in the modern sense, are “always filled with a variety of voices in which the echo of the past is heard” (Gadamer, 1993, 284). As Gadamer sees it, precisely this plurality of voices within traditions provides them with vitality and depth. It is as if Gadamer hopes to show us that the variety of interpretation, and hence

¹² The distinction between *in Überlieferung stehen* and *Tradition* is frequently stressed in the growing literature on Gadamer’s hermeneutics. For a thoughtful discussion of these two meanings of tradition in *Truth and Matter*, see Wilson (1996, 145-158). The translators of *Truth and Method* emphasise the significance of this distinction as well: see (1993, xvi).

conflict, is what distinguishes living traditions from tribal or aggressive nationalism and radical culturalism.

To speak of hermeneutical dialogue, or dialogical fusions in Gadamer's sense, is not of necessity a way of referring to a state of blissful concord, since it may just as conceivably refer to a field of tension and conflict among interpretations. From this it also follows that to have a hermeneutical consciousness, i.e. to be modern, is to be open to the challenges emanating from alternative intellectual, spiritual and moral outlooks, from different and alien horizons and traditions. Gadamer sums up this interdependence or tension between dialogue and conflict, between the familiar and the strange in an illuminating passage as follows:

"What I am describing is the mode of the whole human experience of the world. I call this experience hermeneutical, for the process we are describing is repeated continually throughout our familiar experience. There is always a world already interpreted, already organised in its basic relations, into which experience steps as something new, upsetting what has led our expectations and undergoing reorganisation itself in the upheaval... Only the support of the familiar and common understanding makes possible the venture into the alien, and thus the broadening and enrichment of our own experience of the world (1977, 15).

Now that I have shown some of the similarities and divergences between Gadamer's conception of tradition and some other such conceptions within modern and contemporary political philosophy, it is now possible to spell out more fully the connections and differences among the works of Gadamer, Heidegger and Habermas within the context of the themes of my discussion, which may also serve as a prelude to my analyses in the subsequent chapters.

1-2 Heidegger, Gadamer, Habermas: Three Varieties of Hermeneutics?

Before exploring some of the striking differences among these three thinkers, I would like to begin with a very brief account of the significance of Heidegger's contribution to twentieth-century hermeneutics, its relevance for political philosophy, and its impact on the development of Gadamer's and Habermas's work.

Since its emergence in the seventeenth century, the word hermeneutics has referred to the art of interpretation—that is to say, a theory that promised to lay out the rules of governing the discipline of interpretation.¹³ Thus, until the end of the nineteenth century, hermeneutics restricted itself to giving methodological directions to the interpretive sciences. Gadamer repeatedly acknowledges the impact of the Reformation, the humanistic tradition, the famous *querelle des anciens et des modernes* and the French Revolution, as well as the influence of the German Romanticism, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Dilthey, on the development of “universal hermeneutics.” Nonetheless, in his highly significant essay “The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem,” which has initiated his debate with Habermas, Gadamer stresses that

¹³ Originally a Greek term, hermeneutics refers to the god of Hermes—the announcer of divine messages, the messenger god that links the earth and sky, the living and dead, the gods and humans. Gadamer recognises these ancient origins of the term, but he considers the Reformation as one of the essential moments of the “prehistory of hermeneutics.” In Gadamer's view, Protestants' attempt to find a way to interpret scripture—once the authority of the Catholic Church was no longer binding—was a crucial moment in the history of hermeneutics in that it gave way to the resulting practice of biblical exegesis, which in turn became known as hermeneutics in the middle of the seventeenth century, following J. C. Dannhauer's word in a book title. The philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher extended the meaning of hermeneutics. For Schleiermacher, all cultural creation had to be understood as a process of continuous interpretation, and all thought and action was thus hermeneutic in nature. For a discussion of the development of hermeneutics, see Palmer (1969, 33-45). See also the discussion in Grondin (1994, 17-75).

Heidegger has been the first thinker to give hermeneutics its philosophical character and universality. Indeed, Gadamer learned from Heidegger that the quest for understanding or the significance of interpretation is not merely a “methodological problem,” as social scientists often claim, but a fundamental characteristic of human existence: understanding means less “a mode of knowledge” than “a knowing one’s way around” that is undergirded by “care” and “historicity.”

Although he is extremely critical of Heidegger’s thought, Habermas too stresses the impact of Heidegger’s hermeneutics on the development of his own theory of communicative action. Habermas explicitly states that Heidegger has been one of the philosophers who “determined the direction of [his] philosophical interests” (Habermas, 1992b, 192). Heidegger’s hermeneutics, as Habermas observes, has dramatically altered the ways in which many of the traditional concepts of modern political philosophy have been understood. With the “pathbreaking achievement of *Being and Time*” and Heidegger’s critique of modernity, Habermas says, the stage has been set “for a symbolically embodied, culturally contextualised, historically situated reason” (2001, 143). Indeed, Habermas regards both his ethics of unlimited communication and Gadamer’s hermeneutics as two different responses to the Heideggerian critique—that is, a radical hermeneutics the chief characteristic of which is an attempt to overcome the “philosophy of consciousness” through a “totalising critique” of modernity (1989, 146).

Central to Heidegger's critique of modernity is a hermeneutical view of human existence that stresses the communal and historical character of human life. As I will show, Heidegger's implicit target in his ontological analysis of "everydayness," "publicity" and the "dictatorship of the they" in *Being and Time* is the modern mass civilisation—that is, the growing hegemony of instrumental reason, modern technology and an instrumental-atomistic conception of society. When Heidegger speaks more politically, as he does in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, this critique becomes much more explicit. Heidegger's fundamental argument in these two major early works is that with the increasing objectification and functionalisation of social and political life everyone defines their purposes in individual terms. This, in turn, leads to the emergence of a moral and political landscape in which existence itself gradually appears to be losing its meaning and significance: specialisation, fragmentation, the loss of meaning, and, in consequence, the loss of freedom. As one of Heidegger's well-known commentators has observed, Heidegger's appeal to remember the meaning of being is explainable as a reaction to this peril (Vattimo, 2004, 9-10).¹⁴

In the following chapter we shall see that Heidegger's response to the ills of modern society is an ethics of *polemos* through which an authentic

¹⁴ Taylor brilliantly sums up Heidegger's intentions in his interpretation of the malaise of modernity in *Sources of the Self*, where he links Heidegger's critique of modern society with the "rebellion of the Romantics." Taylor remarks: "Our interests focus us on objects as 'present-at-hand' (*vorhanden*); we forget altogether the way in which objects are primarily there for us as 'ready-to-hand' (*zuhanden*). There is a steady tendency towards the 'forgetfulness of being,' which has to be reversed by an existential analytic, a study which brings to light the forgotten being of things and opens us to the meaning of being, which has been obscured and covered over in our modern worldview" (Taylor, 1989, 460-461).

political community—something more than a mere aggregation of individualised atoms—with a communal destiny, a common purpose and identity can be created, which in turn can bring about a radical transformation of the relation between man and being. Heidegger's war against cosmopolitan modernity in his early work, as Habermas (1989, 147) has observed, essentially stems from the "pathos of a heroic nihilism." Heidegger's politics of *polemos* and authenticity demands that each people "take a creative view of its tradition" from within its communal heritage and assert itself against the homogenising tendencies of the modern age in order to live authentically and more fully (Heidegger, 1987, 38).

As we have seen so far, Gadamer's conception of tradition also relies on the combination of a strong emphasis on the creative, critical interpretation of traditions with a recognition of human historicity and finitude. But it is important to realise that Gadamer derives the meaning of interpretation and its relevance for traditions from within the humanistic tradition and the moral-political horizons of modernity which have profoundly been shaped by the Reformation, the French Revolution, the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Heidegger, on the other hand, sees humanism, cosmopolitanism, modern freedoms and democracy as the latest and most deadly symptoms of the forgetfulness of being. In Heidegger's view, these ideals are essentially rooted in the forms of moral and political life that directly flow from a one dimensional existence and atomism that characterise modern technological societies, and which damage the meaning of being and human existence. As Heidegger says

in his notorious *Der Spiegel* interview, “How can a political system accommodate itself to the technological age, and which political system would this be?... I am not convinced that it is democracy... I do not see in it a genuine confrontation with the technological world” (Heidegger, 1993b, 104-105). That is the reason why Heidegger draws his conception of “authentic recollection of tradition” from the pre-Socratic understanding of being as *polemos*, which he regards as an attempt “to skip over this whole process of deformation and decay” (Heidegger, 1987, 13), a process which leads to the “spiritual decline of the earth” (38).

What specifically binds Gadamer and Habermas together, and what distinguishes their position from that of Heidegger, is the way in which they seek to contest Heidegger’s response to the political and spiritual crisis of modernity.¹⁵ As they have begun to question Heidegger’s conclusions, Gadamer and Habermas have also started to develop their own responses to Heidegger’s thought and to his diagnosis of modernity. But it would be a misunderstanding of their work to conclude from this that Gadamer and Habermas are really saying the same thing. A careful analysis of their thought has to do justice to the striking commonalities and differences between Gadamer and Habermas. These similarities and divergences can be explored in two ways: by outlining the different philosophical horizons that have effectively shaped their thought, and by analysing the different theoretical

¹⁵ For an illuminating comparative analysis of Gadamer, Heidegger and Habermas, see Lawrence (1981, ix-xxxiii).

presuppositions that provide the focus for their work. Since their views of hermeneutics and tradition will be assessed in more detail in Chapter 4, let me now place Gadamer and Habermas in their distinctive philosophical milieu, and then make some initial observations about their central concerns.

Gadamer, as many commentators have observed, sees his hermeneutics as the heir of the German tradition of historical thinking—that is German Romanticism.¹⁶ Nevertheless, Gadamer's thought cannot be seen as a mere repetition of this tradition. As Bernstein (1983, 176) has noted, much of Gadamer's hermeneutics has been formed by his appropriation of ancient political philosophy (especially Plato and Aristotle) and Hegel, and by his ongoing dialogue with Heidegger.¹⁷ While Gadamer has shown a profound interest in ethics and politics, he has never seen himself primarily as a political philosopher. In *Truth and Matter*, his main concern has been to understand the claim to truth in works of art, literary and philosophical texts, and traditions. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to conclude from this that Gadamer's hermeneutics has no bearing on political philosophy. On the contrary, the main task of Gadamer's writings has been to defend philosophy, the humanities and political reason against the universalising claims of scientism and technological worldview. Moreover, from his early essays such as "Plato's educational state" to his later works on Aristotle's and Hegel's thought, and his

¹⁶ For Gadamer's remarks on this, see Gadamer (1984, 315-316). See also Nicholson (1991, 152), Bernstein (1983, 176) and Ricoeur (1973, 152). I shall come back to this point in Chapter 3.

¹⁷ Rosen agrees on this when he argues that Gadamer's hermeneutics is an "attempt to combine the spirit of Plato with a recognition of human historicity" (Rosen, 2002, 257).

lectures on the political legacy of Europe and the contemporary significance of intercivilisational dialogue, Gadamer has devoted most of his central works to crucial ethical and political questions that are in one way or another related to contemporary problems. This is hardly surprising for anyone who has some familiarity with Gadamer's thought, because Gadamer considers his hermeneutics as a continuation of the tradition of practical philosophy, which he characterises as "a reflection upon human-social praxis" (Gadamer, 1990, 275).

Habermas views his philosophy primarily as a contribution to a "normative critical theory" which synthesises Kantian moral philosophy with the Hegelian-Marxist tradition.¹⁸ Habermas's fundamental task, as he defines it, is to formulate a theory of modernity and rationality, with the ultimate purpose of providing the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt thinkers with a normative foundation, which he finds lacking in Horkheimer's and Adorno's account of the "dialectic of the Enlightenment." While fully aware of the "pathologies of modernity," Habermas seeks to demonstrate that it is still possible to find a way of reconstructing and defending the liberating aspirations of the Enlightenment project. Habermas had initially begun his philosophical career as a "Heideggerian"¹⁹ and still continues to acknowledge the significance of

¹⁸ This is not to downplay the theoretical ambitions and eclecticism of Habermas's most recent position. Habermas seeks to integrate many of the philosophical currents of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as sociological theories into his critical theory of modern society such as pragmatism, the sociological tradition that includes Weber, Durkheim and Parsons, developmental psychology, analytic philosophy and philosophy of language.

¹⁹ Habermas argues that he had been a Heideggerian before he became an advocate of critical theory (1992b, 189).

Heidegger's critique of the "philosophy of consciousness." Nevertheless, Habermas has gradually become extremely critical of the whole Heideggerian project from his fundamental ontology with its call to a communal *polemos* to his critique of humanism and modernity. Habermas then has come to the conclusion that Heidegger's ontology and his totalising critique of modernity have failed to recognise the normative potentials of the lifeworld and the liberating power of modernity, because his thinking has always been deeply hostile to modern egalitarianism, moral universalism and Occidental rationalism (Habermas, 1987b, 149, 158-159).

The famous Gadamer-Habermas debate in the 1960s has led to the development of a sizeable literature comparing and contrasting the perspectives of these two influential philosophers of the twentieth century.²⁰ As many commentators have pointed out, Gadamer and Habermas share a

²⁰ In my analysis I do not propose to add to the literature that has grown up around this initial debate. This is in part because Habermas has taken to heart some of Gadamer's criticisms; and also because Habermas has developed his own theory of communicative action, as well as his much more nuanced critique of modernity and tradition, after that initial debate in the 1960s. On this debate between Gadamer and Habermas, see especially Depew (1981, 425-446), Giurlanda (1987, 33-41), Jay (1982, 86-110), Kisiel (1970, 151-160), Mendelson (1979, 44-73), Misgeld (1977, 321-344; 1991, 163-177), Nicholson (1991, 151-162), Ricoeur (1973, 150-163; 1990, 298-334). See also Beiner's discussion (1997, 83-94). What is particularly striking in the literature on Habermas is that those who present themselves as "Habermasians" often ignore or downplay the relation between Gadamer and Habermas, and the impact of Gadamer's hermeneutics on Habermas. This is mainly the reason why Habermasian commentators such as Benhabib (2002), Chambers (1996), Outhwaite (1994), Rasmussen (1990), White (1988) either refer once or twice to Gadamer's work or label him as a Neo-Aristotelian conservative in order to contrast his hermeneutics with Habermas's more "liberal-progressive" project. But this depiction of Gadamer's hermeneutics, as I will show in Chapter 3, distorts. Not only do these critics downplay Habermas's indebtedness to Gadamer. More important, they present Gadamer as a romantic, elitist thinker whose philosophy is irrelevant to contemporary social and political problems in the sense in which they define them. To such an objection, Gadamer has nothing to say, save that their priority to defend the Enlightenment project and solve the "social problems" or "contradictions" of modern societies through theoretical analysis has narrowed down their horizons and blinded their vision to such an extent that they are unable to recognise the significance of any philosophy that does not directly speak to their political preoccupations and expectations.

constellation of common concerns, which distinguishes their thought from that of Heidegger.

First of all, what Gadamer and Habermas have above all in common is that they are both primarily concerned with the dominance of technocratic rationality and the deformations it causes in modern societies. To put it in a different way, both Gadamer and Habermas seek to confront the hegemony of instrumental reason by contesting the claim on the part of technological rationality to be reason incarnate. And they, unlike Heidegger, reject the claim that this type of rationality defines modernity in its entirety. By the same token, they do not contend that self-assertion of different traditions is the most reasonable response to the ills of modernity.

Second, both Gadamer and Habermas are primarily concerned with the ethical and political dimensions of human existence. This is by no means to suggest that Heidegger's thought is not concerned with ethics and politics. Nonetheless, as even Gadamer himself has emphasised, in Heidegger's thought the ethical and political dimensions of human existence stands in the shadow of his fundamental question concerning being.²¹ In Gadamer's view, on the other hand, "being that can be understood is language."

True, Habermas is extremely sceptical of the ontological claims on the part of Gadamer's hermeneutics, which he considers to be reminiscent of Heidegger's thought. But Gadamer's claim that "being that can be understood

²¹ Gadamer remarks: "[In contrast to Heidegger,] I associated myself only with the human side of existence, just as Habermas does, I think" (Gadamer, 2004, 126).

is language” has led Habermas to the conclusion that Gadamer’s hermeneutics represents “an urbanisation of the Heideggerian province.” Gadamer appears to be in agreement with this interpretation of his hermeneutics. But this needs to be understood correctly. As Vattimo (130-132) has observed, the expanded role assigned to language and speech in Gadamer’s hermeneutics has its origin in the relation Gadamer discerns between *logos* and *ethos*. In Gadamer’s view, language has the primordial role of a mediator between *logos* and *ethos*. In other words, language, for Gadamer, is a principal locus of total mediation of every experience of the world; that is to say, it is a shared world, a form of belonging or participation, and a place of a concrete realisation of the collective *ethos* of a tradition. In Gadamer’s own words:

“Language has its true being only in dialogue, in coming to an understanding. This is not to be understood as if that were the purpose of language... It is a life process in which a community of life is lived out... But human language must be thought of as a special and unique life process since, in linguistic communication, ‘world’ is disclosed... Thus the world is the common ground, trodden by none and recognised by all, uniting all who talk to one another. All kinds of community are kinds of linguistic community... As verbally constituted, every such world is of itself always open to every possible insight and hence to every expansion of its own world picture, and is accordingly available to others” (1993, 446-447).

What Gadamer means by the interdependence of tradition and dialogue, of *logos* and *ethos* in this passage is that all human reality is essentially characterised by its linguisticity (*Sprachlichkeit*). To understand any of it, therefore, is to engage in an endless dialogue, of interpretive reflection, which is, to a great extent, shaped by our immersion within a tradition. True, there is no point outside it, but we can still make sense what

lies beyond our hermeneutical circle. Nonetheless, we can reach beyond the narrow confines of our historicity, our tradition, our present horizons not through a denial of our historicity, but rather by acknowledging our own place within an already given interpretive context. In so doing, we can achieve a fusion between our present horizons and other horizons. For Gadamer, this is the only humanly possible way of rising to a higher universality. Moreover, an awareness of our own historical particularity, which is acquired through such an encounter, also denaturalises our given perspectives, unreflected habits and prejudices.

Habermas's entry into hermeneutics has itself been stimulated by Gadamer's work. Gadamer's influence on Habermas is perhaps most evident in Habermas's own *Sprachethik* (i.e., discourse ethics) and his insistence to define the universality of the ethical as residing in its essential linguisticity. Habermas's most provocative contention is that it is possible to isolate a normative *telos* in speech that is universally valid across traditions, but which has been actualised only in Occidental history.

Although an initial and major component of Habermas's eclectic theory is indebted to Gadamer's hermeneutics, Habermas is compelled to challenge the universality of hermeneutics. There are radical differences between Habermas's initial response to Gadamer in the 1960s and his later more nuanced criticism of Gadamer's conception of tradition. But the main motivation for Habermas's critique has remained the same: Gadamer's hermeneutics, Habermas claims, does not provide a critical vantage point

outside the “hermeneutical circle” by which to criticise existing authorities and traditions on rational grounds. Precisely Habermas’s ardent insistence on the necessity of an Archimedean point or an extra-hermeneutical criterion for critical reflection has driven many commentators to label Habermas’s critical theory as a “hermeneutics of suspicion” or “critical hermeneutics.” Some scholars have even argued that the Gadamer-Habermas debate can be seen as a twentieth-century encounter between a qualified Enlightenment project and a more refined Romanticism after the Heideggerian challenge.²²

In the following chapter we shall look more closely at Heidegger’s account of tradition, community and modernity to be able to see the strengths and weaknesses of this challenge.

²² The term “hermeneutics of suspicion” has originally been coined by Ricoeur (1973), but many critics and commentators have considered this as an accurate representation of Habermas’s perspective. Some scholars have also used the term “critical hermeneutics” or “in-depth hermeneutics” or even seemingly conflictual terms such as “interpretive deontology” to define Habermas’s work (Chambers, 1996, 43), which is indicative of Habermas’s indebtedness to Gadamer’s thought. The suggestion that the debate between Gadamer and Habermas is a more nuanced and post-Heideggerian encounter between Enlightenment and Romanticism has also been made by many scholars: see especially Ricoeur (1973) and Jay (1982).

CHAPTER 2: HEIDEGGER'S COMMUNITARIANISM: AN ETHICS OF AUTHENTICITY AND *POLEMOS*

"People still hold the view that what is handed down to us by tradition is what in reality lies behind us—while in fact it comes toward us because we are its captives and destined to it."

Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* p. 76

"By publicness everything gets obscured, and what has thus been covered up gets passed off as something familiar and accessible to everyone."

Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 165

"The great begins great, maintains itself only through the free recurrence of greatness within it, and if it is great ends also in greatness... Only prosaic common sense and little man imagine that the great must endure forever, and equate this duration with eternity."

Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 15

"Everything essential and everything great originated from the fact that man had a home and was rooted in a tradition."

Heidegger, "Only a God Can Save Us," p. 106.

2-1 Introduction: Heidegger on Tradition and Community

The purpose of this chapter is to explore Heidegger's account of tradition and its political implications by concentrating on some of the key terms such as care, authenticity, resoluteness, historicity, communal destiny and *polemos* in Heidegger's two major early works, namely, *Being and Time* and *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. More specifically, the centre of gravity of the chapter will be Heidegger's contention that meaningful human existence requires a strong sense of belonging, rootedness and indeed the subordination of the individual in a particular historical community.

But it needs to be stressed that, despite Heidegger's insistence on the subordination of the individual to a communal destiny in an authentic political community, it would be a great mistake to portray Heidegger's conception of tradition as a defence of tradition for the sake of tradition. Heidegger's

interpretation of human existence is much more nuanced than the standard defence of *Gemeinschaft* ideology and considerably differs from recent models of communitarianism.¹ For one thing, Heidegger's account of authentic political community rejects any conformism and is based on a notorious critique of everyday life and of publicness. For another, Heidegger's conception of historicity, as I show, precludes all talk of conventionalism and traditionalism, and is marked by a paradoxical twofold approach to history—that is, history as tradition (i.e., the idea of an authentic repetition of primordial historical origins) and futurity (i.e., the idea of a projection of a radically new beginning). This simultaneous backward- and forward-looking makes it difficult to regard his approach to political existence as conservative/conventionalist or progressive/revolutionary. Moreover, Heidegger repeatedly argues that the integrity of a truly authentic political community must be sustained in what he calls *polemos*, which is the Greek word for war or confrontation. A particular historical community, says Heidegger, can achieve a truly authentic existence if it succeeds in taking “a creative view of the tradition” (1987, 38). The tradition of a people, in this view, is constituted historically by sharing the memory of a given past and the projection of that past into the common destiny of a future. According to Heidegger, such an authentic reappropriation or “repetition” of the distinctive characteristics of a people's tradition occurs

¹ For an overview of the differences between recent models of communitarianism and Heidegger's account of human existence, see Dallmayr (1993, 62-65, 126). For a different interpretation, see Guignon (1984, 322; 1992, 131, 136). Guignon, in contrast to Dallmayr, points out that there are some important parallels between Heidegger's thought and the works of some contemporary writers such as Taylor and MacIntyre who are widely regarded as “communitarian.”

only in confrontation and struggle (1962, 436). Heidegger thus presents the notion of *polemos* as the way to live most fully: *polemos* is a way of existing from which a community of authentic people with a shared destiny may emerge.² As such, Heidegger's call to *polemos* not only points to the overthrow of everything customary but also puts a strong emphasis on the self-assertion of the historical heritage of a people in the name of establishing a completely new type of dwelling in the world. This is not to suggest that Heidegger's interpretation of human existence is reducible to the rhetoric of *völkisch* fanaticism, but the notion of *polemos* is indisputably a central part of Heidegger's account of tradition and his vision of political existence both in *Being and Time* and in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to discuss the connection between Heidegger's thought and his politics if by this one means Heidegger's relationship to National Socialism.³ The primary aim of the chapter is, rather, to produce a textual discussion of the political implications of Heidegger's

² For a detailed textual analysis of the central place of *polemos* in Heidegger's thought and its political implications, see Fried (1990, 163-195).

³ My aim is by no means to downplay Heidegger's involvement with the National Socialist regime in Germany. Nor is it to suggest that there is no connection between Heidegger's thought and his political involvement. For a brief discussion of Heidegger's political involvement, see Gadamer (1989, 427-430). For a different and more critical interpretation, see Habermas (1989, 140-172). See also Wolin's *The Heidegger Controversy* (1993) for a good collection of essays, letters and commentaries by Löwith, Habermas, Pöggeler, Marcuse, Jaspers, Tugendhat, Wolin and Bourdieu. This collection also includes Heidegger's famous *Der Spiegel* interview and his "political texts" pertaining to National Socialism between 1933 and 1934. See also Arendt (1978, 293-303), Krell (1991, 262-269), and Steiner (1992, 116-126). Safranski's philosophical biography, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, offers a remarkably balanced and thoughtful discussion of the connection between Heidegger's thought and his political involvement (1998, 225-306). For a critical assessment questioning the link between Heidegger's political involvement and various aspects of his thought, see Gillespie (2000, 140-166), Harries (1978, 304-328) and Zuckert (1990, 51-79).

account of tradition in these two works.⁴ Heidegger's account of tradition, as we shall see, is inseparable from his analysis of human existence as care and from his interpretation of everyday life, authenticity, resoluteness and communal destiny. Accordingly, in the first five sections of the chapter (from 2-2 to 2-5) I shall present and discuss a detailed textual account of these key terms. In the last section of the chapter my discussion will primarily focus on *An Introduction to Metaphysics*.

As Heidegger continually says in *Being and Time*, and as it has been widely acknowledged by many of his critics and commentators, Heidegger's analysis of human existence in his magnum opus is largely ontological and formal. But in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* we see a different Heidegger in that Heidegger is not merely concerned in this work with providing an ontologically neutral analysis of the human condition. On the contrary, Heidegger now not only directly speaks of politics but also speaks *politically*. Furthermore, as one commentator has observed, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* not only builds on theoretical themes whose sources are in *Being and Time* (Harries, 1978, 306) but also lends us an opportunity to reflect on Heidegger's radical critique of modernity, liberal democracy, modern technology and Enlightenment universalism. In that work we also see more clearly what Heidegger means by the terms such as "a people" and "a

⁴ My analysis will also selectively draw on Heidegger's writings collected in *Basic Writings* and *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* in order to further elaborate on the themes of my discussion and fully work out the political implications of Heidegger's conception of tradition and modernity. However, the references to these texts will be marginal and the main focus will be on *Being and Time* and *An Introduction to Metaphysics*.

communal destiny,” both of which stand at the very core of Heidegger’s conception of tradition in *Being and Time*. In this sense, the constellation of themes such as history, *polemos*, nation, and destiny in this politically more engaged work communicates well with Heidegger’s account of tradition in terms of “a happening of a shared destiny of a people” in *Being and Time*.

My concern in this chapter is thus limited to exploring Heidegger’s interpretation of tradition and the vision of political existence upon which it is based. In this respect, my aim is by no means to produce a detailed exposition of the philosophical and political significance of these two major works of Heidegger in their entirety. Within these limits my proposal here is to question the dark side and the aggressive tone of Heidegger’s early communitarianism, which heavily draws on what Heidegger calls “the authentic happening of a people.”⁵ What we see in these two works, I argue, is an account of tradition that relies on notions such as “a radical new beginning,” “a national mission,”

⁵ There has been an ongoing controversy concerning the periodisation of Heidegger’s works. Some scholars have seen a turning away from the existential-ontological analysis of Dasein in *Being and Time* towards a greater emphasis upon the history of being in Heidegger’s later works. It has been argued that the later philosophy speaks less heroically and that its pathos is one of resignation, expectation and *Gelassenheit*. Heidegger himself dismissed such a neat distinction and pointed to the continuities in his thought (1993, 217-265). On the other hand, Pöggeler argues that Heidegger’s thought tends to undergo a radical transformation “about five years” (1987, 280). Both Gadamer (1994, 121-137) and Krell (1991, 272-276; 1993, 29-34) offer a nuanced and thoughtful discussion of both the continuities and discontinuities in Heidegger’s works. Gadamer, while pointing out the continuities in Heidegger’s thought, asserts that “the standpoint of the early Heidegger took a Dasein concerned with its being” whereas “the later Heidegger expressly tried to overcome the transcendental-philosophical view of the self found in *Being and Time*” (1994a, 46). Both Dallmayr (1984, 204-234) and Caputo (1993, 39, 55-56) suggest a tripartite, partially discontinuous periodisation. Mehta (1976, 336-337), while acknowledging the continuities by noting the essential role of terms such as “letting-be,” “*aletheia*,” and “care” in Heidegger’s early and late works, and rejecting all biographical reductionism, emphasises the “aggressive” tone in Heidegger’s early writings—in particular in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* and his well-known rectoral address, “The Self-Assertion of the German University.”

“a communal destiny,” and *polemos*, as well as on a rejection of everything that is traditional and public by great leaders, founders and creators.

2-2 Human Existence as Care and Historicity

In a famous passage in *Being and Time*, Heidegger recounts an ancient creation myth, the late-antique *Cura* fable of Hyginus, to convey his vision of human existence in its entirety (1962, 242). This fable is not only an emblematic condensation of Heidegger’s vision of human existence. It also gives a succinct account of the way in which Heidegger’s interpretation of the human condition differs from both the universalism of classical political philosophy with its notion of a timeless human nature⁶ and the political theories of atomism which present an instrumental view of society and a radically individualistic conception of selfhood.⁷

In this fable, “Care” shapes human beings from clay. While she uses “humus” donated by Earth as her material to give shape to human beings, Jupiter provides them with spirit. When Care, Jupiter and Earth quarrel over what these creatures are to be called, they fail to reach an agreement and ask

⁶ As Jonas argues, Heidegger’s thought rejects the notion of human essence or any definable nature of man, which would subject his temporal and finite existence to a predetermined essence (1972, 333). For an overview of the differences between classical political philosophy and Heidegger’s project of fundamental ontology, see Gillespie (1984, 166-167) and Newell (1984, 777, 778, 784).

⁷ For a discussion of the issue of political atomism and its influence in modern political theory, see Taylor’s essay “Atomism” (Taylor, 1985, 187-210). As Taylor remarks: “The term atomism is used loosely to characterise the doctrines of social contract which arose in the seventeenth century and also successor doctrines which may not have used the notion of social contract but which inherited a vision of society as in some sense constituted by individuals for the fulfilment of ends which were primarily individual. Certain forms of utilitarianism are successor doctrines in this sense. The term is also applied to contemporary doctrines... which try to defend in some sense the priority of the individual and his rights over society, or which present a purely instrumental view of society” (187).

Saturn, the god of Time, to be their arbiter. And Saturn makes the following decision:

“Since you, Jupiter, have given its spirit, you shall receive that spirit at its death; and since you, Earth, have given its body, you shall receive its body. But since ‘Care’ first shaped this creature, she shall possess it as long as it lives. And because there is now a dispute among you as to its name, let it be called ‘homo’, for it is made out of *humus* (earth)” (1962, 242).

The fable provides two pointers that are essential to the political implications of Heidegger’s vision of human existence in *Being and Time*.

First, by invoking this tale, Heidegger emphasises that the inherent communality and worldliness of human existence must be conceived of as one of the most fundamental characteristics of the human condition. Care’s shaping of human beings suggests not only that care is constitutive of human life at the most basic level, but also that care is something to which human beings are totally subject throughout their lives. To use one of the key notions of *Being and Time*, this is something into which human beings are “thrown.” As Heidegger says, “‘Being-in-the-world’ has the stamp of ‘care’” (1962, 243). Thus, in saying that to be in the world is to care, Heidegger decidedly takes an anti-Cartesian and anti-atomist stance (Biemel, 1981, 168; Gadamer, 1994, 127, 156; Gillespie, 1984, 124-125; Harries, 1978, 69; Hoy, 1978, 330; Steiner, 1992, 101). As the creature of care, man is inherently political and is fundamentally fated, without personal choice, to a self and to a world of other

selves and beings about which one cannot choose not to be concerned. Care is then a basic characteristic of the human condition.⁸

Secondly, the time reference is important here. According to Heidegger, only a creature that sees before it an open time horizon, into which it has to enter, can be caring. His emphasis on care and time is an implicit criticism of all philosophies of detachment. He seems to be saying that there is no way of avoiding being rooted in a past and faced with a present and a future. Heidegger's invocation of this fable is thus instrumental in demonstrating his insistence on the temporal determination and historical boundedness of human existence. For the character in the fable to whose authority Care, Jupiter and Earth must submit is Saturn, the god of Time. In this sense, it gives an accurate portrayal of Heidegger's contention that time is itself the basic condition for the human way of being and that man is "historical' in the very depths of (his) Being" (1962, 241).

Precisely by invoking the sense that human existence "finds its meaning in temporality" (1962, 41), Heidegger stands against all those political philosophies that take their point of departure from a timeless conception of human nature (1962, 73). Human beings, according to Heidegger, do not have a nature in the sense in which other beings in the natural world or entities in

⁸ For a different interpretation of Heidegger's analysis of human existence in terms of the notion of care, see Habermas (1987-149-151). Habermas rather polemically argues that Heidegger "falls back into the conceptual constraints of the philosophy of the subject" (150). Although Habermas, as we shall see, is correct to point out Heidegger's extremely negative tone in his analysis of publicness and everyday life, he deeply underestimates the significance of Heidegger's criticism of the "philosophy of consciousness." For an excellent discussion of this, see Gadamer (1994b, 12). See also footnote 14.

the human world might be said to have a nature. Those political philosophies, which rely on a static conception of human nature and which attempt to depict “human essence” as if it is constituted as an object domain by regarding it “as life plus something else” (1962, 75), have focused merely on “the whatness of man.” But in doing so, they have ignored the ontological difference between human beings and other entities (1962, 32, 70-75), and hence they have fallen short of an authentic grasp of the human essence or *man’s perfectio*—which, in Heidegger’s view, is accomplished by care always from within a specific historical horizon (1962, 243). Human beings are caring creatures because they specifically experience a time horizon open ahead. Those who insist on an ahistorical human nature ignore, in Heidegger’s view, the fact that as long as human beings live they are never finished or completed, as an object might be, but always remain open for the future, full of possibilities. To be a human being then implies being possible. “Higher than actuality,” says Heidegger, “stands possibility” (1962, 63, 183). This is why in Heidegger’s view “there is always something still outstanding” in human life (1962, 279). This is also what Heidegger means when he says that “the ‘essence’ [*Wesen*] of this entity lies in its ‘to be’ [*Zu-Sein*]...The ‘essence’ of Dasein lies in its existence” (1962, 68), or when he writes that human beings always understand themselves in terms of their existence—that is to say, in terms of a possibility of themselves (1962, 33).

Because human existence is essentially characterised by care which dominates man’s essence through and through, and because time is the

ultimate horizon which limits and determines man's possibilities or ways of being, human existence is, in Heidegger's view, both *political* and *historical* at the same time. In that sense, Heidegger's conception of human existence—Heidegger's individualist-existentialist interpreters notwithstanding—is not *pure* possibility or "projection." Not only is there no such thing as an a priori essence of man. But also there is always a tradition or a pool of possibilities within which human beings find themselves. In terms of this world or tradition human beings understand themselves "proximally and, within a certain range, constantly" (1962, 41). But this is not the whole story. According to Heidegger, there is no such thing as *the* tradition. Each generation must interpret the possibilities that have been handed down to it from its past in a new way in light of a new goal and a new future that is discontinuous with what has been hitherto accepted as its tradition. To put it in a different way, each generation gives rise to a new understanding of the tradition and every new interpretation of the past is thus a selection or re-collection of the tradition. This is what Heidegger means when he says that our past "'happens' out of [our] future on each occasion" (1962, 41). In this sense, Heidegger's interpretation of political existence, as one critic has stated, is marked by "a twofold historical necessity as the 'has been' and 'not yet', as tradition and futurity" (Gillespie, 1984, 158-159; Heidegger, 1962, 41-42, 372-374).

But Heidegger also says that human beings are inclined to interpret themselves as well as their past and future in terms of what lies within the range of the familiar, the attainable and the respectable. The temptation

towards the familiar confines their possibilities to what is at their everyday disposal, to what actually exists here and now. As Heidegger says, "The average everydayness of concern becomes blind to its possibilities, and tranquilises itself with that which is merely 'actual'" (1962, 239). As the dimension of futurity disappears in human life, human beings, argues Heidegger, tend to leave the world as it is and stop questioning their existing horizons. This blocks their access to the primordial sources of their own tradition and prevents them from establishing an authentic relationship between past and future. Heidegger's account of human existence in terms of care and temporality thus culminates in a critique of what he calls the inauthentic sphere of everydayness and an apocalyptic call to build a radically new type of authentic communal existence. To put the point in slightly more Heideggerian language, since every community, like every human being, is characterised from the outset as a possibility, an authentic understanding of a people's tradition and of its communal destiny requires the rejection and overcoming of everything customary and traditional, of all inauthentic everydayness in the name of a completely new type of communal dwelling on this earth.⁹

⁹ Grondin argues that those formulations carry a tone that is reminiscent of the critique of ideologies and that "the enterprise of the early Heidegger is not so distant from the concerns of the young Hegelians" (1995, 54-56). But it needs to be emphasised that the Hegelian-Marxist account of human existence tries to reconcile freedom and nature as the definitive accomplishment of human freedom that unfolds itself in history through either the movement of *Geist* (Hegel) or the self-transforming power of human labour (Marx). Heidegger's account, on the other hand, not only differs from the classical perspective. It also departs from some of the theoretical presuppositions and political implications of the Hegelian-Marxist interpretation of human existence (Gadamer, 1976; Gillespie, 1984, 169-170; Newell, 1984, 780, 783; Taylor, 1975, 570).

2-3 Publicity versus Authenticity

As we have seen, Heidegger rejects the notion that the individual is a detached subject separate from the world in which he lives in some fundamental sense. Human life, in Heidegger's view, is innately social; and the world is the experiential totality that surrounds human existence. Much of the world is already created by others and the content of this world largely affects the way in which the individual defines himself, because everyday existence necessarily involves interaction with things and others within the world. This is what Heidegger means when he says, "Dasein's being-in-the-world is essentially constituted by Being-with" [*Mitsein*] (1962, 156). Being-with, argues Heidegger, is a fundamental characteristic of human existence: "The world of Dasein is a with-world [*Mitwelt*]" (1962, 155). In no way is the relation to others secondary to our relation to things in the world or even to ourselves. We come to know ourselves only through our being with others: "Knowing oneself is grounded in Being-with, which understands primordially" (1962, 161).

Despite Heidegger's emphasis on the inherently communal aspect of human life, the way in which he characterises the forms of living together has created a great deal of controversy within political theory. The debate over the political implications of his ontological account of selfhood, freedom, authenticity and community has given way to many interpretations, ranging from those who find in Heidegger the basis for a critique of much of modern political theory (Dallmayr, 1984, 204-234; 1993, 48) to those who find it either nihilistic or non-political (Blitz, 1981; Jonas, 1972, 1990; Rosen, 1971, 1976;

Strauss, 1983, 1989) or guilty of ignoring the public and ethical dimension of human life (Arendt, 1946, 1973; Bernstein, 1986; Gillespie, 1984, 2000; Habermas, 1985, 1987b, 1993b; Harries, 1977; Löwith, 1993, 1995; Taminioux, 1992, 1997).¹⁰

Apparently in full agreement with the criticism that Heidegger's analysis of everyday existence and authenticity does not do justice to the public dimension in human life, Arendt evokes the political implications of Heidegger's account of authenticity.¹¹ Arendt's criticism of Heidegger's interpretation of human existence—a criticism which also seems to be directly connected to her own conception of the human condition—concentrates on Heidegger's approach to everyday life in *Being and Time*, at the centre of which lies Heidegger's critique of publicness. According to Heidegger, "By publicness everything gets obscured" (1962, 165). In her essay "What is Existenz Philosophy?" Arendt's response to Heidegger's conception of public life is highly critical:

"Existenz itself is never essentially isolated; it exists only in communication and in the knowledge of the Existenz of others. One's fellow men are not an element which, though structurally necessary, nevertheless destroys Existenz; but, on the contrary, Existenz can develop only in the togetherness of men in the common world" (1946, 55).

¹⁰ For an overview of the controversy over the political implications of Heidegger's thought within political theory, see Dallmayr (1984, 204-212) and Gillespie (2000, 140-142).

¹¹ Heidegger's analysis, according to Arendt, reflects "the Platonic bias"; that is to say, "the old hostility of the philosopher toward the *polis*", which has given rise to the depreciation of the political realm in comparison to pure thought (Arendt, 1946, 1973, 9). Although Arendt's critique, as we shall see, points to one of the most problematic aspects of Heidegger's thought—in particular, the way in which Heidegger depicts the notion of authenticity and everyday life—her assessment of Plato's political philosophy rests upon a peculiarly narrow interpretation of Plato that locates, as she repeatedly emphasises in *The Life of the Mind*, the meaning of Plato's political philosophy in the Cave parable of the *Republic* (Arendt, 1977, 98). For an alternative, breathtaking reading of Plato and Aristotle, see Gadamer (1986).

In this passage Arendt argues that there is a certain kind of hostility towards the public realm and everyday life in *Being and Time*, even though Heidegger considers “Being-with” and “care” as the most vital aspects of human existence. As we shall see, Heidegger indeed identifies the public world primarily with an inauthentic mode of existence, which continually serves to hide the primordial possibilities of living—both at the individual and the communal level. It is against this demarcation between a common or public world deemed inauthentic and an authentic world that reflects one’s ownmost primordial possibilities that Arendt’s own account of the human condition is directed.¹² But Arendt’s criticism of Heidegger seems to overlook the crucial link between Heidegger’s conception of authenticity and his notion of authentic community as collective destiny. This is probably the reason why she argues that the most essential characteristic of Heidegger’s authentic self is its “absolute egoism” (1946, 50).

Arendt objects that Heidegger’s account of authenticity and everyday life is so individualistic that it makes no room for other human beings. However, Heidegger’s account of human existence, as we shall see more clearly in the following sections, has a radically communitarian sense, which seems to take even a nationalistic and ominous tone in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*.¹³ In this respect, Arendt’s criticism seems to overlook that

¹² My discussion has benefited a great deal from Taminioux’s illuminating commentary on Arendt and Heidegger (Taminioux, 1997). See especially pp. 1-23.

¹³ For a thoughtful and careful textual discussion of why the charge of egoism and selfishness is not an accurate representation of Heidegger’s account of authenticity, see Caputo (1993, 75-117). As Caputo argues, in fact Heidegger presents us with an account of human existence

communitarian dimension in Heidegger. But at the same time Arendt rightly points to a major lacuna at the heart of Heidegger's thought: namely, if politics can hardly dispense with a foundation in the everyday public world, how can one derive a theory of political existence that is accorded a dignity beyond mere inauthenticity from Heidegger's analysis of public life in *Being and Time*? True, Heidegger, as we shall see, allows for a possibility of an authentic community. But his analysis of this authentic community is articulated in its distinction from a public world that would be capable of serving as a foundation for political existence. Why is that so? In order to grasp more fully Heidegger's interpretation of selfhood, authenticity and community, we shall now examine in some detail his theoretical demonstration of inauthenticity and everyday life.

Heidegger asserts that to be human is "to be there" (Da-sein) and that to be there is to be radically immersed and rooted in the world. This world is everywhere around us. Human beings as the creatures of care are totally embedded in the actual, daily world—i.e., in the sphere of "everydayness." Those political philosophies, which describe how consciousness originates from the world or how the world is constructed from consciousness, are equally deficient and one-sided. Heidegger seeks a third way. He argues that one must start from the phenomenon of "being-in," because one neither first experiences oneself and then the world nor the other way around. Rather, the

that has "a collective or communitarian sense, a national and social sense, but of the most unfortunate kind" (81). My argument is that Arendt, at least in her early essay on "existentialism," seems to ignore this link between authenticity and community in Heidegger.

two—man and the world—are equally primordial or, as he puts it, “equiprimordial”; that is to say, simultaneously present in union (1962, 78-81, 86-87, 94, 170-171). To express this radical embeddedness, Heidegger uses such hyphenated phrases as “being-in-the-world,” “being-with-others,” and “being-in.” In Heidegger’s view, the phenomenon of “equiprimordiality” has often been overlooked in the classical and modern interpretations of human existence, because of a false tendency “to derive everything and anything from some ‘primal ground’”(1962, 170).¹⁴

Heidegger sharply differentiates man’s mode of being from other entities that are simply present in the world. First of all, this means that human existence cannot be exhausted by stating man’s nature or essence (the what). The characteristics of the human condition are solely to be conceived of as possible ways in which Dasein has to be. Secondly, related with the first, to be Dasein is to be a being that questions his own existence. Its being is an issue for it (1962, 32, 68). This is the reason why Dasein, argues Heidegger, is characterised by “my ownness.” This is no egoism. What Heidegger says is that amidst all other beings in the world human beings alone experience existence as problematic. Only human beings can question the meaning of

¹⁴ Gadamer suggests that Heidegger’s discussion of everyday life can only make sense if its connection to “the problem of intersubjectivity”, i.e. to Heidegger’s criticism of the “philosophy of consciousness”, is acknowledged. Gadamer writes: “Heidegger first displayed in his ontological critique the prejudices contained in the concept of the subject, and therewith he incorporated into his thought the critique of consciousness practiced by Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. This means, however, that *Dasein* and ‘Being-with’ [*Mit-sein*] are equally primordial, and ‘Being-with’ does not signify the being of two subjects. Rather, ‘Being-with’ is a primordial mode of ‘Being-we’—a mode in which the I is not supplemented by a you; instead, it encompasses a primary commonality that cannot be reached by the Hegelian thought of ‘Spirit’” (Gadamer, 1994, 12).

existence. In the case of other entities that are just there, their own being is of no concern to them. For human beings, on the other hand, their own existence is at stake. This questioning alone generates what Heidegger calls existence (*Existenz*). Human beings, in Heidegger's view, achieve their essence or their humanity in the process of this questioning. Human beings have always "to be"; they are their possibilities. The choice of what they are to be is inescapably their own. They can and must choose themselves, win themselves or lose themselves:

"Dasein has always made some sort of decision as to the way in which it is in each case mine [*je meines*]. That entity which in its Being has this very Being an issue, comports itself towards its Being as its ownmost possibility. In each case Dasein *is* its possibility... And because Dasein is in each case essentially its own possibility, it can, in its very Being, 'choose' itself and win itself; it can also lose itself and never win itself; or only 'seem' to do so. But only in so far as it is essentially something which can be *authentic*—that is, something of its own—can it have lost itself and not yet won itself. As modes of Being, *authenticity* and *inauthenticity* are both grounded in the fact that any Dasein whatsoever is characterised by mineness. But the inauthenticity of Dasein does not signify any 'less' Being or any 'lower' degree of Being. Rather it is the case that even in its fullest concretion Dasein can be characterised by inauthenticity—when busy, when excited, when interested, when ready for enjoyment" (1962, 68).

Thus, in the first place and for the most part, human beings are captivated by the world in which they find themselves. Everyday life or the world into which human beings are "thrown" has others in it. Being-with-others means that we "always already" find ourselves in joint situation with others: "The world is always the one that I share with Others. The world of Dasein is a *with-world* [*Mitwelt*]" (1962, 155). But it needs to be emphasised that Others do not point to a collection of selves that excludes me—those that stand in opposition to "the I". Rather, they are those from whom one does not

distinguish oneself—as Heidegger says: “those among whom one is too” (1962, 154). To an overwhelming extent, human beings are fascinated with and thus absorbed in the world (1962, 149). Heidegger even goes so far as to say that “Dasein ‘is’ essentially for the sake of Others” (1962, 160). When there are actually no others, when human beings are alone, they do not thereby cease to be with others: “Even Dasein’s Being-alone is Being-with in the world” (1962, 156-157). This is the sense in which Heidegger argues that the subject of everyday existence is not the “I myself”, but what he calls “the they” (1962, 150).

According to Heidegger, we meet others “at work”, that is to say, the others are encountered not by first being distinguished as other subjects from one’s own self as already simply given, but primarily in terms of their preoccupations in the world, of which one is also taking care. This encounter has an utterly worldly character.¹⁵ In that sense, we cannot view the others as free-floating subjects that are merely “out there”. Rather, “they *are* what they

¹⁵ The distinction between “present-at-hand” (*vorhanden*) and “ready-to-hand” (*zuhanden*) is essential to Heidegger’s entire analysis of human existence. When an entity or a being is “present-at-hand”, it has the character of the object “out there”. As such, it characterises the matter of scientific or theoretical attitude towards beings in the world. Heidegger’s argument is that the theoretical attitude does not capture our more primordial relationship to the things in everyday life, because in our daily dealings entities reveal themselves to us as “ready-to-hand”, that is, as equipments or tools or handy objects with which we engage in terms of our own preoccupations and pursuits. As Heidegger says: “The less we stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become... If we look at Things just ‘theoretically’, we can get along without understanding readiness-to-hand” (1962, 98). Similarly, we encounter the others in a ready-to-hand, environmental context of tools and equipments within which they, like us, are concerned with things, use and manipulate them. In other words, we meet other selves as the producers of goods and services, as beings who are absorbed in their dealings with things and the world in everyday life.

do" (1962, 163).¹⁶ Thus, in their everyday existence, human beings stay predominantly in their nearest world in which they are busy in their concerned dealings with things and others as well as with their projects, occupations and pursuits. In addition to this, in their everyday life they do not go beyond the average interpretation of things, of themselves and of the world, which emerges from what they do in the world. This communal absorption in everyday life is characterised by a sort of self-forgetfulness in which human beings are, in the first place and for the most part, not themselves. As Heidegger says:

"Dasein, as everyday Being-with-one-another, stands in subjection to Others. It itself *is* not; its Being has been taken away by the Others. Dasein's everyday possibilities of Being are for the Others to dispose of as they please. These Others, moreover, are not definite Others. On the contrary, any Other can represent them. What is decisive is just that inconspicuous domination by Others which has already been taken over unawares from Dasein as Being-with. One belongs to the Others oneself and enhances their power... The 'who' is not this one, not that one, not oneself, not some people, and not the sum of them all. The 'who' is the neuter, the '*they*' [*das Man*]" (1962, 164).

Thus, in submitting to the anonymity of the public life, human beings turn from their ownmost possibilities and understand themselves in terms of the possibilities that are actually available among other selves in everyday life. Heidegger also suggests that in the sphere of everydayness one pays particular attention to the way one differs from other selves. One tends to

¹⁶ Steiner draws attention to the theoretical affinities between Heidegger's strong emphasis on work, equipment and readiness-to-hand, and the Marxist model of the primarily social character of the process of human individuation (1992, 90-91). But there is a sense in which Heidegger questions, and ultimately rejects, the dualities of object-subject, material-mental and the like. Moreover, in "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger argues that Hegel's account of work and labour in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which has become the basic source of inspiration for the Marxist model of human being, is the first formulation of the metaphysical essence of labour, because in it every being appears, in Heidegger's view, as the product of labour, and the subject-object dichotomy is thus preserved in a very materialistic way (1977, 243).

measure what the others have achieved and failed to achieve in the world. In so doing, one seems to be constantly worried about keeping oneself distinct from others and regard one's differences as the chief determinant of one's own sense of self. But paradoxically, this further contributes to the subjection to others. It makes almost no difference whether we try to be one of them by eliminating our differences as much as possible or we make an effort to accentuate and develop our differences by cultivating radically different ways of living and thinking. In either case, it is "the they" who determines the way we live in one way or another. In either case, what is decisive is that one draws the possibilities of one's being from what is prescribed by others. In doing so, one yields one's existence to an average everydayness, publicness, anonymity; and the real dictatorship of "the they" is thus unfolded (1962, 164).

The dictatorship of this herdlike publicness and everydayness not only "controls every way in which the world and one's self get interpreted", but it is also "insensitive to every level of difference and of genuineness". It has a tendency to level down and average out all differences and the distinctiveness of each self. As Heidegger says: "Distantiality, averageness and levelling down... constitute what we know as 'publicness'." Heidegger's depiction of the sphere of common sense, of everyday deliberation and public life does indeed seem to carry an extremely critical tone: "By publicness everything gets obscured, and what has thus been covered up gets passed off as something familiar and accessible to everyone." In everyday life, "everyone is the other, and no one is himself" (1962, 165).

Devoid of genuine talk and communication, public life is characterised by restless and superficial idle talk (1962, 211-213), uprooted curiosity (1962, 214-217), and sham ambiguity (1962, 217-219). As long as human beings remain within the sphere of this alienating everydayness, they are cut off from a more primordial relation to themselves, to fellow creatures, to the primordial sources of their own tradition and to the world. But it must be emphasised that the mastery by and the absorption in “the they”—i.e. the fact that human beings are delivered over and are thrown to the sphere of everydayness—constitutes the most basic ontological characteristic of everyday human existence. To put it in a different way, there seems to be no easy way out from inauthenticity¹⁷; and human beings can project, if at all, their ownmost possibilities, both individual and communal, only from within this “thrownness” in which they find themselves:

“This everyday way in which things have been interpreted is one into which Dasein has grown in the first instance, with never a possibility of extrication. *In it, out of it, and against it* all genuine understanding, interpreting, and communicating, all re-discovering and appropriating anew, are performed. In no case is a Dasein, untouched and unseduced by this way in which things have been interpreted, set before the open country of a ‘world-in-itself’ so that it just beholds what it encounters... The ‘they’ prescribes one’s state of mind, and determines what and how one ‘sees’ “(1962, 213) (emphases added).

Thus, one’s average everyday self-understanding is thoroughly inauthentic due to the inherent communality of the human condition and the concomitant existential tendency to lose oneself in publicness. In one’s everyday mode of existence, one has, to a very large extent, no grasp of those

¹⁷ As Stambaugh writes, Heidegger’s analysis of authenticity is based on the idea that “no one is born authentic” (1977, 156).

possibilities that are genuinely one's own. In short, one's everyday state is one in which one finds oneself thrown into inauthenticity—that is, a mode of existence which Heidegger terms “fallenness” (1962, 220).¹⁸ Three points need to be clarified regarding the Heideggerian notion of inauthenticity and its moral and political implications.

First, the notion of inauthenticity does not designate any less real modes of one's selfhood. On the contrary, human beings are always already sucked into the turbulence of the public's inauthenticity. Heidegger argues that one's absorption in “the they”, in the average everydayness, is an inseparable dimension of one's “thrownness” into the world (1962, 166, 176-177, 210, 220, 223). It must be seen, says Heidegger, as a universal characteristic of human existence. In other words, inauthentic existence is neither a fall from a primal status nor a deplorable characteristic of a backward culture, which can be eliminated in more, advanced stages of civilisation. Heidegger even reminds us that it would be a complete misunderstanding of the ontological notion of inauthentic everydayness or publicness to think that it applies only to modern mass society. But at the same time, in his discussion of “the they” Heidegger appears to be condemning everydayness and publicness, even though he

¹⁸ As Mehta argues, Heidegger's ontological analysis of everydayness in those passages—where he talks about curiosity, idle chatter, ambiguity and “fallenness”—sounds quite Augustinian (Mehta, 1976, 171). I think it should be added that although these passages seem to have a distinctively Augustinian flavour, Heidegger explicitly states that his interpretation of everydayness neither has anything to do with the Christian doctrine nor makes any assertion about the “corruption of human nature” (1962, 224).

states that he is making no moral judgements and that his analysis is removed from any moralising critique of everyday life.¹⁹

Secondly, authentic human existence does not involve a complete detachment from others. Heidegger is not saying that an individual should live in isolation from others in order to attain authenticity. In that sense, the charge of egoism certainly does not find any support from *Being and Time* itself. This suspicion can only emerge if *Being and Time* is interpreted *purely* in a Sartrean/"existentialist" vein, which tends to portray a highly individualised Dasein, wrestling with a series of "existential" questions.²⁰ The charge of egoism very selectively focuses on Heidegger's analysis of authenticity, death

¹⁹ Such claims seem to be extremely controversial and they have invited many interpretations. According to Steiner, some of Heidegger's key notions such as "the dictatorship of the they", "averageness", and "alienation" give expression to a powerful critique of the modern consumer society (1992, 93). Gadamer's remarks, on the other hand, seem to reflect a more accurate interpretation of Heidegger's own intentions. In Gadamer's view, "In this 'fallenness' the true phenomenon of the 'there' is constantly hidden, as is true 'I myself.' It is the 'they' das Man that is no one and has been no one that is encountered first and foremost by *Dasein*. This is not only to be understood polemically in the sense of a cultural criticism of the century of anonymous responsibility. Rather, behind it was the critical motive that questioned the concept of consciousness itself" (1994b, 128). Gadamer's interpretation is obviously in line with Heidegger's own self-interpretation. But this seems to beg the question as to whether or not Heidegger's analysis is "merely" ontological and whether it has any normative dimension.

²⁰ Jonas's illuminating work (1972), like Arendt's early critique of "Existenz Philosophy" (1946), seems to ignore the crucial connection between the ideal of authenticity and Heidegger's strong emphasis on authentic communal existence. As I have shown, Heidegger's radically embedded everyday self whose most fundamental characteristic is its situatedness and "caring" nature is certainly a world apart from the standard existentialist (i.e., Sartre's) individualistic account of human existence. As Murdoch rightly argues, Sartre's vision of human life "emphasises the absence of any framework which contains me, the individual" (Murdoch, 1997, 139). For a critique of Sartre's "existentialist" vision, see MacIntyre (1984, 204-225) who argues that Sartre's interpretation radically differs from a perspective that underscores the radically embedded nature of human life. My argument is that it would be a mistake to characterise Heidegger's thought as an expression of this kind of individualism. Heidegger repeatedly says that to live an authentic life an individual must recognise his unavoidable involvement in the "destiny of his people." As we shall see in the next sections, Heidegger clearly repudiates the notion of "freedom as free-floating arbitrariness". In fact, Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism" (1977, 217-265) is a direct response to Sartre's "individualistic metaphysics." Heidegger's "existentialist" followers as well as some of his critics and commentators de-emphasise or sometimes completely miss this crucial link between authenticity and communal destiny in *Being and Time*.

and *Angst* but almost completely overlooks how these key notions of *Being and Time* culminate in Heidegger's discussion of authentic communal existence, which emphasises a set of concerns such as "destiny," "authentic happening," "authentic finite freedom," and "authentic historical community" via which Heidegger declares the centrality of collective historical commitment and communal existence.²¹ As we shall see, this simultaneous emphasis on authenticity and communal destiny gives Heidegger's account of tradition its distinctively radical and "utopian" characteristic.

Thirdly, Heidegger's analysis of everydayness implies that the notion of authenticity is directly related to his contention that human existence is characterised by the fact that our very being, our way of existing in the world, is a task for ourselves. Human beings, says Heidegger, are questioning beings. In classical terms, we could say that our being is distinguished by a capacity of self-reflection and self-questioning concerning our own possibilities of existing, which is, as Socrates expresses in the *Apology*, of an utterly ethical character. But this is also the point where Heidegger radically departs from the classical perspective. This is not merely because Heidegger rejects an ethical and political motive behind his critique of everydayness, but more importantly because he totally condemns the standpoint of the *sensus communis*.²² Although the Socrates of the *Apology* is critical about the

²¹ As Hoy remarks, "The popular fascination with Heidegger's description of being-toward-death may cloud Heidegger's insistence that Dasein is not an isolated, private ego but most primordially a social, communal, and historical being" (Hoy, 1978, 329).

²² Gillespie argues that Plato's dialogues, unlike Heidegger's thought, cannot be conceived of as merely ontological analyses. They are suffused with ethical and political preoccupations

unreflective views of those members of the public who have not engaged in philosophical/ethical self-examination and argues that the unexamined life is not worth living, he certainly does not mean that the standpoint of the *sensus communis* can only mislead. Socrates' primary aim is to listen carefully to the justifying arguments given by mature citizens in order to test their validity and strength by initiating a debate in public. According to Heidegger, on the other hand, the sphere of everyday life is profoundly alienating in that in their everyday mode of existence human beings are entirely mastered by publicness, stand in subjection to them and tend to forget that so long as they live they are never finished or completed but always remain open for future possibilities. Heidegger argues that the proximal tendency to take things easily, which characterises the anonymous, unstable, hectic and superficial public affairs, is precisely the inclination that deprives human beings of their "authentic potentiality-for-Being."

In depicting the public realm and the sphere of common sense solely in terms of inauthenticity, Heidegger also seems to be abandoning the Aristotelian tradition of practical philosophy.²³ For Aristotle, what is ethically good is to be gained not in opposition to what is traditional and public but by proceeding from it. To put it in a more specifically Gadamerian language, for

through and through: "The dialogues in this sense seem to be aimed not so much at the determination of a single true answer to the ontological question in response to the relativism and conventionalism of the Sophists but rather at a demonstration that all prevailing answers, if closely examined, lead only to contradiction" (Gillespie, 1984, 166-167).

²³ For a discussion of how Heidegger departs most radically from a traditional Aristotelian ethics, see Gillespie's comparison of Aristotle and Heidegger on some of the key notions of *Being and Time* (Gillespie, 2000, 140-166).

the Aristotelian tradition of practical philosophy, all the way down to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics²⁴ and Habermas's theory of communicative action²⁵, the starting point of the ethically responsible, good life for human beings is precisely the sphere that Heidegger portrays as everydayness, publicness, or the inauthentic world of "the they." Moreover, in those passages Heidegger unquestionably reveals himself, his more sympathetic commentators notwithstanding, as an opponent of liberalism who certainly does not have much sympathy for a participatory, democratic public: "*Publicness proximally controls every way in which the world and Dasein get interpreted...it is insensitive to every difference of level and of genuineness*" (1962, 165) (emphases added). Everyday life is a mode of existence that is full of "concealments and obscurities," which need to be shattered and cleared away through a more primordial return to the origins and through a declaration of war against the inauthentic tendency of everyday life and traditional, commonsensical standpoints (1962, 167).

What needs to be emphasised once again is that authentic human existence, in Heidegger's view, does not signify any complete "detachment from the they" (1962, 168). In other words, it does not signify a mode of existence "which floats above falling everydayness." Rather, it is "only a

²⁴ An illuminating discussion of the theoretical affinities between the Aristotelian tradition of "*philosophia practica*" and Gadamer's hermeneutics can be found in Gadamer's essay "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy" (Gadamer, 1981, 88-112). See especially 88-93, 97, 109-112.

²⁵ Habermas remarks: "Heidegger does not take the path to a response in terms of a theory of communication because from the start he degrades the background structures of the life-world that reach beyond the isolated Dasein as structures of an average everyday existence, that is, of inauthentic Dasein" (Habermas, 1987, 149).

modified way in which such everydayness is seized upon” (1962, 224). It is clear that there is, in Heidegger’s view, no such thing as either pure authenticity or pure possibility but only an authentic appropriation of the inauthentic existence of “the they.” This last quote is perhaps not only the key to Heidegger’s account of tradition, but it also points to the futility of easily categorising his thought under the labels such as “conservative,” “egotist” and even “communitarian” in the sense in which this term has been used in contemporary debates about liberalism. True, he vehemently repudiates the notion that the authentic individual is a solitary hero who makes his own decisions without regard for the demands of the public realm. But by the same token, he does not seem to be providing support for superficially conventionalist and conformist conceptions of community either, because such a community would essentially presuppose the existence of an aggregate of inauthentic selves who accept, without questioning, the reigning public opinion.

But if the inauthentic existence is to retrieve itself from the world of “the they” in order to achieve authenticity through “seizing upon” or reenacting the primordial origins of its tradition, where then does it arrive? This is the question we shall delve into in the next section.

2-4 Anxiety and Resoluteness: The Tension between Past and Future

Many interpreters have considered Heidegger’s analysis of “*Angst*” and “resoluteness as authentic existence” the key to Heidegger’s whole thought. It

can be argued, without exaggeration, that these two notions are crucial in understanding Heidegger's account of tradition and its political implications, because they offer us a new way of looking at the past and future dimensions of human existence.

What is called "being"? What do we mean by "to be"? How is it possible for human beings to understand the meaning of "being"? From what horizon are we to understand it? Heidegger offers a hint at the very beginning of *Being and Time* as to how and from what horizon we must understand the meaning of "to be": "the interpretation of time as the possible horizon of any understanding whatsoever of Being" (1962, 19). And yet Heidegger thinks that this is precisely what we largely tend to overlook in everyday life. Due to our fundamental tendency to give ourselves away, to disperse ourselves among our daily undertakings, interests and preoccupations, we literally find ourselves "here and now," i.e. among the things with which we are busy in our everyday pursuits. In so doing, we normally feel at home amidst the things in our actual world and indulge ourselves in the security of everyday existence, in which the meaning of being seems well-grounded, perfectly self-sufficient and timeless. It is as if we exist in a flow of infinite nows in which we tend to forget our past and future. By playing with the countless superficial interpretations of the world and ourselves that are promoted by the myopic vision of the everyday, we lose ourselves by clinging to the numbing attractions of the predominant "tendency to take things easily" (1962, 127). Precisely this everyday inclination, which is

characterised by Heidegger as unburdening and as a manoeuvre of escape, deprives us of our “authentic-potentiality-for-Being” (1962, 183).

According to Heidegger, the movement of human existence is characterised by a relentless inner tension between illumination and concealment, between past and future, between our thrownness and our future possibilities, and between authenticity and inauthenticity.²⁶ From this tension spring the questions such as Why? Why this and not that? Why so and not otherwise? Why anything at all and not rather nothing? (Heidegger, 1987, 1-4) By asking these questions and acknowledging the inherent tension between authenticity and inauthenticity in human existence, “man thrusts away all the previous security, whether real or imagined, of his life” (1987, 5-6). This experience has the potential to wake us up to the fact that “the *Angst* of life drives human beings out of the centre.”²⁷

But the constitution of human life is such that any experience that reveals and shatters the superficial and illusory safety of everydayness is usually regarded as meaningless and unusual. In fact, we tend to avoid such

²⁶ Harries agrees on this point (Harries, 1978, 77). See also Gadamer (1994, 136). Heidegger’s stress on the simultaneous presence of both illumination and concealment in every sphere of human existence has deeply influenced Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, in particular the way in which Gadamer interprets the notion of tradition. This can easily be observed in Gadamer’s critique of progress and perfect enlightenment: “We have to repudiate the illusion of completely illuminating the darkness of our motivations and tendencies... One has to ask oneself whether the dynamic law of human life can be conceived adequately in terms of progress, of a continual advance from the unknown to the known, and whether the course of human culture is actually a linear progression from mythology to enlightenment” (Gadamer, 1981, 104). But it must be stressed that in Gadamer’s vision of human existence there is, as I will show, no talk of authenticity and inauthenticity. Nor is there a critique of everyday life that is remotely comparable to Heidegger’s.

²⁷ Gadamer states that Heidegger frequently loved to quote this sentence in his lectures on German Idealism and that it originally belongs to Schelling (Gadamer, 1994b, 116).

unpleasant experiences by fleeing from them into our daily occupations and relationships with others within the anonymous publicness. In this sense, everyday “fallenness” is “tempting” (1962, 221). What is more, from the perspective of everyday life, the question of the meaning of human existence and the concomitant experience of anxiety is a moment of meaningless confusion and foolishness (1987, 7-9, 12). Heidegger agrees that what we experience in anxiety is the complete loss of significance and meaning. But he also says that openness to such an experience is what helps us to understand the meaning of human experience, both at the individual and communal level. In anxiety the world, which ordinarily functions as the unquestioned, taken for granted background of our activities, interpretations and relationships obtrudes itself without significance and ground. In anxiety “the world has the character of completely lacking significance” (1962, 231).

The unique power of anxiety lies precisely in bringing things into the mood of total insignificance and demonstrating that what we have anxiety about is in fact *nothing* in particular but being in the world as such. As Heidegger points out in his “What is Metaphysics?”, *nothing* is not an absolute nothing: in it lies the disclosure of the world itself (1993a, 100-104).²⁸ Heidegger even states that “to be there” (Da-sein) essentially means “being held out into the nothing” (1993a, 103). True, in anxiety we then see our world in a new light. But by the same token, since the everyday familiarity and safety

²⁸ As Krell observes in his introductory notes (1993, 90), “What is Metaphysics?”, which Heidegger delivered as his inaugural lecture to the Freiburg University faculties, explores several key issues from *Being and Time* such as anxiety and nothingness.

is suddenly shattered in anxiety we now feel homeless and uncanny. In that sense, the attempt to go beyond the superficial certainty of everydayness is both liberating and unhomely (*unheimlich*) at the same time (1962, 233). Despite this uncanny feeling, in comparison to our “everyday lostness in ‘the they,’” says Heidegger, “*the ‘not-at-home’ must be conceived as the more primordial phenomenon*” (1962, 234).

What is the sense we can make of Heidegger’s emphasis on anxiety, nothingness and uncanniness? What does Heidegger show as coming to light in this rather strange feeling of uncanniness, which he takes to be the most primordial experience of human existence? It might well be argued, without exaggeration, that the experience of anxiety before nothingness and resolute attitude towards one’s own possibilities—both past and future—is a key to Heidegger’s account of tradition and is a bridge between his analysis of inauthentic everyday life and authentic communal existence.

By overturning the relevance of everyday life into complete irrelevance and thus pushing the vanity of actually available possibilities into total insignificance, anxiety deprives us of our habitual hiding place in the anonymous public and brings us face to face with ourselves. This then puts the familiar in an unfamiliar light and provides us with the opportunity to come to grips with our lives and dwell in the world more clear-sightedly, less accidentally and resolutely. It discloses to us the present, the “here and now” as a battleground between our past and future. As such, “the nothing” makes possible the original “openness” of beings as such. As one of our basic

moods, it “reveals beings as a whole.” But for the most part, our attitude to beings is such that we are preoccupied with them, absorbed by them, lost in them. “The more we turn towards beings in our preoccupations,” says Heidegger, “the less we let beings as a whole slip away as such and the more we turn away from the nothing. Just as surely do we hasten into the public superficialities of existence” (1993a, 104). On the basis of the experience of anxiety, we encounter the political and cultural world in which we are rooted in its utter strangeness. But this sense of strangeness gives rise to wonder and the question “Why?”, which is the first step towards authentic existence (1993a, 110). In other words, it becomes the absolutely necessary precondition for the struggle towards authentic existence. This certainly does not mean that in anxiety the meanings that are so familiar in everyday life simply disappear. On the contrary, by becoming a problem, they strike us with unusual force. As Heidegger repeatedly says, even anxiety does not separate us from our world. It makes our communally shared historical world an urgent problem for us.

When Heidegger declares that homelessness is more primordial than being at home, he thus seems to be saying that in anxiety the world appears as a naked “that” and that we can never depend on an unshakeable ground for our world. This takes place as a contingency shock in which we come to realise that there is nothing behind our world, our tradition and the possibilities we find within it. It then leads us to this turning point where we recognise that our tradition and ourselves are in fact a set of meanings that are fragile,

contingent and open to reinterpretation. It confronts us with what really means to be a human being with possibilities or ways of existing (1962, 183). At the same time, this also means that we are beings who are capable of challenging our own interpretations of ourselves, revising them and reaffirming them. Confronting the fragility and particularity of our world presents us an opportunity to reconstruct and reclaim our past for a new future. It brings us face to face with our finitude, historicity and freedom—“*a freedom which has been released from the illusions of the ‘they’, and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious*” (1962, 311).

Heidegger’s emphasis on “facticity” in the following passage helps to explain why in fact human existence cannot be considered in terms of *pure* possibility. According to Heidegger, it would be wrong to consider human life completely in terms of contingency. It must be noted that Heidegger’s interpretation of tradition is equally removed from both determinism and subjectivism. We are always already situated within an established world, tradition and identity—all of which are called into question by the experience of anxiety. Nevertheless, whatever we make of ourselves, we cannot radically disengage ourselves from this particular historical horizon. This feature of human existence is what Heidegger calls “facticity” or “thrownness.” For Heidegger, human existence as such is the battleground where the forces of past and future clash with each other. We live in this in-between:

“Possibility... does not signify a free-floating potentiality-for-Being in the sense of ‘liberty of indifference’. In every case Dasein... has already got itself into

definite possibilities... Dasein is Being-possible which has been delivered over to itself—thrown possibility through and through” (1962, 183).

Heidegger claims that we need a special moment of insight, “the call of conscience,” to alert us to the inherently historical nature of human existence. Moreover, the primordial call of conscience, in Heidegger’s view, is uncanny for two related reasons. First, it does not tell us *what* we are to do but *how* we should exist. Secondly, it tells us that our way of existing is characterised by *guilt*. We will now examine these two aspects of “the call of conscience” in some detail with regard to their political implications.

Although the call of conscience liberates us from the prevailing order of things, it utters no practical proscriptions or moral imperatives. Strictly speaking, the call of conscience, says Heidegger, tells *nothing*. It gives no information about public affairs, moral and political issues, and our everyday concerns and pursuits. The self who has been called is not told about anything, but is “summoned” to his “ownmost potentiality-for-Being” (1962, 318). In other words, the call of conscience simply demands that we face our lives as a whole and suspend our tendency to secure ourselves by our immersion in everyday life. It calls us to the task of leading our lives without recourse to a fixed or common standard. In sharp contrast to the sound common sense and everyday expectations, Heidegger argues that conscience will not and cannot provide specific “do’s” and “don’ts.” In Heidegger’s view, the primary task of the primordial call of conscience is not to tell us *what* we ought to *do*, but *how* we are to *be*.

Many critics and commentators of Heidegger have noted the radically contentless characteristic of his vision of authentic human existence. As one commentator of *Being and Time* has observed, the distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity does not hinge on *what* one is in the sense of what particular possibilities one takes up; rather, it depends on *how* one lives. Indeed, it appears that for Heidegger authenticity is not so much a question of the *content* of a life as it is of the *style* with which one lives (Guignon, 1984, 334). But we have to ask ourselves what happens when the lost inauthentic everyday self is summoned by conscience and the call is resolutely answered. Apparently, *nothing* happens. The world in which we live is not changed. And yet our lives are not anymore determined by the possibilities prescribed by “the they.” They are now revealed as our resolutely grasped and chosen possibilities. Our attitude towards them has been radically changed. We have become free *for* them, because we now begin to understand our world as a particular world with a particular historical tradition that we need to appropriate and reaffirm in the light of our own future, which in turn is constituted out of the possibilities that are already “there” in our tradition. Heidegger vividly expresses this circularity or the constant tension between past and future in a famous passage in *Being and Time* in the following way:

“Thrown into its ‘there’, every Dasein has been factually submitted to a definite ‘world’—its ‘world’. At the same time those factual projections, which are closest to it, have been guided by its concerned *lostness* in the ‘they’. To this lostness, one’s own Dasein can appeal, and this appeal can be understood in the way of resoluteness. But in that case this *authentic* disclosedness modifies with equal primordially both the way in which the ‘world’ is discovered (and this is founded upon this disclosedness) and the way in which the Dasein-with of Others is disclosed. The ‘world’ which is ready-to-hand does not become another one ‘in its content’, nor does the

circle of Others get exchanged for a new one; but both one's Being towards the ready-to-hand understandingly and concernfully, and one's solicitous Being-with Others, are now given a definite character in terms of their ownmost potentiality-for-Being their-Selves... Resoluteness... is always the resoluteness of some factual Dasein at a particular time... But on what basis does Dasein disclose itself in resoluteness? On what is it to resolve? *Only* the resolution itself can give the answer... *The resolution is precisely the disclosive projection and determination of what is factually possible at the time.* To resoluteness, the *indefiniteness* characteristic of every potentiality-for-being into which Dasein has been factually thrown, is something that necessarily *belongs*" (1962, 344-345).

Some critics object that Heidegger's notoriously formal and contentless account of authentic human existence gives us no guidance at all.²⁹ The principal existential imperative of *Being and Time* is simply: resolutely choose and live authentically. But if there are no guidelines for choosing, don't we end up with an arbitrary irrationalism?³⁰ It might well be asked whether or not Heidegger's authentic and resolute Dasein has lost sight of morality altogether. We may indeed wonder where exactly the specifically moral character of conscience lies unless it provides us with some direction with respect to what is good and bad.³¹ In that sense, any positive indication of how

²⁹ Löwith speaks of the joke among Heidegger's students at Marburg University: "I am resolved, but towards what I don't know." Löwith sees in Heidegger's interpretation of authentic existence before nothingness "the possibility of a Heideggerian political philosophy." Moreover, according to Löwith, there exists a theoretical affinity between Carl Schmitt's political decisionism and Heidegger's interpretation of human existence in *Being and Time*. He points out that the underlying principle is the same in both Heidegger and Schmitt: "naked 'facticity,' which is all that remains of life when one has suppressed all traditional living contents" (Löwith, 1993, 173-174, 183).

³⁰ This seems to be the conclusion both Löwith and Habermas draw from Heidegger's interpretation of human existence as "thrown possibility." Habermas writes that *Being and Time* suggests "the decisionism of empty resoluteness" (Habermas, 1987, 141). Both Habermas and Löwith argue that the only political implication of Heidegger's early thought would be arbitrary decisionism and hence irrationalism. Guignon, on the other hand, argues that this way of looking at *Being and Time* overlooks Heidegger's strong emphasis on the embeddedness of human existence in a wider communal, historical context (Guignon, 1992, 130).

³¹ As Rosen remarks, Heidegger's interpretation does not seem to be giving us the slightest hint of how good and evil may be distinguished. Rosen writes, "Heidegger's method... fails to

good and bad may be distinguished is remarkably absent in *Being and Time*.³²

Why is this so?

But, in view of the fundamental ontological aim of Heidegger's work, it may be asked, with justification, whether we can in fact demand from *Being and Time* a fully worked out ethics. It is clear that conscience or authenticity, in Heidegger's view, does not disclose "an ideal of existence" that is universally valid for everyone, but reveals to us our own particular historical situation, which we are summoned to take as our own. For Heidegger, any attempt to formulate a universal ideal existence would go against the meaning of human existence (1962, 311). On this view, all authentic ways of existing are necessarily varied and always in part determined by the specific world in which we live. Resoluteness or "authentic Being-one's Self" crucially depends on intuition into the moment or the "situation" (1962, 346).

The moment of vision forces a decision and holds open the possibility of breaking out of the mundane everydayness into a different reality. "The

capture the living nutrient of human existence: *phronesis*. Heidegger cannot distinguish, as we do in everyday life, between a good and a bad man" (Rosen, 1976, 174).

³² In his "Letter on Humanism" Heidegger claims that his ontological analysis of human existence in *Being and Time* as a matter of fact offers an "originary ethics" (1993, 258). What he means by this is that insofar as an ethics has to reflect on the dwelling of humankind, this thinking was already underway in *Being and Time* where he suggests that we are creatures of care and that our being is a task for ourselves. Heidegger also seeks to justify his own position in *Being and Time* by referring to the early Greek thinkers who, Heidegger tells us, also knew no philosophical discipline called "ethics" and yet were certainly not "unethical." See especially the quote regarding a story about Heraclitus (1993, 256-258). Gadamer seems to be in full agreement with Heidegger on that matter when he says: "Heidegger was penetrating enough to realise that it is impossible, not to say ridiculous, for a philosopher today to write an ethics. How can any philosopher *invent* something that does not exist?" (Gadamer, 1991a, 219) But, of course, the problem is not that whether or not Heidegger should have invented a new ethics. Rather, the problem is whether or not his thought entirely does a way with a morally sound way of existing. See also Safranski's remarks (1998, 166-167).

they” which accepts the world as given and immutable knows only the “general situation,” or “objective forces,” or “universal values.” But the moment of decision is always unique. Each decision occurs in a particular context and is determined by an assessment of the future possibilities opened up in the “situation.” The content of this choice is not set in advance before us in the form of “some empty ideal of existence” (1962, 346-347). In that sense, to try to set up some particular possibility of existence as the universal purpose of life is to fail to understand the human condition in general, because only the particular situation provides the answer to the question of how one ought to live (Gillespie, 2000, 150-151).

It is important to realise that conceptions of universal norms and standards as a yardstick to measure human beings’ conduct, in Heidegger’s view, are entirely drawn from a calculative mode of thinking that attempts to turn life into a calculable business with tidy, unambiguous rules which “would deny to existence nothing less than the very *possibility of taking action*” (1962, 340). Everyday morality with universal rules and fixed measures thus becomes a balance sheet of deeds that ought or ought not to be performed in respect to mutual demands and obligations. But Heidegger thinks that human existence is not something that can be handled by the calculations of a moral accountant. We must take responsibility for our actions without recourse to a fixed measure, because authentic decisions involve taking a risk in the context of a unique situation and there is no blueprint for how we ought to lead our

lives as a whole—apart from the particular historical horizon, which needs our reinterpretation and reconfiguration at each particular situation.

Despite Heidegger's insistence that he does not undertake "any moralising critique" of inauthentic everyday life (1962, 211) and that his aim is only to describe the essential structures of human existence, his portrayal of everyday life, as we have seen, indisputably has critical overtones. His disclaimer notwithstanding, it might well be argued that Heidegger is in fact making a concrete ethical distinction between authentic resoluteness and inauthentic everyday life, and that this distinction carries a certain prescriptive weight whose content nevertheless seems to remain indefinite, mutable and contingent. If conscience calls us back from inauthentic publicness and summons us to take over our possibilities as our own possibilities, this cannot be a merely abstract, formal disclosure, but is arguably a call to the most basic ethical decision we are capable of making.³³ Indeed, Heidegger himself acknowledges that the notions of resoluteness and authenticity are based on "a factual ideal of existence" (1962, 358). Furthermore, at some points he does imply that some types of possibilities are more authentic than others. For

³³ Harries agrees on this point: "Can *Being and Time* be considered a pure example of fundamental ontology? Do terms like 'authenticity' and 'inauthenticity' function in a purely descriptive manner? Rather, does Heidegger not choose them to call us, if not to a particular life, at least to a way of living?... *Being and Time* calls its readers to authenticity, to that honest acceptance of man's own being which Heidegger terms 'resolve'" (Harries, 1978, 307-308). Rorty makes a similar point when he argues that Heidegger's emphasis on "primordially" clearly has "normative" connotations (Rorty, 1991, 43). Dallmayr, too, holds that Heidegger's work is "suffused with ethical preoccupations," but qualifies this observation by stating that "Heidegger termed his analysis in *Being and Time* a descriptive (and not a normative) account; but clearly 'description' here means not a positivist or empiricist description but a philosophical or ontological one (which transcends the fact-value split)" (Dallmayr, 1993, 109).

instance, he distinguishes between authentic “leaping ahead” and inauthentic “leaping in.” The former opens us up to others in a new way and makes “liberating solicitude” possible. It is a way of communal existence, a form of “authentic care” in which we, on the basis of our resolute affirmation of our own existence, are able “to help the Other become transparent to himself *in* his care and to become *free for* it” (1962, 159) In such a communal life where we are resolute we “can become the ‘conscience’ of Others.”³⁴ Only by authentically Being-their-Selves in resoluteness can people authentically be with one another—not by ambiguous and jealous stipulations and talkative fraternizing in ‘the Anyone’ and in what ‘anyone’ wants to undertake” (1962, 344-345).

Do these remarks point to a definite kind of political existence? We will see more clearly the political implications of Heidegger’s analysis of resolve in the next section when we specifically focus on Heidegger’s account of tradition and authentic political community, which he examines in Division 2, chapter 5 of *Being and Time*. But at this stage of our discussion it must be emphasised that although the call to resolve is left empty and formal, it becomes genuine only when expressed in a particular historical context. As one critic has

³⁴ Dallmayr particularly emphasises these passages of *Being and Time* and sees Heidegger’s thought as a useful corrective to the subjectivist tendencies of modern political theory. In Dallmayr’s view, Heidegger’s “writings show a growing alertness to ethical questions, where ethics denotes not simply private morality but the broader arena of social equity” (Dallmayr, 1993, 108). See also 64-65 and 106-107. But, as I have shown, this comment does not seem to find support from *Being and Time* itself. In fact, Heidegger decidedly takes an anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian stance—particularly in *An Introduction of Metaphysics*.

observed, resolve pushes us back into our political community and our tradition (Harries, 1978, 310).

This also means that we are never absolutely free in the sense that we would be uninfluenced by the historical setting in which we live. We are inevitably related to actual possibilities whose undeniable character is granted by the particular historical horizon to which we belong. Authenticity in this regard does not deprive us of the content of our world but allows a fresh access to it. It recalls us to the tradition in which our projects are always embedded. As Heidegger says, “even resolutions remain dependent upon the ‘they’ and its world” (1962, 345-346). It would not therefore be correct to view authenticity or resolve as an escape from the world. Nor would it be right to see it as an overcoming of inauthenticity, because human existence is deeply caught up within the tension between authenticity and inauthenticity, a tension which cannot be left behind once and for all. “The they,” says Heidegger, is the source of all our possibilities, both authentic and inauthentic:

“In resoluteness the issue for Dasein is its ownmost potentiality-for-Being, which, as something thrown, can project itself only upon definite factual possibilities. Resolution does not withdraw itself from ‘actuality’, but discovers first what is factually possible; and it does so by seizing upon it in whatever way is possible for it as its ownmost potentiality-for-Being in the ‘they’” (1962, 346).

But if “the they” is the foundation of all our possibilities, what motivates Heidegger’s critique of everyday life? This brings us to Heidegger’s claim that “entities whose Being is care... are guilty in the very basis of their Being” (1962, 332). According to Heidegger, we are guilty about two inescapable

features of our care—our past and future—which constantly clash with one another. We have already encountered this, but Heidegger now puts this tension in a fresh perspective.

Primordial guilt that we need to own up to refers to our finitude and historicity. It involves both some sort of “foundation” to which we are indebted and some sort of “not-ness” with which we need to come to terms. That we are guilty does not mean that we are lacking in something. Rather, guilt can be found both in our having a past (“facticity” or “thrownness”) and in our having a future (“existence” or “projection”) (1962, 329). We are thrown into a particular tradition, subjected and indebted to it. In other words, we have a past which must serve as a foundation for our future, but which we cannot control or have not chosen. The deepest manifestation of our guilt then lies in our thrownness, which means that we can never go back behind our past so that we could originate our present and future as we please. From this it follows that human beings are powerless to be the ground of their own existence (1962, 330). And yet we are responsible for taking hold of the possibilities handed down to us by our unmasterable past. True, we do not create our place and our future *ex nihilo*, but we need to be involved in the constitution of our own future to live authentically. This also means that we cannot be everything at once and that we are forced to resolutely choose an approach to the world, which unavoidably excludes other possibilities. And when we own up to these manifold ways of “being-guilty” in this way, we become resolute (1962, 343).

The single most important political implication of Heidegger's analysis of resolve is concerned with the concepts of freedom and tradition, which Heidegger explores in terms of the tension between past and future. It has now become clear from Heidegger's exposition that our freedom is subject to limitations and that we nevertheless remain responsible for appropriating these limiting conditions and making them our own. The call of conscience reveals these limitations as our limitations, emerging from the clash between our past and future. In this way it calls us out of our absorption in the present—in everyday life—back to ourselves. It goes without saying that Heidegger's conclusion is not that to live authentically we must face the courage of living in sheer groundlessness as worldless, rootless spectators masquerading as rebels. On the contrary, we should wake up to the fact that we need to have the courage of owning up to a particular tradition. Needless to say, this tradition represents a relative, historical, conditioned, contingent and finite ground to which we always already belong and in which we participate. As such, it seems to be groundless. But it still remains a ground because it is the prior basis of our future, a basis over which we will never have absolute mastery. The real issue in Heidegger's analysis of resolve in terms of our two temporal features of care—namely that we are indebted to our past and that we are responsible for our future—consists in neither complete originality or mastery nor sheer conformism or traditionalism. Instead, it consists in what Heidegger calls *appropriation* or *making one's own*. Authentic resolve in this regard is not freedom *from* the past but *through* it. As

we will see, it awakens us to a personal fate rooted in an inherited past which constitutes the destiny of the tradition to which we belong.

We can now see more fully the motivation behind Heidegger's critique of everydayness. To live authentically we need to uncover the "primordial sources," "origins," and native "soil" of our own tradition and peel off the accumulated layers of customary viewpoints dictated by everyday life which is blind to both past and future. In other words, to live authentically we need to destroy the tradition to reinvent it and go beyond the concealments that stand between us and those primordial sources and experiences of our particular historical context (1962, 3, 6, 40-44). This is primarily the reason why Heidegger regards resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) as a particularly illuminating form of disclosedness (*Erschlossenheit*). It allows a more primordial access to and a reinterpretation of our own tradition. But this is not an easy task, mainly because it consists in seizing up the world of anonymous publicness through a declaration of war against the fallenness and inauthenticity that constitute the bulk of everyday life. It involves a *polemos* through which we confront not only ourselves but also all traditional standpoints:

"When tradition... becomes master, it does so in such a way that what it transmits is made so inaccessible, proximally and for the most part, that it rather becomes concealed. Tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence; it blocks our access to those primordial 'sources' from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part quite genuinely drawn... Consequently,... Dasein no longer understands the most elementary conditions which would alone enable it to go back to the past in a positive manner and to make it productively its own" (1962, 43).

Only in such a confrontation in which we make our tradition our own do we most fully become what we are: beings summoned to an ongoing struggle with the meaning of “being” in order to make way for a new dwelling on this earth and achieve our finite freedom. Confronting, as a moment of struggle leading to an authentic way of life, constitutes the chief characteristic or “essence” of authentic human existence.

But resolve exists in a vacuum unless it is understood in the context of what Heidegger calls “authentic historicity.”³⁵ To this we shall now turn to see whether the rooting of human existence in its historical context and tradition lends to authenticity a political substance that seems to be lacking in Heidegger’s critique of everyday life.

2-5 Authentic Political Community

Heidegger’s interpretation of human existence as care and temporality, as we have seen, implies that the sense one’s life can make is deeply constrained by the communal narrative in which one’s story is embedded. But at the same time Heidegger’s critique of everyday life as well as the strong emphasis on resolve and anxiety in front of nothingness, both of which are considered to be the essential ingredients of authentic existence, might seem to stand in an uneasy relationship with the desire to exist as part of a larger

³⁵ Heidegger points to the fundamentally historical nature of human existence when he talks about the notion of “*Geschichtlichkeit*.” This term has been translated differently in two English translations of *Being and Time*. Although I have used Macquarrie and Robinson’s translation in this work, I will use Stambaugh’s “historicity” rather than Macquarrie and Robinson’s “historicality,” because “historicity” has become the usual term in the literature on Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. Similarly, I will use “occurrence” or “happening” or “event” for the term “*Geschehen*” instead of Macquarrie and Robinson’s “historising.”

whole in light of which human beings gain importance as participants in a larger narrative.³⁶ In that sense, there seems to be a tension between Heidegger's two key notions, care and resolve. However, I think it must be emphasised that the idea of authentic existence can only make sense if the essential link between authenticity and communal destiny in Heidegger's discussion of historicity is acknowledged. In this respect, far from promoting an anything goes kind of relativism or existential subjectivism, *Being and Time* works towards a certain kind of communitarianism in which the unity of thrownness and projection, or past and future, points to the continuity of human existence. As Heidegger says, "as care, Dasein is the 'between'" (1962, 427). In contrast to an individualistic account of political community, Heidegger's interpretation of human existence as care and temporality does not regard a community as a collection of wholly independent individuals. On the contrary, he seeks to recover an understanding of political existence as engaged, as embedded in a culture, a world of involvements, which provides what Charles Taylor calls "strong evaluation."³⁷ To say that human existence is a "thrown possibility" is to say that we are always situated in a cultural context that

³⁶ For a discussion of this tension at the heart of Heidegger's fundamental ontology see Harries (1977, 149). Guignon observes that these seemingly paradoxical aspects of Heidegger's analysis can only arise if the connection between the key terms of *Being and Time*—such as resolve, care, authenticity and historicity—are overlooked (Guignon, 1993, 320-339).

³⁷ Taylor argues that many of the key notions he employs are borrowed from Heidegger. For a discussion of what Taylor calls "engaged agency" and the similarities between his account of community and Heidegger's, see Taylor (1993, 317-336). I think that although there are certain important parallels between Taylor and Heidegger concerning the problem of community and tradition, the confrontational and apocalyptic tone of Heidegger is completely absent in Taylor's communitarianism. In that respect, Taylor's vision of political existence seems to be much closer to Gadamer's account of tradition.

provides the pool of possibilities, which defines who we are. This means that we are historical beings whose possibilities for self-understanding are made accessible by our shared history.

But Heidegger's principle of historicity reiterates the idea that to reenact authentically the "origins," "roots," and "soil" from which our possibilities have emerged we need to detach ourselves from the present and the possibilities circulating in everyday life (1962, 449). In other words, we must face up to the fact that to live authentically does not consist in submitting to what is handed down by tradition regardless of whether it is historically acknowledged or just taken for granted without awareness of its primordial origins. Furthermore, Heidegger regards the latter as an inauthentic approach towards tradition (1962, 431). In order to deal in sufficient detail with Heidegger's account of tradition in terms of the principle of historicity, we will examine closely Division II, Chapter 5 of *Being and Time* by specifically focussing on Heidegger's three key concepts in that chapter, which are "historising" or "happening" (*Geschehen*), "destiny" (*Geschick*), and "repetition" (*Wiederholung*). After a detailed exposition of Heidegger's analysis of historicity is presented, we shall be in a position to discuss the major political implications of Heidegger's account of tradition. To anticipate the conclusion of this section, it can be argued that although Heidegger's account is open to the charge of relativism at the community level, it by no means presents us with a defence of traditionalism.

I) Human Existence as an Ongoing "Happening"

Heidegger sees his notion of historicity not as an affirmation of historical relativism but as an essential condition for our ability to understand ourselves and to take responsibility for our situation. In that sense, he presents his analysis of human existence in terms of historicity as a response to the problem of relativism as well as to the idea that the human being is an isolated self, ontologically distinct from his possibilities and from the historical background which provides a certain content, shape and meaning for his life-story. We have seen the significance of the embedded nature of human existence in Heidegger's analysis of human existence as care and temporality, but now Heidegger more explicitly points to the historical content of human beings' possibilities. Furthermore, Heidegger criticises the notion that the enduringly self-same presence in time constitutes our identity. Heidegger's criticism of the attempt to privilege the present at the expense of past and future is connected to his critique of traditional ontology from Plato to Nietzsche. Heidegger thinks that this traditional approach to human existence is insufficient to explain how human beings exist historically (1962, 427). According to Heidegger, traditional ontology is deficient in two essential respects. First, as we have seen, it does not distinguish human being as a "who" from the "what" of other entities. Secondly, it does not allow for innovation and change, and hence fails to acknowledge the inherently historical characteristic of human existence. Heidegger sees an essential link between the privileging of the present at the expense of past and future in classical and modern political philosophy, and everyday life of "the they" that

inauthentically falls into the present. In Heidegger's view, the traditional ontology from Plato to Nietzsche, like the clichéd interpretation of human life dictated by the common sense of everyday life, remains blind, to an overwhelming extent, to the tension between past and future. In so doing, both approaches fail to pay attention to how the world is originally opened up for us by our relationship to our future and our past. For Heidegger, on the other hand, this interaction between past and future is the real origin of history and constitutes the road to an authentic political existence. Heidegger tells us that once we recognise this, instead of falling into the present, we are able to discover deeper meanings in events by making resolute choices. To draw our attention to this tension, Heidegger repeatedly reminds us of the fact that we are what we do. This is the reason why Heidegger depicts human existence not as an object, but as a "happening" or "event" or "historising" (*Geschehen*) in which we are what we make of ourselves in the course of living out our lives:

"It is within the horizon of Dasein's temporal constitution that we must approach the ontological clarification of the 'connectedness of life'—that is to say, the stretching-along, the movement, and the persistence which are specific for Dasein. The movement of existence is not the motion of something present-at-hand. It is definable in terms of the way Dasein stretches along. The specific movement in which Dasein *is stretched along and stretches itself along*, we call its '*historising*'. The question of Dasein's 'connectedness of life' is the ontological problem of Dasein's historising" (1962, 427).

This passage demonstrates that the self is never the static presence of a thing here and now, but continually stretches itself forward and backward. In this movement between past and future lies the "connectedness of life," which

Heidegger seems to be presenting as an unfolding life-story. In this regard, who we are is defined by the entire story of our lives, our “happening” which is portrayed by Heidegger as a movement that binds together present, past and future into a unity. Heidegger’s conception of human existence as an ongoing “happening” also shows that how our past involvements can count is defined only through their relation to our commitments for the future. This means that we can make sense of events in a life only by projecting some vision of the final outcome of that life which will serve as the temporary basis for seeing events as part of an ongoing “happening” with a certain sense of direction, wholeness and rootedness. But Heidegger also reminds us that this vision of wholeness of life implies neither final security nor perfect enlightenment with regard to the meaning of life. Nor does it suggest individualism.

It does not imply perfect enlightenment because our conception of the meaning of life is constantly changing.³⁸ Not only does our past condition our

³⁸ The contrast with Hegel can easily be observed here. According to Heidegger, “Every essential form of spiritual life is marked by ambiguity” in which there is no final security or an end point (Heidegger, 1987, 9). There is a sense in which Hegel’s ideal of “absolute knowledge” and his concept of experience (*Erfahrung*) aim to go beyond this ambiguity through seeing constantly changing shapes of historical consciousness as necessary steps towards true knowledge or “science.” In other words, for Hegel, “The goal is as necessarily fixed for knowledge as the serial progression” (Hegel, 1987, 51). Heidegger, as we shall see more fully in the notion of “authentic repetition”, not only abandons such a progressive account of historicity but also accepts as basic the radical finitude and temporality of what he calls “facticity”, i.e., “thrownness”, behind which one cannot go and which cannot be superseded by “absolute spirit” (*Geist*) or some similar entity. This is also connected to Heidegger’s conception of truth as *aletheia*, the Greek word for uncovering, which necessarily involves both concealment and unconcealment: there is, in Heidegger’s view, no such thing as absolute knowledge or perfect enlightenment because we ultimately stand in both truth and untruth (1993a, 125, 133). To put it differently, all revealing, according to Heidegger, is also concealing. Since we as human beings tend to fall back into concealment, we continually need to struggle against concealment. This is ultimately what Heidegger means by the term “the hermeneutic circle.” In that sense, the Heideggerian notion of truth as *aletheia* has a central place in Heidegger’s account of tradition, community and freedom.

future, but also the purpose we set for the future conditions how we see the meaning of the past. This is ultimately what Heidegger means when he says that our past “‘happens’ out of (our) future on each occasion” (1962, 41). Therefore, for Heidegger, the meaning of life can never be complete. Both resoluteness and authenticity are then inseparable from openness to the uncertainty of human existence, to what *is*; that is, to the question “why are there things rather than nothing?” (1987, 1) Heidegger tells us that when we open our minds to this question, we not only realise the impossibility of gaining a clear vision which can settle matter once and for all and which can offer final security. But we also “cease to dwell in any of the familiar realms” and go beyond “the things that have their place in everyday life” (1987, 12). From this it follows that, having accepted a starting point of radical finitude, Heidegger can no longer resort either to the timeless universalism of Platonism or to the necessary law of dialectic of Hegel. For Heidegger, in human life and in political existence there is no such thing as a stable ground. Nor is there an ultimate meaning: the meaning of life is inexhaustible and the process of exploring it is endless.

Secondly, there is no room for individualism or subjectivism in Heidegger’s conception of human existence. Heidegger sees authenticity as involving not a renunciation of the world, of one’s tradition and of one’s political community, but rather a double movement of withdrawal and return, because for Heidegger there is no escape from the past, the people and the historical heritage into which we have been thrown (1962, 41-42, 434-436). No

generation creates its tasks from nothing, but inherits them from previous generations. What is more, even the breaks with our tradition are grounded in the past. It is important to acknowledge that Heidegger radically separates the vulgar, inauthentic conception of the past from his own interpretation of the past as *Gewesenheit*. This distinction is based on the idea that “A Dasein which no longer exists, is not past... It is rather ‘having-been-there’” (1962, 432). The past as *Gewesenheit* defines a state where the past still conditions the present. In other words, it is an essential aspect of what we are today and what we will be in the future. Properly understood, the notion of historicity as an ongoing event portrays the essential unity of past, present and future in human life.

It must be clear by now that for an authentic historical being, communal existence in the same world is an essential condition of human existence. As one commentator has aptly put it, to live authentically we must, according to Heidegger, acknowledge our essential historical ties to the community and the world (Harries, 1978, 78). It is indeed almost self-evident that without an understanding of our historicity and engagement within the world, no tradition could be formed. Heidegger also reminds us that even in living authentically it is inevitably the ambiguous idle talk of everyday life that transmits tradition. This is because as thrown, Heidegger reiterates in his analysis of authentic historicity, human beings “understand (themselves) in terms of those possibilities which circulate in the average way of interpreting Dasein today” (1962, 435). We are inauthentically historical insofar as we understand

ourselves from those possibilities which are made public by “the they” and which are currently available in everyday life. For Heidegger, there seems to be no easy way out from the interpretations embodied in the practices of our present world.

II) Destiny and Authentic Community

However, Heidegger also points to a different way in which we might authentically encounter those currently available public possibilities within which we inevitably find ourselves. He argues that to dwell authentically, and this is a crucial point, we do not have to merely reject and rebel against our tradition, but “*from it and against it and yet again for it*” we must deliver over to ourselves the “factically” given possibilities of our historical and political community (1962, 435). In so doing, we can encounter these possibilities as a “heritage.” The more resolutely we understand ourselves in and from “our ownmost possibilities,” the more surely and hence the less “accidentally” we can find and choose our “inherited possibilities”:

“Once one has grasped the finitude of one’s existence, it snatches one back from the endless multiplicity of possibilities which offer themselves as closest to one—those of comfortableness, shirking, and taking things lightly—and brings Dasein into the simplicity of its fate (*Schicksals*). This is how we designate Dasein’s *primordial “happening,”* which lies in *authentic resoluteness* and in which Dasein hands itself down to itself, free for death, in *a possibility which it has inherited and yet has chosen*” (1962, 435) (emphases added).

Heidegger now explicitly points out that the possibilities that we project have to be drawn from the past as a heritage. We cannot simply invent a life project that we have dreamed up completely on our own. The source for all

political projects is the heritage which we share with others in our community and which our culture has accumulated through the works and deeds of past generations. The authentic “happening” of a tradition emerges as an event in which “being” brings itself historically to light in the fullest possible way. Therefore, we must understand the notion of “resolve” in the context of Heidegger’s emphasis on the concept of “heritage,” because in Heidegger’s view “a people” can formulate an image of “authentic historicity” as a mode of existence involving both rootedness and meaning solely in terms of such a historical heritage. As resolute and authentic, we not only clear-sightedly confront our finitude and live up to the fact that not everything is possible. But we also encounter our past and historical culture as a storehouse of opportunities to exist authentically. As Heidegger says, “everything ‘good’ is a heritage, and the character of ‘goodness’ lies in making authentic existence possible” (1962, 435). When Heidegger identifies the good life with the historical possibilities available within our tradition, the radically communitarian characteristic of Heidegger’s account of tradition comes to the fore. In Heidegger’s view, the possibilities made accessible in our political community are “goods” inherited from our heritage, and these “goods” help us every time we look for guidance for meaningful decisions about what is worth pursuing in political life. We cannot live, Heidegger strongly emphasises, by ambiguities, problematics and negations *alone*. We only become fully human by choosing to live authentically and resolutely within a concrete historical culture and political community. In other words, we grasp the range of goals and “goods”

available to us as defined by our historical heritage. Furthermore, the notion of heritage must be understood not as a context of meaning whose boundaries are fixed once and for all but as a “happening with others” in *our* political community, a “collective happening” out of which arises *our* “common destiny” (*Geschick*). Political existence as such is essentially bound up with a “collective occurrence of the community, of a people”:

“Destiny is not something that puts itself together out of individual fates, any more than Being-with-one-another can be conceived as the occurring together of several Subjects. Our fates have already been guided in advance, in our Being with one another in the same world and in our resoluteness for definite possibilities. Only in *communicating* and in *struggling* does the power of *destiny* become *free*. Dasein’s fateful destiny in and with its ‘generation’ goes to make up the full *authentic* historicising of Dasein” (1962, 436) (emphases added).

What is striking about this passage is that it not only takes us to the heart of what is distinctive about Heidegger’s interpretation of the concept of tradition. Perhaps more important for our purposes, it also reveals some of the deep problems implicit in Heidegger’s thought. In this passage we see more clearly two fundamental political implications of Heidegger’s account of tradition, because here Heidegger not only shows us how the past provides the content that allows human beings to escape the arbitrariness of seemingly rootless resolve. Moreover, he tells us why we must understand the concept of freedom in terms of “a common destiny of a people.” In other words, in this passage Heidegger presents us with his own conceptions of political community and freedom, both of which are rooted in his account of tradition. We shall look at these two important characteristics of Heidegger’s account of tradition separately.

First, Heidegger now explicitly states that the fate of the individual is conditioned by the “destiny” in which he stands. This is because what he calls “destiny” is not a collection of atomised fates but something that “guides our fates in advance.” It might well be argued that even if the notion of resolve in front of nothingness appears to empower the individual with absolute authority, Heidegger now undoubtedly shifts the locus of authority onto the inherited common destiny, that is, onto the tradition in which our possibilities are always rooted. For Heidegger, there is a sense in which we can never absolutely rise above the particular context into which we have been cast. Not only can we never wholly master from the ground up the heritage to which we already belong. In addition to this, all of our plausible possibilities emerge from a “particular historical situation” in which we are caught up. History, which is for Heidegger always “our history,” is essentially the lived context from out of which our limited possibilities emerge. In Heidegger’s view, the past we are called to appropriate is always “our shared past” or a shared heritage, and the future toward which we project ourselves is always “our future” or a communal possibility. In this respect, political existence is by its very nature “a communal happening” in which one participates with “one’s generation.” The most striking aspect of this account of political existence is that because each and every communal happening is conditioned by the particular and contingent historical circumstances, political community is always *precarious* and *situational*. True, our fates are guided in advance by a common destiny. But “only in communicating and struggling does the power of destiny become free.”

The second political implication of this account of tradition is concerned with the meaning of freedom. Heidegger tells us that freedom arises as the reappropriation of a particular cultural and historical heritage in which one already participates and to which one is subordinated at once. We misunderstand what freedom is, Heidegger reminds us, if we think that it means indifference, arbitrariness of goals or action without restraint. On the contrary, authentic political existence demands the subordination of the individual to a “common destiny.”

But it might be asked how the idea of subordination can be reconciled with freedom at all. Heidegger’s interpretation of freedom in terms of finitude, subordination and transcendence would be barely understandable without taking into account his remarks in “On the Essence of Truth.” In this essay Heidegger presents us with his most succinct definition of freedom. “Freedom,” says Heidegger, is not “mere absence of constraint with respect to what we can or cannot do.” Thus, to use Isaiah Berlin’s famous definition, Heidegger repudiates a merely “negative conception of liberty.” Freedom, according to Heidegger, does not solely consist in doing what we please or being unimpeded from exercising our capacities in pursuit of our desired ends within a secured private domain. By the same token, it is not “mere readiness for what is required and necessary” (1993a, 126). In Heidegger’s view, prior to any discussion of “negative” and “positive” freedom, freedom is concerned both with a certain kind of transcendence and with a peculiar kind of subordination to something larger than the individual. The notion of

transcendence is crucial here, but it must be understood in the sense in which Heidegger defines it. It must not be understood in terms of subjectivism or independent of the horizon of time (1987, 18). The most striking aspect of the Heideggerian notion of transcendence is its finiteness and its relationship to freedom. Freedom involves transcendence, because our freedom, argues Heidegger, consists in having the power of transcending beings as a whole, among them first and foremost our own everyday selves. In this regard, the possibility of transcending our everyday selves relies on our ability to see ourselves “thrown” into or situated in a particular historical context with a particular political goal. As such, transcendence, on Heidegger’s reading, means the human ability to be part of something larger than oneself. This brings us to the second dimension of freedom, which is its radical finitude, its situatedness, and its “powerlessness” (1962, 436). What Heidegger means by “powerlessness” is that we are always already there, thrown into or delivered over to certain historical possibilities which define who we are and behind which we cannot go. In Heidegger’s terms, human existence stands in the “happening of unconcealment” through which we as members of a political community understand ourselves and confront our possibilities as our possibilities. And since such a self-understanding is necessarily situational, particular, prejudicial and historical, we are always “equally in truth and in untruth” (1993a, 133). This is ultimately what Heidegger means by the play between concealment and unconcealment: self-understanding is inevitably clouded by our embeddedness within a particular tradition. Differently put, our

self-understanding is always finite, historical, particular and partial. According to this interpretation, there is no point to trying to ground it in some ultimate, perspective-free reality. In that sense, “powerlessness” and “transcendence” together characterise Heidegger’s definition of finite freedom.

Whereas the inauthentic self of everydayness, Heidegger says, is blindly driven by the accidents of his everyday concerns, the resolutely rooted self becomes clear-sighted for the accidents that fall to his share from the historical heritage to which he belongs. The individual is always already political and historical; and yet he is free to respond to and reappropriate his heritage or to lose himself in the anonymous publicity of everyday life. Freedom consists in choosing the possibilities that we inherit from our heritage but nonetheless take over as our own. What Heidegger calls “finite freedom” entails only “having chosen the choice” (1962, 436). “The they,” on the other hand, “eludes choice,” because it is “blind for possibilities,” and hence cannot reenact its heritage in an authentic manner. It simply retains the “actual” and “understands the past in terms of the present” (1962, 443). But to live authentically we need to detach ourselves from and transcend the falling publicness of the present. This is the sense in which Heidegger’s conception of freedom involves both transcendence and finitude—that is, both a critical and confrontational attitude towards the present and rootedness in a historical heritage, which together make an authentic communal destiny possible. Only through such a constant reinterpretation and struggle can we as a community have “a clear vision of the accidents of the Situation” (1962, 436). It needs to

be emphasised once again that for Heidegger “only in communicating and struggling does the power of destiny become free.”

But we must ask ourselves what exactly Heidegger means by “communication” and “struggle” in this passage. What kind of communication and battle should we undertake to lead an authentic life? Why, we might ask, does Heidegger treat this important aspect of his account of tradition with such reticence? And furthermore, what criteria can we have for distinguishing the “authentic happening of a people” from an inauthentic one? In accordance with the formalistic and contentless characteristic of his account of human existence, Heidegger offers us no such criteria. Instead, he tells us that authentic existence leads us to the appreciation of our finite freedom; that is to say, to an urgent commitment to the roots of our historical world. Thus what emerges from Heidegger’s emphasis on “a common destiny of a people” is Heidegger’s contention that only as a member of a political community with a shared historical heritage do we seek to own up to our individual fates in relation to a wider destiny we as a community face. The most obvious political implication of this vision is that all political possibilities almost entirely seem to be conditioned by parochial conceptions of good and evil.

iii) Authentic Repetition

Heidegger seems to restate Nietzsche’s famous aphorism with a radically communitarian flavour: freedom consists in understanding how we

have become what we are³⁹; and this can make the primordial encounter between communal destinies and the world as well as an “authentic repetition” of the historical origins possible. On this account, to understand where we stand and where we are going, it is imperative to understand where we come from and the destiny that ties us to our political community. Like authenticity, freedom is never a given but an achievement for which a constant communal struggle is necessary. To put it in another way, freedom arises as the reappropriation of a historical context of meaning in which one already participates. In this respect, authentic existence always “repeats” resolutely some inherited possibilities:

“The resoluteness which comes back to itself and hands itself down, then becomes the *repetition* of a possibility of existence that has come down to us. *Repeating is handing down explicitly*—that is to say, going back into the possibilities of the Dasein that has-been-there. The authentic repetition of a possibility of existence that has been—the possibility that Dasein may choose its hero—is grounded existentially in anticipatory resoluteness; for it is in resoluteness that one first chooses the choice which makes one free for the struggle of loyally following in the footsteps of that which can be repeated” (1962, 437).

This conception of authentic repetition (*Wiederholung*) displays both the embeddedness and the future-directedness of authentic political existence. In this way, Heidegger’s account of authentic repetition expands the notion of authentic destiny by demonstrating how we draw guidance from the past and by providing an account of action as the transmission of a tradition. As

³⁹ Heidegger approvingly cites Pindar’s famous dictum “Become what you are” both in *Being and Time* (186) and in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (101-103). On Heidegger’s reading, an authentic existence is one in which the ideal of becoming what you are is fulfilled. But it must be noticed that Heidegger interprets this dictum in a Nietzschean spirit, because his vision of human existence, like Nietzsche’s, does not assume that there is some fixed end (for instance, rational animal, citizen in the *polis*) all human beings have in advance solely by virtue of the fact that they are human.

participants in the drama of the “communal happening” of the “destiny” of “our people”, we inevitably contribute to the historical potential of our tradition by taking a resolute stand on its legacy. Only through the actions of authentically fateful individuals (who have resolutely reappropriated their own historical heritage) does the power of destiny become free. Heidegger tells us that this occurs primarily in “a choice of one’s hero” through which “a people” finds what is worthy in the past. What Heidegger suggests here is that when a community resolutely repeats its heritage, it draws a role model from the heroes of the past, which can serve as a guide for orienting one’s life in the future. For Heidegger, only in this way can a community achieve genuine “connectedness” and rootedness.

It has been argued that Heidegger offers many of his key notions such repetition, destiny, historicity, resolve and authenticity in order to formulate an alternative vision of political existence against subjectivistic relativism and so-called “rootless cosmopolitanism of political liberalism” (Hoy, 1978, 342; Pöggeler, 1993, 224-226; Steiner, 1992, 122, 148-149; Wolin, 1993, 7-11). I think it should also be added that Heidegger’s strong emphasis on “choosing a hero” and “communal destiny” can be understood in the context of Heidegger’s criticism of the political and social aspects of modernity. That nihilistic indifference or subjectivism is precluded by Heidegger’s account of historicity, as I have shown, is beyond doubt. By the same token, Heidegger is also critical of a nihilistic and indifferent attitude towards past and future. It would be a mistake to assume that for Heidegger all historical understanding is

equally valid. In this respect, it might not be wrong to claim that Heidegger proposes his key notions such as “history as a happening”, “destiny,” “authentic repetition,” “choosing a hero,” as an alternative to the rootless cosmopolitanism of modernity which he identifies, like Nietzsche, with historical relativism. In this sense, the way in which he defines historicity, as many critics and commentators have observed,⁴⁰ is highly reminiscent of Nietzsche’s interpretation of historicity in terms of three approaches to history—the monumental, the antiquarian, and the critical (1962, 448). Drawing on the causes and implications of Nietzsche’s diagnosis of historical relativism, Heidegger argues that his own approach is not relativistic because it provides a model for authentic existence by incorporating all these three aspects at once. An authentic community, says Heidegger, understands its fundamental task as the repetition of its historical heritage for the purposes of a shared communal destiny. For Heidegger, as one commentator has rightly argued, more basic than history (*Geschichte*) is the destiny (*Geschick*) (Kisiel, 1985, 20). The “authentic happening” or “repetition” is not merely historical at all, but something “destining.” On this view, every reading of the communal past begins with one’s own time, from its own time, about the needs of its time. In this respect, every political community regards its time as needy, as a turning point, a point of decision wavering between destruction and a new beginning. Authentic repetition then begins with the present and is worried

⁴⁰ For an overview of Nietzsche’s influence on Heidegger’s account of historicity, see Hoy (1978,343) and Guignon (1992, 137-138). Gadamer asserts: “The true predecessor of Heidegger was...Nietzsche” (1993, 257).

about the future, because its existence is essentially “an issue of care.” We can never, in Heidegger’s view, adopt “the view from nowhere.” The density of our tradition, of our beginnings, of our destiny is always already at work on us. We are always already there. “Choosing a hero” is thus always conditioned by the possibility of repeating meanings from the past, of recollecting “the hidden sources” of the destiny of a people (1962, 453). And the future, as always, is primary (447):

“The repeating of that which is possible does not bring again something that is ‘past’, nor does it bind the ‘Present’ back to that which has already been ‘outstripped’...Rather, the repetition makes a *reciprocatve rejoinder* to the possibility of that existence which has-been-there. But when such a rejoinder is made to this possibility in a resolution, it is made *in a moment of vision; and as such* it is at the same time a *disavowal* of that which in the ‘today’, is working itself out as the ‘past’. Repetition does not abandon itself to that which is past, nor does it aim at progress. In the moment of vision authentic existence is indifferent to both these alternatives” (1962, 438).

Now we see more clearly Heidegger’s radical intentions—particularly his continual gravitation toward the “extreme possibilities,” which in effect demands the destruction of everything familiar and traditional in the name of a radically different future. In this passage what Heidegger calls “repetition” emerges as a community’s resolute decision that explicitly transmits the heritage of the community in which it is implicated. But it must be emphasised that repetition not only *appropriates* what is transmitted but also, and more importantly, *destroys* it. In that sense, Heidegger’s account of tradition and historicity is as distant from historical determinism as it is from subjective relativism. The continuity of a tradition is not the continuity of things that stand in a cause and effect relation. Rather, it is accomplished through a free and

resolute response of a community to its own historical heritage. This is no historical determinism because the bindingness of the past on the present is fundamentally different from causal necessitation. For Heidegger there is no such thing as unavoidable “objective forces.” Nor is it “anything goes” kind of relativism, because neither is everything possible, nor can we understand our past, present and future as we please. What is more, the common destiny of a people is not simply given to it by history. The communal heritage, says Heidegger, needs to be reinterpreted and developed in order to work out the possibilities of the past, which are relevant and timely. Thus, the “repetition” of a heritage does not in any way mean a slavish imitation of or an impossible return to the past but rather a recovery or re-enacting of what is worth preserving in the past. In this respect, Heidegger’s vision of tradition as authentic repetition cannot be defined as a sort of traditionalism or as a mere defence of the status quo. Instead, it must be viewed as a confrontational attitude towards the past and the present, that is, as a radical transformation of communal possibilities that have emerged in the past.

This kind of repetition or reappropriation, says Heidegger, can occur if a community “critically” (i.e., through “communicating” and “struggling”) engages the tradition that has been handed down to it—and not from some higher standpoint *beyond* it, but rather *through* it. “In the moment of vision” an authentic political community “sees” what is to be done, but *without recourse to a transcendent measure*. In this way, while using the Platonic image of “vision,” Heidegger once again repudiates any appeal to Platonic political

philosophy. It should be noticed that for Heidegger the object of resolute decision is neither the good life for human beings that is universally valid (i.e., the Platonic-Aristotelian idea of the Good) nor a universal principle of action (i.e., the Kantian categorical imperative). Nor can it be seen as contributing to the progressively unfolding power of reason or freedom in history (Hegel and Marx). Rather, it is a communal struggle without a definite direction and always on a shaky basis, which welds a community together and forges them into a *Volk* with a collective destiny and commitment. The possibility of such an occurrence, Heidegger now tells us and will tell us more explicitly in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, depends upon the emergence of a historical and political hero whose way of existing is admired and is taken to represent the cultural characteristics of a people. Their communal destiny, whose primary concern is a new future and a new beginning, represents a normative, overarching origin to which a political community is bound primordially. On this view, the destiny is the Good. To use Hegel's language, the link between *Moralität* and *Sittlichkeit* seems to be completely shattered in Heidegger.

The project of Kantian moral and political theory—for instance, Habermas's discourse ethics which aims to posit a foundational and universally valid decision-procedure in order to render irrelevant the historical context in which judgement operates—would be regarded by Heidegger as distorting the way in which a historically situated human being can come to know what is to be done. Authentic decision, according to Heidegger, is not a question of conforming to abstract universal rules, but of insight into what is

demanded by the historical situation. Human being, Heidegger repeatedly says, is adequately conceived not as *animal rationale* (1962, 74, 208; 1993a, 226) but as the temporal being faced with decision and choice, uncertain of his future but resolved to act. The most fundamental political implication of such a situational interpretation of action is that it wholeheartedly endorses a radically contingent, prejudicial and precarious vision of political existence. Rather than providing a foundation for enduring goals, the tradition provides a continually changing context within which the projection of a communal destiny for the future takes place. Such a projection of the historical heritage is not established according to a transcendent measure but must be perpetually reconfigured in light of the uniqueness of the present situation. Moreover, the break with the forward continuity of the tradition is precisely the most authentic way to reappropriate the tradition and return to its primordial origins more profoundly. Here we begin to perceive the full radicality of Heidegger's both forward and backward looking approach to the problem of tradition, that is to say, his call to the primordial origins that is supposed to bring about a radical transformation, a new beginning.

What now emerges as striking are certain elements of Heidegger's analysis of tradition, which do not find their equivalents in Gadamer's interpretation. In Heidegger's account, there seems to be nothing akin to the notion of "fusion of horizons" as a way of rising to a higher universality. Nor is there any room for mediation between past and future, between strange and

familiar.⁴¹ For Heidegger, a people's heritage, its "ownmost distinctive possibility" permanently discloses the fixed horizons within which an authentic political necessarily moves. To put it differently, there seems to be no way of overcoming the limitations, opportunities and prejudices afforded by one's time and community in Heidegger's conception of tradition. Though we know that an authentic political community requires a projection of its possibilities that are uniquely its own, this remains a totally formal stipulation that excludes virtually nothing.⁴² Precisely this aspect of the notion of communal destiny gives Heidegger's account of tradition its distinctively contentless utopian characteristic. But we should ask ourselves whether Heidegger resolves the problem of the individualist-existentialist interpretation of human existence—i.e., arbitrariness at the level of the individual—by substituting it with arbitrariness at the level of the community. Authentic repetition demands that a people be extremely resolute about its time and the destiny of the community, but this by no means enables the community to rise above the contingencies and prejudices of its history, of its heritage. We must also ask ourselves what exactly Heidegger means by "a people"? Who is this "people"? If the ethical

⁴¹ For a comparison of Heidegger and Gadamer along these lines, in particular with regard to the notion of historicity, see Kisiel (1985, 19-22) and Grondin (1995, 120; 2003, 76-83).

⁴² That Heidegger's account of historicity offers no criteria for judging different traditions and historical interpretations has caused a considerable debate among Heidegger's commentators and critics. See Hoy (1978, 343) and Löwith (1993, 173). Guignon (1992, 141) agrees with Hoy's thesis that Heidegger's account is largely formal and goes on to assert that Heidegger's account of historicity can "accommodate almost any political position." Blitz (1981, 217) and Newell (1984, 782) argue that, though the notion of resolute commitment seems to be highly contentless, Heidegger's account of political existence points towards a "definite kind of political alternative" (Newell, 782). Similarly, Wolin argues that Heidegger's notion of historicity is less formalistic than is generally assumed. He asserts that Heidegger's account expresses a "conservative revolutionary ideology" that was "influential among the German mandarin intelligentsia in the middle to late 1920s."

inadequacy of the liberal political theory is an atomistic individualism which fails to do justice to the historical and moral embeddedness of the individual in a political community, the ethical danger of Heidegger's account of tradition seems to be provincialism and moral relativism.

2-6 *Polemos* against Modernity

All features of Heidegger's contentless communitarianism we have examined so far—the critique of everyday life and of publicness, the ideal of authentic resoluteness, the notion of nothingness underlying human existence, and the vision of political existence as an ongoing reappropriation of a communal destiny through struggle and reinterpretation—ultimately rely on Heidegger's vision of human existence which is in turn rooted in the central aspect of his thought, the question of being.

In *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger defines the nature of the political problem of the formation and the boundaries of a political community—that is, the nature of our experience of belonging to and participation within a shared context of meaning—in terms of a strong emphasis on *Volk*, a people. Just as Heidegger has argued in *Being and Time* that the fundamental character of one's life is a product of its essential historicity, so in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* Heidegger likewise suggests that a nation or a people is defined primarily in terms of its time. On this view, our experience of belonging to a political community has necessarily a historical foundation. Furthermore, the historical heritage and the ideas in

terms of which human beings understand and give shape to their own political existence are not eternal. In time they gradually and inevitably lose their power to organise and direct human affairs. What lasts is not eternal either as “eternal presence” or as an infinite sequence of present moments. Human affairs and their order are historically constituted and acquire their definitions only in distinction from or in opposition to others. Thus, Heidegger defines the problem of political community in terms of both historicity and exclusivity. But all these characteristics of political community are ultimately rooted in the question of being which Heidegger formulates essentially in a Heraclitean manner as *polemos*:

“Heraclitus says (Fragment 53): ‘Conflict is for all (that is present) the creator that causes to emerge, but (also) for all the dominant preserver. For it makes some to appear as gods, others as men; it creates (shows) some as slaves, others as freemen.’ The *polemos* named here is a conflict that prevailed prior to everything divine and human, not a war in the human sense. This conflict, as Heraclitus thought it, first caused the realm of being to separate into opposites; it first gave rise to position and order and rank. In such separation cleavages, intervals, distances, and joints opened. In the conflict [*Aus-einandersetzung*, setting-apart] a world comes into being. (Conflict does not split, much less destroy unity. It constitutes unity, it is a binding-together, *logos*. *Polemos* and *logos* are the same)” (1987, 61-62).

Heidegger tells us that this *polemos*, which is “the father of all things,” is “the original struggle.” It is the pre-Socratic experience of the question of being and, in contrast to the modern one, is not primarily concerned with the realm of beings. The Greeks, says Heidegger, do not interpret being as something, as some being. For the Greeks, being means “the emerging and arising, the spontaneous unfolding that lingers” (1987, 61). Heidegger says that this pre-Socratic experience of being as an event of arising, to use the language of *Being and Time*, is “more primordial” and deeper. Building on what he has

presented in *Being and Time*, Heidegger now tells us that “the question of being” or the question of what it means “to be” cannot itself be an entity, a being. Rather, being establishes an open region, the place, wherein we may first encounter beings. Heidegger also adds that this openness of being takes place through *polemos*, a cosmic strife or confrontation, which also extends to the historical and political realm. In fact, for Heidegger “this is precisely what determines the essence of being-human,” because “what man is first manifested (shows itself) in *polemos*” (1987, 140). Every authentic goal is established in and by being itself as an event of *polemos*. Each revelation of being directs man towards a new goal, a new direction and a new future.

According to Heidegger, human existence then embodies a *polemos*: so long as human beings are alive, they live in the tension between what is “factual” and constraining—the past—and what they are yet to become—the future. This is precisely why Heidegger points out that “we do not learn who man is by learned definitions; we learn it...when he projects something new (not yet present)” (1987, 144). But again there is no individualism here: this is an entirely political struggle—i.e., one in which human beings participate, not as isolated individuals, but as a people in a historical community. The world that comes into being through *polemos* is “history in the authentic sense” (1987, 62); and its site is the *polis*: “The *polis* is the historical place, the there *in* which, *out* of which, and *for* which history happens” (1987, 152). The historical *polis* is “the foundation and scene” of human existence and is the place where a communal destiny is formed.

Heidegger's vision of political existence explicitly repudiates the universalistic, individualistic and egalitarian ideals of the liberal tradition. The political and historical *polemos*, the "battle," says Heidegger, is mainly sustained by "the creators," who are the "men of action"—i.e., the "poets, the thinkers and the statesmen" (1987, 62, 152). To the overwhelming power of being, they respond with their work through which it becomes possible to project and develop "what had hitherto been unheard of, unsaid and unthought." The *polis* thereby becomes the site of "authentic history" and of "the original struggle." Moreover, Heidegger insists that the *nomos*—i.e., the law—of such a community gets established in a collective struggle of these founders and creators. In other words, the *nomos* for the *polis* is not universal but totally particular and historical, and reflects the concerns of the communal destiny of a people (1987, 131). This is, in Heidegger's view, the truly authentic political community, which is unified and has acquired its destiny, its *nomos* and identity through the works of these authentic creators. In this respect, there is no populism in Heidegger's vision of political community; and this communicates well with his critique of everyday life, of publicness, of *das Man* and inauthenticity in *Being and Time*. The harmony, unity and the "good" in an authentic political community requires a distinction of status, position and rank, because "rank and domination" are among the fundamental characteristics of being and cannot be eliminated from political existence. On the contrary, a truly authentic political community, argues Heidegger, presupposes a certain order of rank. It is uncompromisingly hierarchical:

“If being is to disclose itself, it must itself have and maintain a rank. That is why Heraclitus spoke of the many as dogs and donkeys. This attitude was an essential part of Greek being-there. Nowadays a little too much fuss is sometimes made over the Greek polis, this aspect should not be forgotten, or else the whole idea becomes insignificant and sentimental. What has the higher rank is the stronger. Therefore, being, the logos as gathering and harmony, is not easily accessible to all in the same form; unlike the harmony that is mere compromise, destruction of tension, flattening, it is hidden... The true is not for every man but only for the strong” (1987, 133).

These authentic creators transcend the boundaries of ordinary, inauthentic human existence and everything customary. In this way, they allow a space to open up, a space which provides an opportunity to fundamentally alter the actually existing world with its taken for granted assumptions, norms and principles. Heidegger defines this overthrow of the prevailing conditions as a revolutionary awakening, a radical transformation of political existence. This transformation is so great and radical that the creators of the authentic political community, according to Heidegger, also become *apolis* and homeless, “without city and place,...without statute and limit, without structure and order, because they themselves as creators must first create all this” (1987, 152-153). But it must be noted that *apolis* means anything but apolitical here. On the contrary, these authentic creators are political in the authentic and highest sense; they are the founders of the political community as such.

Drawing on Sophocles’s *Antigone*, Heidegger endorses its portrayal of human being as “the uncanniest being,” and argues that this is precisely how we must understand the spirit of the founders of the authentic community (1987, 146-149). They have “to use power” and “become pre-eminent in historical being as creators, as men of action” (1987, 152). But Heidegger also

warns us that the use of power is not to be understood merely as brutality and arbitrariness. He comments that the creators of an authentic political community must be seen as violent and *apolis* because they depart from the “customary, familiar limits” of their own community and tradition in order to start anew and to build a new tradition and a new way of existing for their people (1987, 151). Real statesmen have to break through the conventions of their time to produce new rules and new forms of political existence through a reinterpretation of the old, which inevitably involves the use of power, violence and *polemos*, because for Heidegger every new interpretation necessarily destroys the existing boundaries of meaning, overthrows the familiar and gives rise to a new tradition (Gillespie, 1984, 158; Sluga, 2001, 212).

To experience being as a *polemos* is to understand that the meaning of political existence is a question which demands, not eternal answers, but a response that is itself a historic struggle, and that the establishment of an authentic political community can occur if a people, under the spiritual leadership of its founders, realises that the truly political act is not a mere operating within fixed political and traditional boundaries and institutions but an act of creating new laws and rules, and of reconfiguring the destiny of a people. Similarly, Heidegger’s powerful criticism of modernity needs to be understood on the basis of his contention that the philosophical traditions that have governed Western history since Plato have sprung not from a genuine experience of being as a *polemos* but from a forgetting of being. This forgetting, Heidegger claims, relies on the hegemony of the scientific-

technological way of looking at the world, which has inevitably led to the alienated, nihilistic and technological subjectivism in the modern age.

According to Heidegger, the metaphysics underlying the modern technological subjectivism pictures the human condition in terms of a subject that becomes the foundation around which the world revolves. The modern age, argues Heidegger, is thus characterised by an ever more increasing attempt to objectify nature in order to master and control it more efficiently for human purposes. This process, in Heidegger's view, is the essence of modern technology; and it ultimately culminates in the will to transform everything, including humanity itself, into a "standing reserve" or a raw material that can be exploited in the service of technology. The roots of modern subjectivity are in European scientism, positivism, liberal individualism and industrial revolution, all of which he later regards as the different aspects of the same sweeping wave of the technological worldview characterising the modern age. But the most "demonic" forms of this combination of nihilism and technology manifest themselves in Anglo-American liberal utilitarianism and Marxist state "regulation... of the material conditions of production" (1987, 47). The supposedly universal, rationalised principles and forms of political existence imposed by the global superpowers—i.e., the U.S. and the USSR: liberal individualism and Marxist collectivism—represent the "same technological frenzy" aiming to destroy all differences among people. To show that these principles are true and universally valid, these powers seek to apply them worldwide, and thus necessarily come into conflict with each other and put

pressure on all nations. According to Heidegger the most dangerous outcome of this global race is that it tends to level all historical and cultural differences and impose a technological understanding of being on a global scale (Gillespie, 1984, 124-134)⁴³. Heidegger argues that in order to resist the imperialist policies of these powerful polities aiming to establish a technological world civilisation and a cosmopolitan brotherhood, all nations must maintain themselves as different peoples with different traditions and must assert their distinctive characters in opposition to the powers aiming to destroy their independence. In order to retain their national independence, they must take “a creative view of [their] tradition[s]” (1987, 38) and hence falsify the inauthentic universal pretensions of liberal individualism and Marxist collectivism—both of which are deeply rooted in the same metaphysical understanding of “Being as eternal presence” and both of which have “become an active onslaught that destroys all rank and every world-creating impulse of the spirit” (1987, 46).

Heidegger therefore thinks that the truly authentic political response to this global danger is a form of political existence that is centred on the idea of *Volk*, of communal destiny and national tradition as well as on the possibility of re-enacting the Greek understanding of human existence as *polemos*.

⁴³ In “The Age of the World Picture,” Heidegger considers this struggle between liberal individualism and communist collectivism as the outcome of “the fundamental event of the modern age,” which is “the conquest of the world as picture.” He argues that as long as people continue the attempt to remake nature to suit their own purposes, they will struggle to make their own positions universally dominant. The inevitable consequence of this worldwide competition is that the world becomes a global arena in which there exists “a confrontation of world views” (Heidegger, 1977, 128-135).

Heidegger succinctly presents both his diagnosis of the political/metaphysical problem of the modern age and his response to it in a famous passage in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*:

“This Europe, in its ruinous blindness forever on the point of cutting its own throat, lies today in a great pincers, squeezed between Russia on one side and America on the other. From a metaphysical point of view, Russia and America are the same; the same dreary technological frenzy, the same unrestricted organization of the average man... Through all this turmoil a question still haunts us like a spectre: What for?—Whither?—And what then? The spiritual decline of the earth is so far advanced that the nations are in danger of losing the last bit of spiritual energy that makes it impossible to see the decline (taken in relation to the history of 'being'), and to appraise it as such. This simple observation has nothing to do with *Kulturpessimismus*, and of course it has nothing to do with any sort of optimism either; for the darkening of the world, the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the transformation of men into a mass, the hatred and suspicion of everything free and creative, have assumed such proportion throughout the earth that such childish categories as pessimism and optimism have long since become absurd.

We are caught in a pincers. Situated in the centre, our nation incurs the severest pressure. It is the nation with the most neighbours and hence the most endangered. With all this, it is the most metaphysical of all nations. We are certain of this vocation, but our people will only be able to wrest a destiny from it if *within itself* it creates a resonance, a possibility of resonance for this vocation, and then takes a creative view of its tradition. All this implies that this nation, as a historical nation, must move itself and thereby the history of the West beyond the centre of their future 'happening' and into the primordial realm of the powers of being. If the great decision regarding Europe is not to bring annihilation, that decision must be made in terms of new spiritual energies unfolding historically from out of the centre” (1987, 37-39).

The strong emphasis placed on the central role of national tradition in the collective awakening from the spiritual and political ills of modernity is unmistakable in this passage—a passage in which Heidegger’s voice sounds quite chauvinistic. Heidegger here defines political existence in terms of notions such as destiny, nation and tradition in such a way that the difference or authenticity of *völkisch* communal existence seems to take an absolute character. It almost becomes the foundation of a truly authentic political community. We can easily recognise here the seminal idea of modern

nationalism. And yet it is equally striking that Heidegger never uses the term “nationalism” in this work; and whenever he uses it in his other works, his attitude is quite critical.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, it goes without saying that Heidegger’s community is undoubtedly not Goethe’s cosmopolitan polity.⁴⁵ Nor does it seem to have any resemblance to today’s multilingual, multicultural polities. On the contrary, Heidegger’s authentic political community is a community of “a people” in strife who embark on the historical mission of maintaining the vitality of their national tradition by an ongoing *polemos*—a collective struggle which, like the natural tradition it aims to re-enact, has neither a content nor a definite destination. Needless to say, Heidegger’s community, as one commentator has argued, is “a cultural, linguistic, historical unity that is defined by its assigned destiny.”⁴⁶ The power and direction of this communal possibility, of collective destiny, can only emerge from the *Volk*’s struggle in the moment of vision, from its *polemos*.

Heidegger’s voice in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* thus becomes markedly gloomier, more political, more filled with the rhetoric of nation, struggle, greatness, and spiritual renewal. His sweeping criticism of modernity takes an unmistakable political significance. With one brush stroke he dismisses a whole range of social and political institutions of liberal

⁴⁴ In “Letter on Humanism” he argues that “Every nationalism is metaphysically an anthropologism, and as such subjectivism” (1993, 244). See also page 241.

⁴⁵ Homelessness, in Heidegger’s view, is the symptom of oblivion of Being in the modern age. He argues that Hölderlin’s poetry, which fully captures the significance of “the homeland,” is “essentially more primordial and thus significant for the future than the mere cosmopolitanism of Goethe” (1993a, 242-243).

⁴⁶ Caputo (1993, 82) also asserts that Heidegger’s definition of a people has an unmistakable aggressive and dark side: “In *An Introduction to Metaphysics* the dark side of the authentic happening of ‘a people’ is unleashed.”

democracy, which are in Heidegger's view based on "mere compromise" and "utilitarian intelligence" (1987, 49, 133), and he calls for a radical renewal, a deep resolve, a profound confrontation, a transformation of political existence. The modern age, says Heidegger, is a spiritually impoverished, politically levelled, nihilistic world.⁴⁷ The main problem with liberal politics and humanitarian values is that they are, like modern technology, based on a subjectivist metaphysics. In this respect, the modern age as a whole has a profoundly subjectivist outlook. Heidegger calls for a certain kind of communitarian politics and claims that "today it is the we that counts. Now is 'the time of the we,' not of the I" (1987, 70). There is, in Heidegger's view, no man in general: human beings always exist historically within a community (1987, 143-144). As historical beings, they are members not of an abstract "world brotherhood" but of "a national community [*Volksgemeinschaft*]" united by rootedness and ground—that is, by a national heritage and common historical, cultural roots (1993b, 50). Heidegger believes that the I-centred world of liberalism with its negative individual liberties should be overcome (1993b, 34-35), because he thinks that the notion of universal rights and a cosmopolitan philosophical anthropology, like the technological competition for global dominance, denies the historical differences between peoples and traditions. For Heidegger, such a denial amounts to nothing less than a denial of *polemos* and of the non-subjectivist and non-technological experience of

⁴⁷ Heidegger says: "The world is darkening. The essential episodes of this darkening are: the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the standardization of man, the pre-eminence of the mediocre" (1987, 45).

being. In other words, it paves the way to a totally inauthentic political existence. Heidegger's fundamental claim is that it is only by entering into the original struggle with the power of being and by asserting its difference and identity that a people as a political community can live up to its destiny in an authentic manner. According to Heidegger, the particular national traditions and ways of living of different communities constitute the sites for the historical manifestations of being. When these distinctions get blurred, that is, when human beings experience anything akin to what Gadamer calls "the fusion of horizons," Heidegger's key notions such as historicity, communal destiny, *polemos* and authenticity lose their force and meaning.

CHAPTER 3: GADAMER'S HERMENEUTICS AS A PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY OF FINITUDE: AN ETHICS OF CONTINUITY AND DIALOGUE

"It is the *physis* of humankind that human beings have language—and history."

Gadamer, *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, p. 221.

"What makes classical ethics superior to modern moral philosophy is that it grounds the transition from ethics to 'politics,' the art of right legislation, on the indispensability of tradition. By comparison, the modern Enlightenment is abstract and revolutionary... Even where life changes violently, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything than anyone knows, and it combines with the new to create a new value."

Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 281.

"[The hermeneutical] experience is experience of human finitude. The truly experienced person is one who has taken this to heart, who knows that he is master neither of time nor the future. The experienced person knows that all foresight is limited and all plans uncertain... In [hermeneutical experience] all dogmatism, which proceeds from the soaring desires of the human heart, reaches an absolute barrier... Real experience is that whereby man becomes aware of his finiteness. In it are discovered the limits of the power and the self-knowledge of his planning reason."

Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 357.

3-1 Introduction: Gadamer's *Philosophia Practica*

In this chapter I wish to explore the meaning of tradition and dialogue in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics with a view to highlight its political implications by concentrating on the differences between his vision of political existence and Heidegger's account of authentic political community. I shall try to accomplish two main objectives in my analysis of Gadamer's thought. First, I will discuss and defend the relevance of Gadamer's hermeneutics as *political philosophy*. More specifically, my primary aim is to show that Gadamer's "hermeneutics as practical philosophy" expresses a political philosophy, and hence a vision of political existence, that rests on five fundamental themes:

finitude, tradition, dialogue, *Bildung* and political reason.¹ I will explore the distinctive features of Gadamer's thought by means of a framework composed of these five concepts. In the next section I will begin my analysis by trying to clarify what Gadamer means by each of these concepts through which he articulates the chief characteristics of philosophical hermeneutics as practical philosophy.

It is important to realise that these five concepts continually come to the fore in Gadamer's writings and that they are of considerable relevance for political philosophy broadly considered. Gadamer's strong emphasis on human *finitude*, his rehabilitation of the concept of *tradition*, his reinterpretation of the concept of *Bildung* and the central place he accords to *dialogue* and *political reason* in his vision of political life are not only central to his thought. They are also some of the hotly debated aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutics within political philosophy.

It might be argued that political theory is not in the foreground of Gadamer's investigations and that in his magnum opus, *Truth and Method*, in which Gadamer lays out the foundations of his own understanding of

¹ I am using the notion of political reason to convey the meaning of Gadamer's interpretation of practical reasonableness or *phronesis*. But it is important to realise that Gadamer's interpretation of that term, though profoundly inspired by Platonic-Aristotelian political philosophy, merges almost completely with his understanding of the hermeneutical character of human existence. In that sense, it would be wrong to suggest that Gadamer's understanding of practical reasonableness is identical with its classical meaning. The modern strain in Gadamer's understanding of practical reasonableness comes out very clearly when he states, "I found a better basis for *phronesis*, which I developed, not in terms of a virtue, but rather in terms of the *dialogue*" (2003, 21). Moreover, Gadamer frequently uses what might be considered as a distinctively modern equivalent of that term, *gesellschaftliche Vernunft*, to convey almost the same meaning (2001, 84). For the sake of clarity and to remove any confusion, I have preferred to use political reason rather than *phronesis* or *gesellschaftliche Vernunft*.

philosophical hermeneutics, Gadamer's primary concern is with the understanding of works of art, texts, and tradition—i.e. with “what is handed down to us.” Indeed, some commentators have argued that since Gadamer has never claimed that his work involves a political philosophy and since his hermeneutics is “too philosophical” to have any relevance for political philosophy, it would be a futile undertaking to search for a systematic account of political existence in Gadamer's work.² But this interpretation is based on a narrow understanding of political philosophy. Moreover, such a reading ignores nothing less than the guiding ambition behind almost all of Gadamer's writings because Gadamer has repeatedly emphasized that his hermeneutical project must be seen as a contribution to the tradition of “practical

² Some question has been raised about the status of Gadamer's hermeneutics as a political philosophy by one of Gadamer's translators who claims that it would be wrong to suggest that Gadamer has a political philosophy (Marshall, 2004,). But, as many of his commentators have observed, Gadamer's hermeneutics has a distinctive “political texture” (Dallmayr, 1990, 92). Sullivan, too, provides a detailed analysis of the relevance of Gadamer's hermeneutics as political theory, but argues that Gadamer's “early thought” (that is to say, Gadamer's early works on Platonic-Aristotelian political philosophy prior to the publication of *Truth and Method*) is more political than his later thinking (Sullivan, 1986). But Gadamer disagrees with this interpretation, and states that there is no such distinction between his “early” and “later” works and that the ethical and political dimensions of his work have in fact become more and more explicit in the development of his hermeneutics—in particular, after his debate with Habermas on the political implications of the hermeneutical conception of tradition. (Gadamer, 1994a). Another interesting work on hermeneutics is Rosen's *Hermeneutics as Politics*, but Rosen's analysis has almost nothing to say about Gadamer's hermeneutics. Instead, Rosen mainly concentrates on Derrida's thought and “postmodernism,” which he seems to identify with hermeneutics. Gadamer, while recognising some of the philosophical affinities between his hermeneutics and Derrida's deconstructionism, has decisively rejected any such identification of his own hermeneutics with deconstructionist postmodernism (1989b, 24-25, 55-57, 109-125; 2002, 62). Moreover, Rosen's fundamental argument is based on his observation that “Kant's distinction between morality and politics continues to serve as the paradigm for postmodernist treatments” of politics (Rosen, 1987). But since such a Kantian distinction between morality and politics has been the major target of Gadamer's hermeneutics and his critique of Kant's moral philosophy, Rosen's identification of hermeneutics with postmodernism cannot apply to Gadamer's thinking. For an interesting work on this theme, see Zuckert's analysis of Gadamer's hermeneutics (1996, 70-103) and Beiner's response to it (2004, 145-157). For a discussion of the significance of Gadamer's hermeneutics for modern political theory, see Lawrence (1981, xiv-xxx) and Bernstein (1983).

philosophy”—i.e. as a “*scientia practica*” by which Gadamer means, following classical political philosophy, “reflections upon human-social praxis” (1990, 275). It is the existence of this inherently practical—i.e., ethical and political—dimension which is the crux of Gadamer’s interpretation of hermeneutics. Furthermore, Gadamer’s work provides ample textual evidence to support the contention that his hermeneutics does indeed bear an extraordinary significance for contemporary political theory and practice. As many of Gadamer’s commentators have suggested, *Truth and Method* is an important source not only for his view of ethical and political judgement³ but also for his vision of the human world—which is for Gadamer always a social world shaped by language, history and tradition. Moreover, if we pay close attention to Gadamer’s other writings, we will see that he has consistently shown a concern with ethics and politics, and that the implications of his own hermeneutical interpretations of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel and Heidegger convey a claim for the relevance of philosophical hermeneutics for political philosophy. This is precisely the reason why many scholars have argued that a full-blown analysis of the political import of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics requires seeing how it represents an interweaving of themes drawn from Aristotle, Plato, Hegel and Heidegger (Bernstein, 1983, 161; Pippin, 2002, 218). Indeed, Gadamer repeatedly states that his philosophical hermeneutics is hugely inspired by a Platonic understanding of dialogue, an

³ For an analysis of the ethical dimensions of Gadamer’s hermeneutics, see Foster (1991, 45-78) and Smith (1988, 75-91). For a thoughtful discussion of Gadamer’s hermeneutics in terms of its contribution to contemporary debates about political judgement, see Beiner (1983).

Aristotelian notion of *phronesis* and practical philosophy, Hegel's modern communitarianism—i.e., a vision of political existence which recognises both the centrality of the idea of freedom in the modern world and how the human self is embedded in the ethical and political life of the community in which he finds himself—and Heidegger's "hermeneutics of facticity." In this sense, Gadamer's hermeneutics as practical philosophy is a breathtaking fusion of the horizons of the ancients and the moderns, and is perhaps the most ambitious attempt within contemporary political philosophy to combine the best of the ancients with that of the moderns. As my discussion unfolds, I will try to show how specifically Platonic, Aristotelian and Hegelian elements feature within Gadamer's thought and why it is almost impossible to make sense of his hermeneutics without taking into account their influence on Gadamer.

Secondly, and related with the first, Gadamer's concept of tradition, too, needs to be understood in the context of the aforementioned concepts. The main thrust of my interpretation is to demonstrate that Gadamer's concept of tradition, which rests on his criticism of the "excesses of dogmatic Enlightenment," should be understood neither as a reactionary attitude towards modernity nor as traditionalism. This can only be acknowledged if the nature of Gadamer's conception of tradition is explored in relation to the other crucial concepts of his hermeneutics, particularly *Bildung* and dialogue—two concepts that are, as can be observed in *Truth and Method*, as well as in his other writings, profoundly indebted to the moral and political philosophies of

Kant, early German Romanticism and Hegel.⁴ The distinctively modern characteristic of Gadamer's account of tradition further manifests itself in his notions of the fusion of horizons and the hermeneutic experience, which I will discuss in the last section of this chapter.

It is also fundamental to my argument to demonstrate that Gadamer's hermeneutics synthesises the political insights of Platonic-Aristotelian communitarianism with the fruits of modernity and the legacy of the Enlightenment that have been expressed in the moral and political philosophies of Kant and Hegel.⁵ In this sense, my interpretation of Gadamer's hermeneutics is directed against the views claiming that Gadamer's understanding of the concept of tradition represents a conservative or traditionalist perspective, or a version of Neo-Aristotelianism, or a mere

⁴ I am using the term "early German Romanticism" in the sense in which it has been used in Beiser's illuminating work on modern German political philosophy. My interpretation benefits particularly from Beiser's analysis of *Frühromantik* in which he portrays the political thought of early German Romanticism as "a middle path between conservatism and liberalism" (Beiser, 1992, 1996, 2003). Beiser argues that the early German Romantics not only build on but also critique Kant's moral and political philosophy, and that their political thinking culminates or is "*aufgehoben*"—with the contributions of several thinkers within German political thought such as Herder, Schiller and Schleiermacher—in Hegel's political philosophy. In his recent work, Beiser explicitly points to the political and philosophical affinities between the political thought of the early German romantics and Gadamer's hermeneutics, and goes so far as to argue that the early German romantics are "the pioneers in the development of hermeneutics" and that hermeneutics has its origins "at the close of the eighteenth century in the reaction against the *Aufklärung* among the early romantic generation" (Beiser, 2003, 3). This interpretation is in accordance with Gadamer's self-understanding because he has continually emphasised the contributions of early German romanticism to the development of philosophical hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1984, 315-316; 1989b, 21, 27). As Gadamer remarks: "The dialogical turn in hermeneutics, of course, puts me in the neighbourhood of the early Romantics" (1989b, 118).

⁵ Gadamer has repeatedly stressed that his hermeneutics represents a fusion of ancient and modern political philosophies. In an essay on Hegel, for instance, Gadamer says: "What so formed my thinking was a personalised, dialogical Hegel behind whom there always stood the daily, thoughtful intercourse with the Platonic dialogues" (1981, 44). This does not mean that Gadamer accepts Hegel's thought in its entirety. Gadamer's attitude towards Kant's moral and political philosophy, as we shall see, is equally double-edged.

repetition of Heidegger's thinking.⁶ It has to be pointed out that on no account can Gadamer's conception of tradition or his hermeneutics be so construed as to refer to either of these views. While the scholars who make such criticisms often disagree with one another and are not always so explicit, they come together in two respects: in understanding Gadamer's hermeneutics as having conservative implications, and in stressing its affinities either with Neo-Aristotelianism or with the historicist denial of universalism or with postmodern concerns. But this distorts. True, in *some* crucial respects, Gadamer severely criticises the political implications of the formalistic rationalism and individualism of Kant's moral philosophy and political Jacobinism of the Enlightenment. And the fact that Gadamer's hermeneutics benefits from radically different sources—namely, Platonic and Aristotelian political philosophy, the humanistic heritage, the thinkers within modern German political philosophy such as Kant, Herder, Schiller, Schleiermacher and Hegel, and, above all, Heidegger's thinking—further complicates the issue. It must be said, however, that Gadamer neither integrates these different sources within the European tradition in an arbitrary and eclectic manner into his

⁶ Habermas, on different occasions, has made all of these remarks and has defined Gadamer's hermeneutics as Neo-Aristotelianism (1991, 201-203), as some version of conservatism (1977, 351-361) and as "an urbanisation of the Heideggerian province" (1985b, 191-199). Strauss too argues that Gadamer's hermeneutics, like Heidegger's thought, has profoundly historicist and relativistic implications (1971a, 1-9; 1978, 5-12). But unlike Habermas's critique of Gadamer's thought that takes its bearings from modern political philosophy, Strauss's criticism of Gadamer's hermeneutics is firmly rooted in ancient political philosophy. Caputo (1989, 258-264) and Vattimo (1988, 130-144), who interpret Heidegger in terms of his contributions to post-modern, pluralistic and "post-metaphysical" conceptions of democracy, have made some criticisms of Gadamer's hermeneutics and claimed that Gadamer tends to retain the conservative aspects, rather than more radical and post-modern features, of Heidegger's thought.

hermeneutics, nor endorses them in their entirety. It must also be emphasised that, despite his criticism of the excesses of the Enlightenment and of Kant's formalistic rationalism, in other important respects, Gadamer has continued with the legacy of the Enlightenment. To put it in another way, he has continued to believe in the desirability of *Bildung*, the recognition of universal human rights and the possibility of a peaceful, civil coexistence of different traditions in a non-aggressive global political context. While he, following Heidegger, is highly sceptical of the ideal of progress and of the political and moral assumptions of technological and commercial republics driven by a will to rule the planet, Gadamer holds that it would be wrong to see the modern human condition solely through the dark glass of global technology and affirm, on the basis of this rather simplistic diagnosis, the *polemos* of different traditions against the ideals of ancient and modern Enlightenment. True, Gadamer is not so naïve to dogmatically believe in all the ideals of the Enlightenment, but he considers the equation of technology with the universalistic moral and political ideals of ancient and modern political philosophy as an indication of some kind of a lack of a well-educated political reason.⁷ In this respect, Gadamer's vision of political existence, as well as his concept of tradition that rests on it, dramatically departs from Heidegger's view of authentic political community. For one thing, in his interpretation of tradition

⁷ True, Gadamer thinks that catastrophic experiences of the twentieth century have created a new political mood—one that marked "the end of the age of liberalism with its belief in progress based on science" (cited in Lawrence, 1981, xiii). But it must be emphasised that Gadamer is neither a total critic of modernity nor one of its unquestioning supporters. In that sense, he fully recognises the "dialectic of modernity." Thus, my suggestion would be that Gadamer's remarks on the post-World War I philosophical and political climate, too, should be understood in this context.

Gadamer gives no consideration to the term “authenticity” in the sense in which it is used in *Being and Time*: Gadamer’s vision of political existence relies not on a *völkisch*, particularistic *polemos* of different peoples, but on dialogue and the fusion of horizons. For another, Gadamer’s hermeneutics does not condemn either the European tradition or the fundamental political characteristics of modernity.

In this chapter, I will first examine the fundamental concepts of Gadamer’s hermeneutics. Then I will give a detailed analysis of the central theme of my discussion—i.e., Gadamer’s concept of tradition. Let me repeat once again the fundamental premise of my interpretation: far from being some version of traditionalism or a reaction against modernity, Gadamer’s concept of tradition relies on a tacit acceptance of the central moral and political presuppositions of the Enlightenment, and his concept of tradition makes sense only in a political context where the fruits of modernity have been acknowledged. This proposition surely deserves to be further scrutinised and tested. To explicate it further, in the final section of the chapter, I will present and discuss Gadamer’s notions of *Horizontverschmelzung* and the hermeneutic experience—two crucial notions that are central not only to Gadamer’s understanding of tradition but also to my thesis that Gadamer’s concept of tradition has nothing to do with traditional societies or traditionalism, but builds on the moral and political ideals of the Enlightenment.

3-2 The Fundamental Concepts of Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy: Finitude, Tradition, Dialogue, *Bildung*, Political Reason

My analysis, to repeat once again, will attempt to reconstruct Gadamer's notion of hermeneutics as practical philosophy within the context of five concepts that are central to Gadamer's concerns. Indeed, for Gadamer, the concepts of finitude, *Bildung*, tradition, dialogue and political reason form the core of political existence. In this respect, unlike the traditional hermeneutics of the nineteenth century that tried to provide rules and methods for understanding—i.e., a new methodology that is considered to be merely a technical skill (*Kunstlehre*)—for the *Geisteswissenschaften*, Gadamer presents us with a hermeneutical vision of political existence, a view of what we truly are, what is most characteristic of our humanity (1981, 99).⁸

Let me begin my discussion by drawing attention to three passages from Gadamer's writings that underscore both the political and ethical import of Gadamer's hermeneutics in the modern world and how his vision of political existence radically departs from Heidegger's apocalyptic critique of modernity

⁸ For Dilthey, hermeneutics was a general theory of *Verstehen* as the access to all expressions of cultural and historical life. Dilthey's aim was to show how the general theory of understanding was to legitimate "the human sciences" (*Geisteswissenschaften*) as an independent field of inquiry. In that sense, what the old hermeneutics of Dilthey tried to provide were precisely rules and methods for understanding the cultural, social and historical life. But Gadamer argues that this is not "philosophical" hermeneutics. It is merely a technical doctrine, a methodology. Gadamer's aim, on the other hand, is to explore the significance of understanding and historicity for human existence by questioning the modern Cartesian and Kantian bias as well as the romantic and historicist relativism. To this end, he turns to Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, and, above all, to Heidegger. Heidegger's place in Gadamer's hermeneutics is crucial because, as Gadamer has continually argued, Heidegger is the first thinker who has shown that the hermeneutical problem is not one of a formal account of the interpretive human sciences, but ontological—i.e., concerns human being itself. On this view, our very mode of being is interpretive. This is the reason why Gadamer has continually emphasised that his hermeneutics is not merely epistemological but *philosophical* (1990, 273-277; 1994a, 26). For a general introduction to the development of hermeneutics and the philosophical sources of Gadamer's thought, see Grondin (1994; 1995; 2003, 55-70).

and *völkisch* communitarianism. These passages also help focus the central goal of my analysis in this section, which is to highlight the meaning of finitude, *Bildung*, tradition, dialogue and political reason in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics:

"How can we learn to recover our natural reason and our moral and political prudence? In other words, how can we reintegrate the tremendous power of our technique within a well-balanced order of the society and reconstitute a living solidarity?...Precisely and especially *practical and political reason* can only be realised and transmitted dialogically. I think, then, that the chief task of philosophy is to justify this way of reason and to defend practical and political reason against the domination of technology based on science. That is the point of philosophical hermeneutics. It corrects the peculiar falsehood of modern consciousness—the idolatry of the sciences; and it vindicates again the noblest task of the citizen—decision-making according to one's own responsibility—instead of conceding that task to the expert. In this respect, *hermeneutic philosophy is the heir of the older tradition of practical philosophy*" (1975, 314, 316, emphases added).

And, with explicit reference to Heidegger, Gadamer comments on Heidegger's remarks on the modern age and makes the following claim concerning his own philosophical hermeneutics in his "Foreword" to *Truth and Method*. The relevant passage should be quoted here in its entirety because Gadamer's criticism of Heidegger comes out very clearly in this passage:

"Heidegger, who first described the concept of understanding as the universal determinateness of Dasein, means by this the very projectiveness of understanding—i.e., the futurity of Dasein. I shall not deny, however, that—among all the elements of understanding—I have emphasised the assimilation of what is past and of tradition. Like many of my critics, Heidegger too would probably feel a lack of ultimate radicality in the conclusions I draw...When science expands into a total technocracy and thus brings on the 'cosmic night' of the 'forgetfulness of being,' the nihilism that Nietzsche prophesied, then may one not gaze at the last fading light of the sun setting in the evening sky, instead of turning around to look for the first shimmer of its return? It seems to me, however, that the one-sidedness of hermeneutic universalism has the truth of a corrective. It enlightens the modern viewpoint based on making, producing, and constructing concerning the necessary conditions to which that viewpoint is subject. In particular, it limits the position of the philosopher in the modern world. However much he may be called to draw radical inferences from everything, the role of prophet, of Cassandra, of preacher, or of know-it-all does not suit him. What man needs is not just the persistent posing of ultimate questions, but the sense of

what is feasible, what is possible, what is correct, here and now...But though the will of man is more than ever intensifying its criticism of what has gone before to the point of becoming a utopian or eschatological consciousness, the hermeneutic consciousness seeks to confront this will with something of the truth of remembrance: with what is still and ever again real" (1993, xxxvii-xxxviii).

In the first passage Gadamer defends practical reason as the right antidote to scientism and technological rationality in the modern age. Gadamer's primary concern here is to emphasise that political reflection and practice have substantially deteriorated in modern technological societies, that we are confronted with a world in which there has been "a domination based on science" and "a false idolatry of the expert," and that this development poses one of the most important threats to political reason in the present. This claim is one Gadamer partly shares with Heidegger and Habermas. Moreover, Gadamer also states that the chief task of hermeneutical political philosophy is to "defend practical and political reason" which can become a counterforce against the contemporary deformation of political practice. Gadamer concludes that, and this is his most original and startling claim, precisely the defence of political reason makes philosophical hermeneutics "the heir of the older tradition of practical philosophy." But more importantly, in the second passage Gadamer links his defence of political reason with an account of how he distances himself from the radical and dark side of Heidegger's root and branch critique of modernity.⁹ In so doing, Gadamer undertakes to play the

⁹ Gadamer's criticism of Heidegger also comes to the fore in his correspondence with Strauss concerning *Truth and Method* when Gadamer argues: "But where I otherwise still appeal to Heidegger—in that I attempt to think of 'understanding as an 'event'—is turned, however, in an entirely different direction. My point of departure is not the complete forgetfulness of being, the 'night of being' but rather—I say this against Heidegger as well as Buber—the unreality of such an assertion. That holds good also for our relation to the tradition" (1978, 8). For a

Aristotelian notion of practical philosophy against Heidegger in a language somewhat reminiscent of Aristotle's criticism of Plato in *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*. Gadamer aims to reconsider, and he ultimately rejects, the two fundamental conclusions of Heidegger's early thinking. First, from the perspective of Gadamer's hermeneutics Heidegger's notorious characterisation of the *sensus communis* as a completely inauthentic way of existence that has to be destroyed in the name of a more authentic political community seems to be extremely problematic. Gadamer also reminds us that his more modest understanding of the powers of philosophy as well as his emphasis on "the truth of remembrance" are truer to Heidegger's original insight into the significance of finitude and temporality in human existence than Heidegger's fundamental ontology. Secondly, Gadamer is not convinced by Heidegger's "deconstructive" reading of the European philosophical tradition—a reading in which Heidegger lumps together technology, liberal universalism, cosmopolitanism and humanism and considers all of the fundamental features of modernity as the latest avatar of metaphysical thinking that carries the stamp of Plato's understanding of being (1994a, 34).¹⁰

discussion of the correspondence between Gadamer and Strauss as well as an overview of the differences between Gadamer and Heidegger within the context of modern political philosophy, see Lawrence (1981, xvi-xviii).

¹⁰ Many commentators have rightly emphasised that one of the major disagreements between Gadamer and Heidegger stems from Gadamer's resolute refusal to see "the origin of Western nihilism" in Plato. See, for instance, (Grondin, 1995, 110-123; Pippin, 2002, 219-220; Zuckert, 1996, 73, 83). Gadamer's remarks in the preface to his *The Idea of Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, support this interpretation: "In the background was the continuous challenge posed for me by the path Heidegger's own thought took, and especially by his interpretation of Plato as the decisive step toward 'metaphysical thought's' obliviousness to being (*Sein*). My elaboration and projection of a philosophical hermeneutics in *Wahrheit und Methode* bear witness to my efforts to withstand this challenge theoretically" (1986, 5).

It is certainly correct that Gadamer's critique of the overriding dominance of technology and the rule of experts in modern societies is Heideggerian in nature. Yet, as we clearly see in these passages, the roots of their criticism seem to be opposed to each other: whereas Heidegger links his critique of technology and subjectivist metaphysics to his critiques of publicness, humanism and liberal democracy, Gadamer interprets the dominance of technology over political reason as the result of the abandonment of the humanist tradition and of the tradition of practical philosophy—two traditions in moral and political philosophy in which there is a strong emphasis on the primacy of civic virtues, a degree of social responsibility, a knowledge of public issues, political solidarity, civic education (*Bildung*), and the concern for the good life. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that Gadamer's understanding of humanism is based on a vision of human existence, the fundamental presuppositions of which he has derived from the political philosophies of ancient and modern communitarianism, particularly Aristotle's and Hegel's view of human existence—a vision which lays the greatest stress on the social nature of human beings and their need for political friendship and recognition. Differently put, on this view, in opposition to the fundamental presuppositions of Hobbesian and Kantian accounts of morality, the meaning of political existence can be derived neither from the selfish pursuit of pleasure nor from the selfless performance of moral duty. Rather, it is the actualisation and perfection of human being's characteristic powers, whether they are moral, intellectual, emotional or

physical, which in turn can be achieved only through *Bildung*—i.e., the education of humanity.¹¹

Gadamer defines *Bildung*, which is the German word for education or formation of character, as “the properly human way of developing one’s natural talents and capacities” (1993, 11). For Gadamer, this “ultimately means developing the human capacity for [ethical] choice and [political] judgement” (1998, 119). Gadamer’s interpretation of *Bildung* undoubtedly carries classical overtones, but it must be stressed that Gadamer gives a distinctively modern account of it—one that makes the modern notion of freedom as one of the essential ingredients of *Bildung*. As social beings, people can develop their distinctive powers only through their relationship with others; and this social need, says Gadamer, can find fulfilment only in a political and cultural context where there is mutual recognition in the Hegelian sense of that term. As one of his commentators has observed, *Bildung* in the sense in which it is understood by Gadamer is “an unending quest for civility” in political existence that can only be attained through a process of education or formation for which there can be no scientific rules, but rather some exemplary models (Grondin, 1995, 121).

In this connection, Gadamer’s fundamental argument with Heidegger’s thought is that in his critique of modern technological civilisation and the Western tradition Heidegger fails to acknowledge the universalistic

¹¹ As we shall see, Gadamer’s rehabilitation of tradition starts off precisely with his assessment of the notion of *Bildung*. See Grondin’s comparison of Heidegger’s criticism of humanism and Gadamer’s understanding of it (1995, 111-123).

achievements and the ethical horizons of both the ancients and the moderns.¹² Recall that for Heidegger the only way to overcome Platonic metaphysics—in which we are still allegedly imprisoned and which is guilty of “forgetfulness of being” that culminates in nihilistic humanism, technological struggle for world domination and liberal cosmopolitanism—is to declare war against all universalistic political projects on the basis of authentic communal identities and traditions. The politics of universalism, according to Heidegger, overlooks the meaning-giving background of the ontological pre-understanding that always shapes the historically specific and essentially incommensurable political traditions of different peoples. Gadamer, on the other hand, does not share this apocalyptic tone of Heidegger’s call for communal *polemos*—primarily because Gadamer thinks that the negative consequences of technology and power politics can be checked by a well-educated political reason.¹³ This is the main reason why, as one commentator has rightly observed, Gadamer explicitly rejects “the particularistic and eschatological character” of Heidegger’s vision (Zuckert, 1996, 4). This strain in Gadamer’s thought comes out very clearly when he says, “practical reason is capable of

¹² In her assessment of the political implications of Gadamer’s hermeneutics, Zuckert argues that the notion of fusion of horizons expresses an ethical character that seems to be lacking in Heidegger’s thought: “The aspect or element of Gadamer’s understanding of both Plato in particular and philosophy in general that most distinguished him from his mentor was his insistence on its *ethical* character. (Whereas Heidegger dismissed ‘ethics’ as a subject of the hoary ‘metaphysical’ tradition he was attempting to ‘destruct,’ Gadamer entitled the *Habilitationschrift* he wrote under Heidegger’s direction *Plato’s Dialectical Ethics*.) Philosophical dialogue and textual hermeneutics are essentially ethical, Gadamer argued from the beginning until the end of his career, because they entail respect for the integrity and independence of the other, not only in the initial attempt to understand but also in the peaceful, nonviolent character of the accord or agreement at which the dialogue aims” (Zuckert, 2004, 235).

¹³ Zuckert agrees on this point and states that Gadamer “advocates practical, political control and direction” (1996, 8).

employing science, like all human capacities, in a responsible way.”¹⁴ Therefore, Gadamer is not blindly opposed to technology and to its attendant instrumental consciousness because he thinks that a well-educated political community can effectively set a boundary to the domination of technology in the modern world.¹⁵

In response to Heidegger’s claim that modernity is characterised by “the darkening of the world” and “the cataclysmic crash of all horizons of meaning and value,” and that “*Nur ein Gott kann uns retten*,” Gadamer emphasises the hermeneutical view that “the displacement of human reality never goes so far that no forms of solidarity exist any longer.” Gadamer’s departure from Heidegger further manifests itself when argues: “Plato saw this very well: there is no city so corrupted that it does not realise something of the true city; that is what, in my opinion, is the basis for the possibility of practical philosophy” (1983, 264).¹⁶ In addition to this, Gadamer does not share Heidegger’s outright rejection of universal egalitarianism and the modern notion of freedom. In one of his essays on Hegel, Gadamer robustly defends the modern notion of freedom and universality: “The principle that all are free never again can be shaken” (1981, 37). In so doing, Gadamer also gives his

¹⁴ In his letter to Richard Bernstein, Gadamer writes: “I cannot really make sense of a *phronesis* that is supposed to be scientifically disciplined, although I can imagine a scientific approach that is disciplined by *phronesis*,” and adds that “Don’t we all run the risk of a terrible intellectual hubris if we equate Nietzsche’s anticipations and the ideological confusion of the present with life as it is actually lived with its own forms of solidarity? Here, in fact, my divergence from Heidegger is fundamental” (1983, 263-264).

¹⁵ To make the differences between his hermeneutics and Heidegger’s political vision more explicit, in one of his last interviews, Gadamer points out that “Heidegger wasn’t really interested in practical knowledge or *phronesis* at all” (2004, 20).

¹⁶ Gadamer also criticises Heidegger’s eschatological remarks on the emergence of new gods along these lines in an interview on Strauss (1984a, 9-11).

concept of *Bildung* a distinctively modern sense: Gadamer reminds us that what is characteristic of *Bildung* in the modern sense, in contrast to the ancient, is precisely its acknowledgement of the principle of freedom. Thus Gadamer's hermeneutics incorporates the modern idea of freedom as a crucial element. It is this emphasis on the interdependence of freedom and *Bildung* in the modern sense, then, that separates Gadamer's hermeneutics not only from the classical perspective but also from Heidegger's early political vision.

Another central concept of Gadamer's hermeneutics, to which there has already been an allusion, is dialogue, understood not only in the ontological sense but also in terms of its ethical and political sense. Recall that Heidegger's ontology, too, acknowledges the dialogical nature of human existence by defining the human condition in terms of care. Heidegger, as we have seen, derives some radically communitarian ethical and political consequences from this ontological account—albeit in a more disguised form in *Being and Time*. But when he directly speaks of politics, he explicitly states, as he does in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, that his ideal of authentic communitarianism is directed not only against the philosophical discourse of the Western tradition but also against the fundamental political features of modernity such as moral universalism, egalitarianism, individual freedoms, the institutions of liberal democracy and the ideals of social democracy. In stark contrast to Heidegger's account of authentic political community, Gadamer unabashedly evokes the cosmopolitan ideal of peaceful coexistence, mutual

respect and civility among different traditions and nations. The main point of hermeneutics, says Gadamer, is that the other may be right. He is certainly aware of the fact that it may be difficult to live by this maxim, but he argues that it seems to be the sole basis for civic coexistence and intercivilisational dialogue in the modern world. Here as elsewhere, Gadamer fully endorses the fruits of modernity:

“That is the essence, the soul of hermeneutics: To understand someone else is to see the justice, the truth, of their position. And this is what transforms us. And if we then have to become part of a new world civilisation, if this is our task, then we shall need a philosophy which is similar to my hermeneutics, a philosophy which teaches us to see the justification for the other's point of view and which thus makes us doubt our own” (1992, 152).

The concept of dialogue plays a vital role in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, but we must not interpret the strong emphasis placed on dialogue as a naïve restatement of postmodern relativism. For Gadamer, there is a middle ground between fanaticism and relativism; and, as we shall see, he attempts to capture this possibility through the notion of the “fusion of horizons,” which he defines as a way of “rising to a higher *universality*.” (1993, 305, emphasis added).

Gadamer is undoubtedly critical of the ills of modern societies. But by the same token, while he is critical of the excesses of individualism, social utilitarianism and technology as well as Jacobin fanaticism of some of the boosters of modernity, he is not one of its outright knockers.¹⁷ This attitude particularly reveals itself in Gadamer's interpretation of the political

¹⁷ For a discussion of Gadamer's thought vis-à-vis the boosters and knockers of modernity, see Newell (2003).

philosophies of Aristotle, Plato, the early German romantics, Hegel and the humanistic tradition. Gadamer's contention is that such an encounter may provide a critical perspective on our modern human condition. For Gadamer, these thinkers provide crucial references for understanding the nature of modern society and diagnosing its ills. There is no doubt that the Aristotelian tradition of practical philosophy figures prominently in Gadamer's hermeneutics. But it would be a grave misunderstanding to conclude from this that Gadamer is advocating a nostalgic return to Aristotelianism. What Gadamer finds inspiring in Aristotelian ethics and politics is the internal relationship between the human good and *ethos*, which is also of utmost importance in his hermeneutics. Thus he writes that "the virtue of practical reason is not to be thought of as a neutral capacity for finding the practical means for correct purposes or ends, but it is inseparably bound up with what Aristotle calls *ethos*. *Ethos* for him is the *arche*, the 'that' from which all practical-political enlightenment has to set out" (1981, 133).

Gadamer thus wants to do full justice to the indivisibility of ethics and *ethos*. This is why we often find him saying that all "human reason is determined by actual *ethos*" (1999, 68, 74), and that ethical knowledge is "knowing from within" (1999, 143). But we should be very careful at this point and avoid deducing too hasty conclusions from Gadamer's stress on the connection between ethics and *ethos*, between *logos* and *ethos*. Gadamer certainly does not suggest that the normative perspectives into which we have been "thrown" remain fixed immutably and are beyond criticism. He is simply

saying that “practical philosophy presupposes that we are already shaped by the normative images or ideas (*Vorstellungen*) in the light of which we have been brought up and that lie at the basis of the order of our entire social life” (1981, 135). This is in Gadamer’s view another way of expressing the primacy of finitude in human life. Gadamer’s concept of tradition, too, germinates from this core idea and rests on similar premises.

The most heated debates about Gadamer’s hermeneutics centre on his rehabilitation of tradition. It might be argued that it is precisely in his conception of tradition that Gadamer’s indebtedness to Heidegger’s thought fully comes into view in his hermeneutical philosophy. As Gadamer repeatedly states, “on the basis of Heidegger’s existential analysis of human existence hermeneutics appears in a new light” (1974, 129; 1993, 254-264; 2001, 37-39). Gadamer argues that it is the notion of “thrownness” which is the major crux of Heidegger’s hermeneutics.¹⁸ There is no doubt that this notion figures prominently in Gadamer’s concept of tradition. Recall that Heidegger has pointed out in *Being and Time* that understanding is the basic mode of human experience in the world, and that finitude means that human beings cannot be the sole masters of their own origin and destiny. Heidegger conveys the limitedness of all human projects by the term “thrownness” or *Geworfenheit*. Correspondingly, authentic political community, in Heidegger’s view, is brought

¹⁸ True, the notion of “*Geworfenheit*” figures prominently in Gadamer’s hermeneutics, but it appears with a different name—and, as we shall see more fully in Gadamer’s notion of the fusion of horizons, with a radically new content. Gadamer acknowledges this when he says: “In *Truth and Method* I do not talk about “*Geworfenheit*” but about tradition...this is my Heideggerian basis” (2001, 111-112).

about by a collective reappropriation or repetition of the primordial roots of a communal heritage as an act of projection that overcomes the traditional ways of existing. Gadamer's analysis of human finitude, though, replaces *Geworfenheit* with belongingness to tradition. As many commentators of hermeneutics have rightly observed, it is this emphasis on remembrance or recollection that unites Gadamer and Heidegger.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Gadamer's project does not follow Heidegger in giving primacy to the future (Grondin, 2003, 82-83) and to the question of being in the sense in which it is understood in Heidegger's early thought (Gadamer, 2004, 127).

In a radical departure from Heidegger and without falling prey to moral and historical relativism, Gadamer translates Heidegger's emphasis on thrownness, *polemos* and authentic repetition to a dialogical vision of human finitude in which the priority is simultaneously given to belongingness to tradition and to what he calls the "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 2004, 29). To put it differently, the point where Gadamer approaches Heidegger most can also be conceived of as the gateway through which Gadamer's thought moves from Heidegger's ontology to hermeneutics as practical philosophy: finitude and dialogue, or belongingness to tradition and the fusion of horizons go hand in hand in Gadamer's hermeneutics. We are finite, dialogical beings in the sense that we are always surrounded by what Gadamer calls

¹⁹ Risser's discussion of hermeneutic experience as recollection not only draws attention to Gadamer's indebtedness to Hegel and Heidegger but also shows the extent to which Gadamer's analysis of tradition rests on Plato's theory of recollection (1986, 41-55). For an overview of how Gadamer relates Plato's "theory of *anamnesis*" to his own understanding of tradition and finitude, see Gadamer (1993, 113).

Wirkungsgeschichte, the work of history—that is, a tradition, a horizon or a background against which our desires, opinions and aspirations make sense (1993, 300-301). What we are consists in the traditions that are alive within us, and most importantly we are what we have made out of these traditions when we constructively applied them to our situation. Traditions manifest their superiority over our insistence that they need to be redesigned in an obtrusive manner. As Gadamer writes: “In fact history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror” (1993, 276-277). But it needs to be noted that this emphasis on the essential factor of tradition which enters into all understanding does not turn Gadamer into an ultra-conservative or traditionalist. Nor does it imply an uncritical acceptance of tradition (1974, 108). The most common of the misinterpretations of Gadamer’s hermeneutics is the one which takes its stress on tradition to betoken socio-political conservatism. No misunderstanding of Gadamer’s thought could be more complete than one which attributed to him the view that the practice of critical thinking is to be assimilated to tradition, and that we should return to traditional ways of life. In truth, philosophical hermeneutics does not seek to rehabilitate premodern forms of thought or traditional ways of life. What are commonly defined as “traditional” societies are in fact those that are devoid of tradition in the hermeneutical sense. For Gadamer, we belong to a tradition hermeneutically only if we belong to it

creatively and *critically*, which can take place only under the conditions of modernity where “every renewed encounter with an older tradition is no longer a simple matter of appropriation” (1981, 98). In this respect, the hermeneutical understanding of tradition does not imply traditionalism and involves “in no sense a preference for that which is customary, to which one must be blindly subservient” (1990, 288).²⁰ On the contrary, Gadamer argues that the hermeneutical approach towards tradition is a rational, historically oriented one, with the understanding that one cannot simply swallow the tradition but has to enter a reasonable dialogue with it.²¹ This is ultimately what Gadamer means when he says that “modern consciousness takes a reflexive position concerning all that is handed down by tradition...This reflexive posture towards tradition is called interpretation” (1974, 111). Therefore, to speak of a living tradition, in Gadamer’s view, is to speak of an incessant dialectic of alienation and appropriation, between preservation and creative change: “Tradition,” says Gadamer, “exists only in constant alteration” (1990, 288). Living traditions are open to modification; and yet every modification contributes to their continuation. By recasting the projection of the past into the future as the preservation of a living tradition, however, Gadamer seems to

²⁰ This criticism has continuously been expressed by Habermas who claims that Gadamer’s hermeneutics advocates the view that “political theory can know nothing more than what is anyhow contained in the everyday norm consciousness of different populations” (Habermas, 1991, 202).

²¹ Peter Berger provides a fine sociological account of this reflexive posture towards (religious) tradition, which has a considerable theoretical affinity with Gadamer’s hermeneutics. Berger regards this reflexive attitude towards tradition as the “heretical imperative” and argues for it under the heading, “The Inductive Possibility” (Berger, 1979). A further theoretical affinity between Gadamer and Berger stems from the fact that Berger’s own understanding of tradition and religion has profoundly benefited from hermeneutics—though not Gadamer’s but Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics. See especially pp. 125-156.

have emphasised the continuity of tradition in opposition not only to Heidegger's ontology but also to what he takes to be "the excesses of the Enlightenment" project.

It must be noted that Gadamer's concept of tradition is in fact a corollary to the central place accorded to the notion of finitude in his hermeneutics. The idea of human finitude has always been at the centre of Gadamer's hermeneutics from *Truth and Method* to his most recent essays and interviews. Thus it would not be wrong to characterise Gadamer's hermeneutics as a political philosophy of human finitude. Finitude, Gadamer says, "is precisely what the human being is." In fact, what Gadamer calls hermeneutic experience is essentially the experience of human finitude (2004, 27). The next two sections will spell out more clearly and in more detail how deeply Gadamer's controversial conception of tradition is rooted in his understanding of human finitude.²²

3-3 Gadamer's Concept of Tradition

One of Gadamer's most striking criticisms of the Enlightenment, which is also one of the most controversial aspects of his hermeneutics, is his argument with the Enlightenment's "prejudice against prejudice."²³ "The

²² The philosophical and political significance of Gadamer's analysis of hermeneutic experience as "experience of human finitude" (Gadamer, 1993, 357) has also been emphasised by Beiner in his assessment of Gadamer's thought. See Beiner (1997, 83-94, 102-104).

²³ For the purposes of this thesis, it is important to realise that what Gadamer means by "the Enlightenment" is particularly the German *Aufklärung*, Kant and his followers in German moral and political philosophy. In that sense, Gadamer is careful to distinguish between the Kantian perspective and other variants in the Enlightenment moral and political thinking such as the common sense tradition within Scottish philosophy (1993, 24-25).

fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment,” writes Gadamer, “is the prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power” (1993, 270). Not only does Gadamer hold the Enlightenment responsible for the “negative connotations” of the concept of prejudice, but he also insistently tells us that “the recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust” (1993, 270).

In the perspective of the Enlightenment prejudices arise from a reliance on traditional views and refusal to employ one’s own reason. This critical spirit emphatically manifests itself in Kant’s famous answer in his influential essay on the question “What is Enlightenment?”: “Sapere aude! Have courage to use of your *own* understanding” (Kant, 1970, 54). Gadamer certainly recognises the political and philosophical significance of Kant’s answer as well as of his moral philosophy upon which his articulation of the spirit of the Enlightenment is based.²⁴ In this sense, it would be a grave misunderstanding to assume that

²⁴ Gadamer’s interpretation of Kant’s moral philosophy is a nuanced one. As Grondin has rightly observed, Gadamer never opposes Kant’s categorical imperative and his universalistic moral outlook in the name of historicism or a relativism of values. According to Grondin, “Gadamer is much nearer to Kant’s universalism...Gadamer’s conception of *Bildung* is linked to an elevation to universality, to a transcendence of simple particularity...What gives him a problem is not universalism, but intellectualism... which intends to make the rectitude of moral action depend on the cognition of an abstract norm” (Grondin, 2003, 104). In other words, for Gadamer, the problem with Kant’s moral philosophy is its formalism and “unconditionedness,” which needs to be balanced with Aristotelian practical philosophy (Gadamer, 1999, 18-36). Therefore, it might be argued that Gadamer’s hermeneutics does not represent a complete denial of Kant’s moral and political thought. As Gadamer says, “we should learn from both [Kant and Aristotle]” (Gadamer, 1979, 81). In his assessment of Gadamer’s hermeneutics, Beiner too calls attention to the presence of both Aristotelian and Kantian elements in Gadamer’s thought: “Gadamer’s ‘Aristotelianism’,” writes Beiner, “presupposes a prior fusion of Aristotelian and Kantian horizons” (Beiner, 1997, 86). This articulation of Gadamer’s hermeneutics is also fully in line with my interpretation of Gadamer’s concept of tradition. Recall that I have argued that Gadamer’s concept of tradition cannot be reduced to traditionalism because the hermeneutical reappropriation of tradition is not a slavish reproduction of that tradition but a creative rearticulation of it. It is also part of my argument to

Gadamer's criticism of the Enlightenment's "prejudice against prejudice" is tantamount to a critique of the Enlightenment *per se*. Indeed, Gadamer fully acknowledges that "it is in the critique of religion that we can see the real significance of defining the essence of enlightenment as having courage to think differently in the face of all the dominant prejudices" (Gadamer, 1998, 71). The radical Enlightenment, says Gadamer, rightly declared war on all prejudices. He also maintains that this is "its emotional appeal, its *pathos*," that by way of this *pathos* "it accomplished a kind of liberation, an emancipation of the mind" (2001, 43), and that this also "implies the pragmatic relationship of science to human happiness, health, welfare and freedom from suffering and misery" (1998, 73). Moreover, Gadamer acknowledges that modern society is based on the principle of freedom and that what is politically authoritative in modernity derives its authority essentially from public debate and argument. In this respect, Gadamer is advocating neither a nostalgic or Romantic reaction to the spirit of modernity nor political or moral relativism. Gadamer's earliest works, as well his more recent essays, lectures and interviews, represent the greatest testimony to his lifelong loyalty to some of the basic ideals of the Enlightenment, such as freedom of thought, religious tolerance and the rule of law. Thus it is important to realise that while Gadamer is one of the profoundest critics of the Enlightenment's concept of prejudice and reason, perhaps as formidable as Burke, he is free from any reactionary prejudices

show that such a creative rearticulation of tradition can only be achieved thanks to the historical break introduced by the French Revolution and the moral horizon of the Enlightenment. In that sense, far from being a complete repudiation of Kant's moral and political philosophy, Gadamer's hermeneutics represents a supersession of it.

and hatred of liberty, equality and fraternity.²⁵ But by the same token Gadamer argues that the notion that reason represents the unboundedness of human aspiration and the unlimited possibilities open to human thought, planning and endeavour is ultimately illusory and untenable and has dangerous political implications:

“We have to repudiate the illusion of completely illuminating the darkness of our motivations and tendencies...One has to ask oneself whether the dynamic of human life can be conceived adequately in terms of progress, of a continual advance from the unknown into the known, and whether the course of human culture is actually a linear progression from mythology to enlightenment. One should entertain a completely different notion: whether the movement of human existence does not issue in a relentless inner tension between illumination and concealment. Might it not be just a prejudice of modern times that the notion of progress that is in fact constitutive for the spirit of scientific research should be transferable to the whole of human living and human culture?

...If one wishes to appraise the significance or the task and the limits of what we call hermeneutics today, one must bear in mind this philosophic and humane background, this fundamental doubt about the legitimacy of objective self-consciousness” (1981, 104-105).

What Gadamer is critical of is neither the spirit of the Enlightenment and its emphasis on the critique of religion and political authority nor the pragmatic benefits of science and technology. Rather, the target of Gadamer’s criticism is the Enlightenment antithesis between *logos* (i.e. reason) and *ethos* (hence prejudices) as well as the modern notion that “the individual...represents the *ens realissimum* of all beings” (Gadamer, 1999, 16). For Gadamer, this problematic self-understanding of modernity not only epitomizes the belief that reason, because it is always situated within an *ethos*, cannot therefore be reasonable. More importantly, this conception of reason, says Gadamer,

²⁵ For a discussion of the Enlightenment perspective and its critics (“counter Enlightenment”) contained within modern political philosophy, see Berlin’s interesting article, Berlin (2001, 1-24).

repudiates the hermeneutical emphasis on human finitude and limits on human freedom.²⁶ According to Gadamer, “the idea of an absolute reason” is not a possibility for human beings because all human existence is “limited and qualified in various ways.” From this it follows that “reason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms,” that is to say, it “remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates” (1993, 276). Although Gadamer seldom refers directly to Hegel in his description of the concept of tradition in *Truth and Method*, a strong Hegelian legacy of viewing historical phenomena within their integral socio-cultural perspective is always present—as Gadamer has repeatedly acknowledged in several parts of his magnum opus. Thus Gadamer tells us that to say that there is no such antithesis between reason and *ethos* is not to deny the critical spirit of the Enlightenment.²⁷ On the

²⁶ It needs to be stressed that while Gadamer is critical of the unconditionedness of Kant's moral philosophy, which he characterizes as “an ethics of the *ought* that overlooks the hermeneutical problem” (Gadamer, 2001, 82), he also thinks that our present-day prepossession with the technological dream and emancipatory utopia does not arise from Kant's moral philosophy but from our contemporary “self-consciousness that has come to rest more and more on our ability to do and make things”, and from which “the moral basis of Kant's idea of freedom and Enlightenment has vanished by degrees” (Gadamer, 1998, 79). Thus, there is a sense in which Gadamer makes a fine demarcation between Kant's moral philosophy and its ramifications on German Idealism and Hegel on the one hand, and the technological dream that aspires to eliminate contingency, finitude and fallibility from human life and political existence on the other. Gadamer's acknowledgement of the “dialectic of the Enlightenment” further manifests itself in one of the footnotes in *Truth and Method* where Gadamer says: “Horkheimer and Adorno seem to be right in their analysis of the ‘dialectic of the Enlightenment’” (1993, 274).

²⁷ This can also be observed in Gadamer's response to one of his critics who merely considers Gadamer's thought as a strong criticism of the Enlightenment and Kant's understanding of it. In response to that comment, Gadamer argues that it would be more appropriate to regard his hermeneutics as a critique of what he takes to be the excesses of the Enlightenment rather than as a root and branch criticism of it. Gadamer says: “It is extremely astonishing to me that my project of a philosophical hermeneutics as well as some other such projects are being discussed under the title ‘critique of enlightenment’ and not with reference to the idealist concept of the ‘completed enlightenment’ which was coined by Fichte. For what matters to us can only be the question whether a completed enlightenment which would dissolve all human predisposition and societal prejudices is an intelligible claim... What Kant calls enlightenment in truth corresponds to what hermeneutics has in view. To a large

contrary, it is to acknowledge the influence of what Hegel calls “objective spirit” on human existence and political life (1981, 14, 30). Echoing a Hegelian theme, Gadamer maintains that the idea that it is possible to abstract from historical reality and construct a political order according to the mere will of an aggregate of human beings may lead to chaos and terror in which such utopian fanaticism ultimately ends. In other words, Gadamer’s concern is to draw attention to those modes of being that lie outside the circumference of human consciousness and control—i.e., those social and political institutions such as family, language and community life that are of human origin, but which exercise considerable influence on individual destinies. Thus, this hermeneutical emphasis on human finitude and historicity, and certainly not any hostility to the political fruits of the Enlightenment, is the motivation behind Gadamer’s provocative sentence put in italics at the beginning of his analysis of the concept of tradition in *Truth and Method*: “*The prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitute the historical reality of his being*” (1993, 276-277).

In stark opposition to the denigration of the status of prejudices by the Enlightenment, and building on Heidegger,²⁸ Gadamer argues that literally a

extent, Kant’s famous essay... belongs already to that critique of enlightenment which Rousseau inaugurated and which is directed against the expectation that the progress of the sciences will lead to a moral perfection of humanity” (1994a, 287).

²⁸ Warnke’s analysis demonstrates Gadamer’s indebtedness to Heidegger by comparing Gadamer’s interpretation of prejudices in *Truth and Method* (265-270) with Heidegger’s description of the hermeneutical circle in *Being and Time* (188-195). Warnke remarks: “Here Gadamer follows Heidegger... and argues that interpretive projections of meaning are rooted in the situation of the interpreter... This situated determination of meaning reflects that which Heidegger refers to as the fore-structure of understanding. His point is that even before I begin consciously to interpret a text or grasp the meaning of an object, I have already placed it

prejudice (*Vorurteil*), far from being necessarily a false judgement, is simply a pre-judgement (*Vor-urteil*) (1993, 270). Rather than being simply an “unfounded judgement,” a prejudice, in Gadamer’s view, is a judgement made before all the evidence has been adequately examined. Thus Gadamer points out that to assume that all prejudices are illegitimate as the Enlightenment does is “a prejudice against prejudice.” Another way of stressing the significance of prejudices in human life is, according to Gadamer, to say that human beings are thoroughly historical and that the normative authority of our prejudices extends even to our rebellions against them. But at the same time it needs to be emphasised that there is no room for subjectivism in Gadamer’s interpretation of the concept of prejudice.²⁹ One’s prejudices are not always one’s idiosyncratic biases, and thus the prejudgements of the individual are not his alone but those of the culture and tradition to which he belongs:

“It seems to me that the great horizon of the past, out of which our culture and our present live, influences us in everything we want, hope for, or fear in the future... I have given the following formulation to this insight: It is not so much our judgements as it is our prejudices that constitute our being. This is a provocative formulation, for I am using it to restore to its rightful place a positive concept of prejudice that was driven out of our linguistic usage by the French and the English Enlightenment. It can be shown that the concept of prejudice did not originally have the meaning we have attached to it. Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something—whereby what we encounter says something to us” (1977, 9).

within a certain context (*Vorhabe*), approached it from a certain perspective (*Vorsicht*), and conceived of it in a certain way (*Vorgriff*). There is no neutral vantage point from which to survey the ‘real’ meaning of a text or object” (Warnke, 1987, 77).

²⁹ As Warnke has observed, from the point of view of Gadamer’s concept of prejudice, “it is the Enlightenment’s appeal to tradition in understanding that is arbitrary and subjectivistic. This Enlightenment appeal assumes the possibility of an interpreter’s determining the meaning of an object in an autonomous and unconditioned way, as an individual subject, with the use of his or her reason alone” (1987, 80-81).

Gadamer's critique of the Enlightenment conception of prejudice thus leads Gadamer to conclude that the world in terms of which human beings understand their existence is historically limited. Gadamer considers this account of the hermeneutic predicament to have fundamental consequences for ethical knowledge and political theory. But, we might wonder, if our attempts to understand ourselves and to decide how we ought to act proceed only on the constantly shifting ground of an ongoing tradition, then does this also mean that we cannot hope to transcend that historical tradition? And if, according to Gadamer's hermeneutics, how we understand continually changes, then we must also ask ourselves whether or not it is possible for us to appeal to an unchanging human nature and human reason for our moral foundations. Gadamer's answer to these questions is that it is no longer possible for us (i.e., those who live in modern societies and have appropriated, in one way or another, the European civilisation) to affirm any vision of human existence that does not take into account historicity. Under these civilisational conditions, Gadamer argues, we require a political philosophy and an ethics that can accommodate a conception of human nature and reason that is also historical—that is to say, a view of reason that is “not detached from a being that is becoming, but determined by it and determinative of it” (1993, 312).

But precisely because he stated that human existence is essentially historical, Gadamer's hermeneutics has also been charged with relativism. In his friendly dispute with Gadamer, as well as in his influential works in political philosophy, Strauss argues that historicist philosophy (in which philosophical

hermeneutics is deeply rooted) is inherently relativist in that the conclusion of this philosophy is that there are no universal and absolute moral truths or goods.³⁰ For Strauss, philosophical hermeneutics, which is profoundly indebted to Heidegger's historicist thought, necessarily entails that all moral claims are ultimately prisoners of their own finite horizons. In Strauss' view, this also means that philosophical hermeneutics has no normative power or relevance for political philosophy. Furthermore, Strauss also points out that "the historicist thesis is self-contradictory or absurd" (1971b, 25) because its basic premise claims to have universal validity which itself is denied by the very same premise. What perhaps most troubles Strauss is the fate of moral integrity in a historicist age, one that is marked by historical relativism and anxious uncertainty concerning the status of moral truths and fundamental political questions. Differently put, Strauss is essentially concerned that we inevitably will fail to make universal moral claims if we affirm the fundamental insights of Gadamer's hermeneutics.

There is, however, a fundamental agreement between Gadamer and Strauss concerning the contradictory characteristics of radical historicism because for Strauss as well as for Gadamer it remains theoretically incorrect

³⁰ Both Strauss's critique of philosophical hermeneutics and his arguments against historicism can be found in his correspondence with Gadamer concerning *Truth and Method* (1978, 5-12). His two major arguments against historicism and relativism are best expressed in works which do not refer to Gadamer, although they either include references to or draw heavily on Heidegger (1971b, 9-34; 1989, 27-46). However, one of Strauss' influential essays in which he asserts that Heidegger's existentialism is the ethical corollary to historicism and that the fundamental characteristic of Heidegger's historicist philosophy is the absence of any political philosophy does include a reference to Gadamer as well (1971a, 1-9).

and potentially dangerous in practice.³¹ The radical historicist, Gadamer says, is concerned that if we make universal moral claims we will deny the historicity of our knowledge. As we will see more clearly in his notion of *Horizontverschmelzung*, Gadamer's hermeneutics, by contrast, simultaneously affirms both historicity and the possibility of true moral claims. For his part, Strauss seems to consider such a philosophy as unreliable because no objective guarantee has been given. For Gadamer, however, there are no such guarantees that absolutely prove a claim to be true in ethics and politics. But at the same time the absence of such absolute guarantees, in Gadamer's view, does not mean the absence of genuine truth in moral knowledge. Gadamer even goes so far as to suggest that by claiming that the only alternative to historicist relativism and *Seinsvergessenheit* can be "the idea of an infinite intellect" and of absolute truth, Strauss himself seems to "share the point of view of full historical enlightenment and miss the real hermeneutic problem" (1993, 535).³²

Gadamer's fundamental argument against Strauss' criticism of hermeneutics is that moral claims are not monological claims they appear to be from the objectivist perspective on truth—a perspective which is in

³¹ In fact, Gadamer and Strauss, as Gadamer has stated on a number of occasions, agree on more points than one. Their attitude towards the positivistic tendencies within the human sciences is a case in point. Just as Strauss (1971b, 35-80) is critical of the distinction between facts and values in the modern age, so too Gadamer (1993, 9-43) criticizes the subordination of the human sciences to the natural sciences and laments the gradual disappearance of the moral and political tradition of the concept of *sensus communis* within the human sciences.

³² Ironically, Habermas who defends the universalism of not the ancients but the Enlightenment has also raised the criticism of relativism against Gadamer's hermeneutics. Gadamer's response to Habermas, as we shall see, is similar: hermeneutics as practical philosophy is "a dangerous relativism only from the standard of an absolute knowledge that is not ours."

Gadamer's view assumed both by the radical historicist and by Strauss. Rather, they are always part of ever-larger dialogues in which our claims meet responses that correct and enrich them. Gadamer thinks that when horizons fuse in this manner we witness the only kind of universality attainable by human finitude. In other words, this is the only universality that human intellect can achieve, and Gadamer considers this kind of truth to be the distinguishing characteristic of the experience of human understanding in the humanities and social sciences as well as in art, ethics and political life. Moreover, Gadamer sees no self-contradiction in philosophical hermeneutics because he thinks that his fundamental thesis (that is, it is the *physis* of humankind that they have history and hence human existence is essentially historical) does not aim to show that "this proposition will always be considered true, any more than that it has always been so considered. Rather, historicism that takes itself seriously will allow for the fact that one day its thesis will no longer be considered true—i.e., that people will think 'unhistorically'" (1993, 534).

Although Gadamer suggests that the reality of historically interpretive understanding is not unique to the modern age, he also emphasises that what he calls "historical consciousness" represents "the privilege of modern man to have a full awareness of the historicity of everything present and the relativity of all opinions," and that "today no one can shield himself from this reflexivity characteristic of the modern spirit" (1974, 110). For Gadamer, the impact of this distinctively modern phenomenon on our *ethos* and self-understanding is enormous and unprecedented:

"The appearance of historical consciousness is very likely the most important revolution among those we have undergone since the beginning of the modern epoch. Its spiritual magnitude probably surpasses what we recognise in the applications of natural science, applications which have so visibly transformed the surface of our planet. The historical consciousness which characterises contemporary man is a *privilege*, perhaps even a *burden*, the like of which has never been imposed on any previous generation" (1974, 109, emphases added).

Thus Gadamer agrees with Strauss that our present-day understanding of history is fundamentally different from the way in which the past appeared to any previous epoch. But Gadamer, perhaps more than Strauss, hints at its ambiguous value by acknowledging both the *privilege* and *burden* of having a historical consciousness. The ambiguous value of having a historical consciousness stems from the fact that so much of what was traditionally accepted as true has today become foreign or even suspect as false: "Modern consciousness—precisely as 'historical consciousness'—takes a reflexive position concerning all that is handed down by tradition" (1974, 111). Precisely this reflexive attitude towards tradition gives Gadamer's understanding of tradition its peculiarly modern and post-Kantian characteristic. For Gadamer, this is an irreversible stage in European consciousness, a stage that has been reached "once the French Revolution had broken the self-evidence of the Greco-Christian tradition" (1984, 315). What is particularly telling is that Gadamer considers the French Revolution and the critical spirit of the Enlightenment as one of the fundamental moments in the formation of "a universal hermeneutics": when the past becomes alien and when "every renewed encounter with an older tradition is no longer a simple matter of appropriation," this is "the hour of universal hermeneutics" (1981, 97-98).

For Gadamer, a second modification of the historical consciousness occurs in the post-Romantic epoch when “the Romantics developed the ability... to discover the charm of the past, the far and the alien” (1984, 315). Gadamer’s interpretation of what he calls “romantic hermeneutics” is a nuanced one. True, he acknowledges the contributions of the romantics—particularly Schleiermacher’s—to his own hermeneutics, but he is also critical of some of the presuppositions of the romantic perspective. Thus, on the one hand, Gadamer argues that with Schleiermacher and his followers hermeneutics has acquired a central place in viewing human experience and that they have become the first “to develop the problem of hermeneutics as the primary aspect of social experience” (1984, 316). Furthermore, Gadamer points out that all too frequently commentators miss the emphasis placed simultaneously on the communal and individual aspects of human existence in Schleiermacher and his associates in early German Romanticism. More importantly, the romantic approach towards the concepts of authority and tradition, Gadamer argues, stands in heightening contrast with the Enlightenment’s perspective. According to the romantic criticism of the Enlightenment, “our finite historical being is marked by the fact that the authority of what has been handed down to us—and not just what is clearly grounded—always has power over our attitudes” (1993, 280). Differently put, Gadamer thinks that it is to “romanticism that we owe this correction of the Enlightenment:” that we become mature and rational beings, as the romantics have demonstrated, does not mean that we are freed from all tradition. In

denying the power of tradition in ethics and politics, Gadamer reminds us, the Enlightenment has failed to recognise the fact that “the real force of morals is based on tradition” (1993, 280).³³ Thus, by refusing to admit the centrality of tradition in political existence as well as the connection between morality and tradition, the Enlightenment has ultimately failed to understand not only the complexities of moral knowledge and action but also how tradition “in large measure determines our institutions and attitudes.” This is the main reason why it remained “abstract and revolutionary” (1993, 281). Indeed, part of Gadamer’s argument is to show how little we are aware of the fact that even when we consciously attempt to break with tradition, it retains its normative force.

In spite of the positive contributions of romanticism, argues Gadamer, from Schleiermacher all the way down to Dilthey, “there was no recognition of the older tradition of practical philosophy.” Thus, those thinkers who have conceptually remained within the Romantic heritage have failed to gain any “insight into the connection between hermeneutics and practical philosophy” (1981, 99-100). This failure, Gadamer points out, is largely responsible for

³³ In his nuanced assessment of the excesses of the Enlightenment and the Romantic response to it, Gadamer might also have made his difference with Heidegger more explicit—particularly in relation to the role of tradition in morality and political life. But Gadamer characteristically has not preferred to do that. Nevertheless, the difference becomes visible in the foreword to *Truth and Method*, to which there has already been an allusion above. In his analysis of the concept of tradition, the difference between Gadamer and Heidegger becomes more explicit, as Gadamer totally drops the distinction between authentic and inauthentic, “idle chatter” and authentic communication which figure so prominently in *Being and Time*. In his essay ‘Heidegger’s Later Philosophy,’ Gadamer very briefly touches on the concept of authenticity and argues that Heidegger had described everyday existence in his early work “so acrimoniously” (Gadamer, 1976, 215-217). In her fine interpretation of Gadamer’s thought, Zuckert, too, discusses the differences between Gadamer’s interpretation of tradition and Heidegger’s view of everyday existence (Zuckert, 1996, 297).

both the romantics' inability to see the universality of hermeneutics and their rather anachronistic approach towards tradition, which Gadamer regards as "traditionalism" and "historicism." The fundamental error of romanticism, in Gadamer's view, stems from the fact that it shares the philosophy of history of the Enlightenment and only reverses its values, seeking to establish the validity of what is old simply on its being old. Turning from romanticism's criticism of the Enlightenment's understanding of tradition to the romantic approach towards the past, Gadamer finds more traces of the influence of the Enlightenment on romanticism, for it is here that the historicism of the modern age—by which Gadamer means the dichotomy of reason and tradition, shared both by the Enlightenment and by romanticism—and its political implications are most effective and visible. Differently put, like the Enlightenment, "Romanticism conceives of tradition as an antithesis to the freedom of reason and regards it as something historically given, like nature" (1993, 281). The following passage in *Truth and Method* testifies to Gadamer's distance not only from the traditionalist nostalgia of romanticism but also from Heidegger's *völkisch* communitarianism:

"In contrast to the Enlightenment's faith in perfection, which thinks in terms of complete freedom from 'superstition' and the prejudices of the past, we now find that olden times—the world of myth, unreflective life, not yet analysed away by consciousness, in a 'society close to nature,' the world of Christian chivalry—all these acquire a romantic magic, even a priority over truth. Reversing the Enlightenment's presupposition results in the paradoxical tendency toward restoration—i.e., the tendency to reconstruct the old because it is old, the conscious return to the unconscious, culminating in the recognition of the superior wisdom of the primeval age of myth" (1993, 273).

Here, as elsewhere, Gadamer characteristically avoids making the differences between his own concept of tradition and Heidegger's explicit. To

be sure, Heidegger is as critical of traditionalism as Gadamer. But it might well be argued that Heidegger's account of authentic political community, with its simultaneous emphasis on a *polemos* against "the darkening of the world" in the modern age as well as on a mythic reconstruction of primordial roots of a *völkisch* community for the actualisation of an apocalyptic future, undoubtedly carries the stamp of some of the sensibilities of romanticism. Gadamer, however, avoids such explicit comparisons with Heidegger. Nevertheless, Gadamer's argument aims to demonstrate that, with romanticism, belief in the perfectibility of reason solely changes into the idealisation of an allegedly paradisiacal primal state. But such a mythical orientation towards the past is based on the problematic notion that there exists a mythical collective consciousness or a mysterious, authentic beginning. The romantic obsession with primordial, authentic beginnings expresses, Gadamer reminds us, nothing but a useless and potentially dangerous nostalgia for what has supposedly been destroyed by the onslaught of modernity. This romantic illusion is "just as dogmatic and abstract as that of a state of perfect enlightenment or of absolute knowledge" (1993, 274). For Gadamer, it is when traditions turn into empty, mechanical cults that they develop into a source of unintelligible mystification and are conceived of as entirely irrational sources, emanating from the primordial roots of an authentic community.

What is more problematic with the notion of a romantic retrieval of primordial origins, to repeat once again, is that it is itself based on the Enlightenment: "primeval wisdom is only the counterimage of 'primeval

stupidity” (1993, 274, 275). In this respect, both approaches are based on the affirmation of an unconditional antithesis between tradition and reason, which is the main target of Gadamer’s criticism and his hermeneutics as practical philosophy in the first place. Thus, “the romantic faith in the ‘growth of tradition’,” says Gadamer, “before which all reason must remain silent, is fundamentally like the Enlightenment, and just as prejudiced” (1993, 281). Both the idea of a romantic retrieval of mythical origins and the Enlightenment’s complete denial of the notion of tradition, according to Gadamer, ignore that there is always “an element of freedom” in a living tradition. As Gadamer puts it more explicitly, “Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated” (1993, 281).³⁴

The distinctive features of Gadamer’s hermeneutics figure conspicuously in his interpretation of the concept of authority—a highly political concept which has been, according to Gadamer, “distorted by the Enlightenment” in its fight against ignorance, superstition, fanaticism, oppression and barbarism (1993, 279). Gadamer’s attempt to discuss the concept of authority rests on similar premises. The Enlightenment’s understanding of authority, in Gadamer’s view, derives from the “mutually

³⁴ Gadamer considers the idea of an “organic society” and its ramifications in Marx and Rousseau as other cases of “romantic refraction.” According to Gadamer, in Marx the notion of an organic society “appears as a kind of relic of natural law that limits the validity of his socio-economic theory of class struggle.” Gadamer maintains that the same idea goes back to “Rousseau’s description of society before the division of labour and the introduction of property,” and adds that “Plato had already demonstrated the illusory nature of this political theory in his ironical account of a state of nature in the third book of the *Republic*” (1993, 274-275).

exclusive antithesis between authority and reason" (1993, 273), which is in turn based on "the Enlightenment conception of reason and freedom" (1993, 279). It needs to be stressed, however, that it would be a misunderstanding of Gadamer's position to interpret his conception of authority as a defence of "counter-Enlightenment" or of authority against human reason. Rather, here as elsewhere, Gadamer's concern is directed against what he takes to be the "dogmatism of the Enlightenment" that characteristically views the concept of authority as diametrically opposed to freedom and reason. In doing so, Gadamer writes, the Enlightenment has "denigrated all authority." According to this view, authority is nothing but "blind obedience" and "a source of prejudices;" and hence it can by no means be "a source of truth." But Gadamer warns us against this false dichotomy between authority and reason:

"I cannot accept the assertion that reason and authority are abstract antitheses, as the emancipatory Enlightenment did... For in my opinion this abstract antithesis embraced by the Enlightenment is a mistake fraught with ominous consequences. In it, reflection is granted a false power, and the true dependencies involved are misjudged on the basis of a fallacious idealism. Certainly I would grant that authority exercises an essential dogmatic power in innumerable forms of domination: from the ordering of education and the mandatory commands of the army and government all the way to the hierarchy of power created by political forces or fanatics" (1976, 33).

But for Gadamer this is not the "essence of authority." The acceptance of authority, Gadamer says, is not always a question of coerced obedience. Rather, authority depends upon what he calls "dogmatic recognition," which in turn derives from man's finiteness and fallibility. It is on a highly provocative note that Gadamer rounds off his definition of authority by saying that authority

"lives not from dogmatic power but from dogmatic acceptance. What is this dogmatic acceptance, however, if not that one concedes superiority in knowledge and insight to the authority, and for this reason one believes that

authority is right? Only on this crucial concession, this belief, is acceptance founded. Authority can rule only because it is freely recognised and accepted. The obedience that belongs to true authority is neither blind nor slavish" (1976, 33-34).

It is not difficult to see how such a view of authority could be so construed as to mean that Gadamer made human reason subordinate to the authority of the past or the status quo.³⁵ Passages such as these sound Burkean and sometimes have been read in such a light. In fact, as we shall see, Habermas has voiced this criticism and argued that Gadamer's interpretation of tradition has Burkean overtones. However, the truth of the matter is that in the context of the concept of authority, the thrust of Gadamer's argument is aimed at the romantic and subjectivistic implications of the notion which views every limitation as purely external coercion and as a matter of slavish obedience to persons in positions of power or to the dead weight of the past. In a language somewhat reminiscent of Herder and Hegel, Gadamer refers to the significance of exposure to morally exemplary individuals and morally relevant laws in political life in order to show the limitations of "a purely inward morality" of Kantian rationalism (1981, 30). This is precisely what

³⁵ Gadamer's interpretation of the concept of authority has been perhaps one of the most hotly debated issues in the literature on philosophical hermeneutics. Some critics have argued that there seems to be a tension between a dialogical and a conservative Gadamer. Even Warnke—one of Gadamer's commentators whose assessment of Gadamer's thought is remarkably balanced and who views philosophical hermeneutics with considerable approval—remarks that "Gadamer's thesis here is the fundamentally conservative one that since we are historically finite, since we have no concept of rationality that is independent of the tradition to which we belong and hence no universal norms and principles to which we can appeal, we ought not even to attempt to overthrow the authority of that tradition" (1987, 136). But Gadamer's writings provide ample textual evidence to support the contention that dialogue and tradition, reason and authority, finitude and universality go hand in hand in his thought. More importantly, unlike traditionalists, Gadamer never says that we are enclosed within the horizons of our political community and its cultural prejudices. Thus, Gadamer has responded to this kind of criticism by saying that the charge of conservatism is still based on the idea of an infinite intellect which is "not ours." Any attempt, therefore, to juxtapose a dialogical Gadamer against a conservative Gadamer flies in the face of textual evidence.

Gadamer means when he says that authority essentially rests on “an act of acknowledgement and knowledge... and hence on act of reason itself, which aware of its limitations, trusts the better insight of others” (1993, 279). Moreover, Gadamer’s emphasis on the “dogmatic recognition” in finite human life must be situated within the framework of his larger ontological claim concerning the interdependence of reason and tradition in human existence, which he sums up in a critical passage that should be quoted in its entirety:

“The fact is that in tradition there is always an element of freedom and of history itself. Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation, and it is active in all historical change. But preservation is an act of reason, though an inconspicuous one. For this reason, only innovation and planning appear to be the result of reason. But this is an illusion. Even where life changes violently, as in ages of revolution, far more preserved in the supposed transformation of everything than anyone knows, and it combines with the new to create a new value. At any rate, preservation is as much a freely chosen action as are revolution and renewal. That is why both the Enlightenment’s critique of tradition and the romantic rehabilitation of it lag behind their true historical being” (1993, 281-282).

It is also important to realise that despite some seeming parallels between Burke’s and Gadamer’s conceptions of tradition, Gadamer does not advocate a Burkean understanding of tradition and political life.³⁶ For Gadamer, the point is not to defend this or that tradition but to draw attention to its relevance for ethical and political life. Moreover, the fundamental

³⁶ It must be stressed that in *Truth and Method* Burke’s name appears only once—in a passage dealing with the Enlightenment’s concept of prejudice (1993, 273). And Gadamer nowhere suggests that his vision of moral and political life has been inspired by Burke’s criticism of the French Revolution. But if Gadamer’s criticism of early German Romanticism is of any indication, we may conclude with some justification that Gadamer’s view of tradition and political life is anything but Burkean. Nonetheless, there is one more allusion to Burke, not in *Truth and Method* or in any of Gadamer’s major writings but in one of his interviews where Gadamer says: “Romanticism primarily was a German development... And why is this so? Marx said, because the Germans didn’t make a revolution... We Germans were never quite convinced of the transformative power of the Enlightenment; Burke has been more effective among us than Saint Juste and the concluding period of the French Revolution” (1992a, 126).

problem for Gadamer is, How is it possible to demonstrate “the limits and dogmatism of a completed *Aufklärung*” without betraying reason. Just as Kant’s moral philosophy is too rationalistic, an ethic for repressing rather than cultivating sensibility, in like manner Burke’s criticism of the French Revolution is one-sided because Gadamer does not consider tradition as a hallowed prejudice—and still less as a binding inheritance from our forebears or a support for the ancien regime. In this respect, Gadamer undoubtedly recognises that there can be no returning to premodern times. Therefore, hermeneutical thinking should not be seen as a return to the allegedly happy days of the past, but as a supersession of the pitfalls of the “dogmatic Enlightenment.” Gadamer is convinced that the powers of criticism are as inescapable as they are invaluable in modern societies. In that sense, Gadamer does not see any value in affirming the value of prejudice as such. But at the same time, and in stark opposition to “the ideals of a completed enlightenment,” Gadamer is also convinced that in philosophy, as well as in ethics and politics, we must begin with what we have, because he thinks that as historical and political beings we are always *medias res*, or in the middle of things. There is no such thing as a completely new beginning in human life, which is for Gadamer just another way of saying that “we are always situated within traditions” (1993, 282).

3-4 *Horizontverschmelzung* and the Hermeneutical Experience

It should be clear by now that Gadamer’s concept of tradition does not justify interpreting it as an expression of nostalgia or as a work of anti-

modernist traditionalism. As Gadamer sees it, “the power of effective history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) does not depend on its being recognised. This, precisely, is the power of history over finite human consciousness (1993, 301). But to say that what we are, whether we are explicitly aware of it or not, is always being influenced by tradition does not mean that tradition is something given that stands over against us—i.e., some kind of “supersubject” or “a permanent condition” (1993, 293; 2001, 51). On the contrary, as Gadamer argues, “we produce it ourselves inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence further determine it ourselves” (1993, 295). In this sense, modification of the existing social and cultural conditions is “no less a form of connection to tradition than is a defence of existing conditions” because a living tradition “exists only in constantly becoming other than it is “ (1990, 289). To speak of tradition is, then, to remember human finitude and acknowledge that there is tradition and the silent work of history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) in all understanding (1993, 301).³⁷

It would also be wrong to identify Gadamer’s concept of tradition with something irrational, arbitrary and authoritarian. All that we have seen of the aims and presuppositions of Gadamer’s thought belies this interpretation. Moreover, as I have shown in the previous section, the thrust of Gadamer’s argument is aimed at demonstrating that there is also an act of reason and freedom in the evolution of a living tradition. A living tradition, in Gadamer’s

³⁷ All too frequently commentators miss the crucial link between finitude and the critical dimension in Gadamer’s hermeneutics. But, as Grondin remarks, to ignore *Wirkungsgeschichte* and finitude, and fail to acknowledge that history is active in us, works in us, or penetrates us is “to be exposed still more blindly to the hold of unmastered prejudices” (Grondin, 2003, 76).

view, acts as a preservative of the most vital characteristics of political communities, but it would be a misunderstanding of his thought to interpret this as some kind of sentimentalism. Gadamer acknowledges that a tradition can be a danger when it becomes too mechanical and acts as a narcotic. Gadamer's aim is thus not to dethrone reason. On the contrary, as Grondin has observed, Gadamer is absolutely convinced that "if the rationality of a tradition becomes problematic, it usually ends in atrophy... To maintain it means nothing but a question of restoration or folklore" (Grondin, 2003, 98). Gadamer is not interested in those traditions. Nor is it Gadamer's aim to preserve social stability and harmony and subordinate the development of individual person to that of the supposedly higher unity, the closed community or traditionalist conception of tradition. This kind of cultural romanticism or closed communitarianism is completely alien to Gadamer's thought. Gadamer's concept of tradition is an ideal inspired by the spirit of a cosmopolitan humanism where the main concern is with the growth of political communities in which the ultimate goal is to promote the realisation of mutual respect and recognition as well as the full development of the intellectual and moral capacities of all human beings—an ideal which fully comes into view in Gadamer's analysis of the key notions of his hermeneutics such as *Bildung*, dialogue and political reason. As we shall see in the following chapter, precisely Gadamer's stress on the interdependence between cultivation and reason stands in the forefront of the debate between Gadamer and Habermas. But before presenting this crucial stage of my analysis, I'd like to consider two

concepts that will help round off the discussion of Gadamer's concept of tradition: the fusion of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*) and the hermeneutical experience (*hermeneutische Erfahrung*).

Gadamer has repeatedly emphasised that in philosophical hermeneutics universality and human finitude go together, and that the tension between situatedness and openness lies at the very heart of hermeneutical experience (1993, 295). Gadamer's writings provide ample textual evidence to support this contention, and his interpretation of the concept of horizon is a case in point:

"Every finite present has its limitations. We define the concept of "situation" by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence essential to the concept of "horizon." The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point...A person who has no horizon does not see far enough and hence overvalues what is nearest to him. On the other hand, to have a horizon means not being limited to what is near by but being able to see beyond it. A person who has an horizon knows the relative significance of everything within this horizon, whether it is near or far, great or small" (1993, 302).

The most significant difference between Heidegger's communitarianism and Gadamer's concept of tradition quite markedly appears in this passage. In contrast to Heidegger who suggests that peoples find the authentic basis of their "destiny" and identity in what is most distinctively their own, Gadamer argues that a horizon is limited and finite, but it is essentially open. Indeed, for Gadamer, the very idea of a closed horizon is not only, ontologically speaking, a false abstraction. More importantly, it is morally and politically wrong. Just as Plato, in the *Republic*, repudiates the idea that justice solely consists in loving one's own on the grounds that excessive attachment to one's own is the

fundamental source of injustice, so too does Gadamer argue that to have an horizon is not to be limited to what is nearest but to be able to move beyond it.³⁸ True, we are always ontologically grounded in the horizons of our political communities, but what we seek to achieve is a *Horizontsverschmelzung*, a fusion through which our own horizon is enlarged and enriched. Gadamer considers the idea of a closed horizon as “a romantic refraction, a kind of Robinson Crusoe dream of historical enlightenment, the fiction of an unattainable island,” and maintains:

“The closed horizon that is supposed to enclose a culture is an abstraction. The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion” (1993, 304).

Gadamer not only suggests that the commonality that binds us to the tradition is constantly being formed in our relation to it, but he also argues that there is no such thing as an “unbroken stream of tradition,” or a golden age that needs to be reaffirmed against modernity and the political ideals of the Enlightenment.³⁹ But at the same time, it is also important to realise, Gadamer

³⁸ Zuckert stresses the difference between Plato's and Heidegger's understanding of community, and argues that Heidegger, unlike Plato, does not “analyse peoples or their politics in terms of right or justice” (1990, 61). I think it can be added that Gadamer's analysis of the concept of horizon, its roots in Heidegger's ontology notwithstanding, acknowledges the Platonic insight and goes beyond the particularistic vision of Heidegger's communitarianism.

³⁹ Bernstein provides an illuminating interpretation of Gadamer's concept of horizon. He suggests that according to Gadamer's hermeneutics “human beings are essentially open to understanding alien horizons” merely because “the medium of all human horizons is linguistic” (1983, 144). I think that while it is true that the “linguisticity” of the human condition plays a vital role in Gadamer's hermeneutics, “linguisticity” does not and cannot automatically imply that all human beings or political communities are open to “alien horizons.” Thus my argument is that Gadamer's notion of *Horizontverschmelzung* is an ideal that can only be achieved in modern societies where the fruits of the Enlightenment have been acknowledged and internalised by a public culture.

reminds us, that all self-knowledge includes, to use Hegel's well-known term which Gadamer frequently utilises, an *Aufhebung* of existing horizons, that is, a mediation of the horizons of the past and present, the familiar and new. Therefore, in contrast to the ideal of a completed Enlightenment, Gadamer claims that it would be wrong to assume that the illumination of the hermeneutical situation can be completely achieved. What is more, and this is a crucial point, "the fact that it cannot be completed is due not to a deficiency in reflection but to the essence of the historical being that we are." For Gadamer, to be historical implies neither the repudiation of the role of reason in human life nor moral relativism. It simply means that "the knowledge of oneself can never be complete," and that all self-knowledge necessarily arises from a particular horizon, "from what is historically pregiven, what with Hegel we call 'substance,' because it underlies all subjective intentions and actions" (1993, 301-302).

Thus Gadamer argues that not only can we not conceive of tradition as "a permanent precondition," but it would also be wrong to regard traditions as pure, monolithic blocs separated from other traditions by insurmountable barriers. On the contrary, living traditions are always inevitably "filled with a variety of voices" and "only in the multifariousness of such voices" do they exist (1993, 284). Our participation in the event of a tradition, Gadamer writes, necessarily involves a process of transmission in which past and present, the familiar and the strange are constantly mediated (1993, 290). Precisely this

continual mediation makes the discovery of the true meaning of a text and knowledge of oneself, one's tradition and other traditions "an infinite process."

It is also important to recognise that while Gadamer argues that we always find ourselves within a context of "prejudices"—i.e., within the context of a specific political community and its beliefs and values—he also emphasises that human beings are not simply a product of habituation as if what they live is merely a habitual life. In this respect, Gadamer's hermeneutics explicitly challenges all forms of cultural relativism that regard the traditions and practices of a political community as closed entities, and which deny man's capacity to be critical of his habitual context of social rules and beliefs. This critical dimension of Gadamer's hermeneutics particularly becomes manifest in the distinction he draws between "true prejudices" and "false prejudices" (1993, 277-279, 295, 298-299). True prejudices are those "by which we understand" (1993, 298). In other words, they are "justified" (*berechtigte*) or "legitimate" (*legitime*) prejudices that enable understanding. False prejudices, on the other hand, hinder understanding. Gadamer maintains that it is the "undeniable task of critical reason" (*kritischen Vernunft*) to overcome those "unjustified" prejudices (1993, 277). All too frequently commentators miss this critical dimension of Gadamer's hermeneutics.

Prima facie it is difficult to understand how Gadamer's repudiation of a prejudice free standpoint in ethics, politics and history goes hand in hand with his belief in critical reason and universality. But it might well be argued that this difficulty only shows our own limited historical and philosophical horizons.

Gadamer's contention is that this comes from the legacy of early modern rationalism and the political philosophy of the *Aufklärung*. More specifically, it derives from the philosophy of Descartes and the moral and political theory of Kant, both of which express, argues Gadamer, a form of rationalism that is based upon a faulty ontology and a deficient understanding of moral and political existence—one which expresses itself in a subjectivist epistemology and a formalistic account of morality, uncontaminated by human finitude and fallibility, that is to say, by desires, habits, prejudices, inclinations, *sensus communis* and traditions. Echoing his response to Strauss's criticism of hermeneutics, Gadamer once again reminds us that this view of universality is rooted in an idea of "an infinite intellect" which refuses to see the interdependence between finitude and universality. The kind of universality defended by Gadamer is one that comes into being through *Horizontverschmelzung*—a fusion which combines situatedness with openness, self-assertion with self-forgetting, attachment with detachment:

"We must already have a horizon in order to be able to transpose ourselves into a situation. For what do we mean by 'transposing ourselves'? Certainly not just disregarding ourselves. This is necessary, of course, insofar as we must imagine the other situation. But into this other situation we must bring, precisely, ourselves. Only this is the full meaning of 'transposing ourselves'" (1993, 305).

This encounter, Gadamer emphasises, takes many forms: it may be an encounter between self and other in political and social life, or it may be an encounter in which one deals with the texts of the past, or an encounter between different traditions. However, the major crux of Gadamer's argument is that regardless of the form it takes, it always involves "rising to a higher

universality.” To emphasise a point to which there has already been an allusion, there is no room for sentimentalism in Gadamer’s notion of the fusion of horizons:

“Transposing ourselves consists neither in the empathy of one individual for another nor in subordinating another person to our own standards; rather, it always involves *rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other*. The concept of ‘horizon’ suggests itself because it expresses the superior breadth of vision that the person who is trying to understand must have. To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand—not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion” (1993, 305, emphasis added).

This passage demonstrates very well that any attempt to juxtapose a dialogical Gadamer against a “traditionalist” or “conservative” Gadamer flies in the face of textual evidence—because, as Gadamer says, the tension between situatedness and openness, tradition and dialogue, finitude and universality is “the true locus of hermeneutics” (1993, 295). Gadamer also reminds us that the fusion of horizons is the only humanly possible way of differentiating true prejudices from false ones—not only in our pursuit of knowledge but also in ethical and political life—because only through such a fusion of and an encounter between different horizons are our own prejudices suspended and are “brought into play by being put at risk” (1993, 299). In Gadamer’s view, this necessarily requires the virtue of openness and “a hermeneutically trained mind.” Gadamer provides a detailed phenomenological analysis of what he calls the hermeneutical experience (*hermeneutische Erfahrung*) to convey the nature of hermeneutical openness. Since any assessment of his concept of tradition is incomplete without an

analysis of the hermeneutical experience, I shall conclude this chapter by briefly discussing this last pillar of Gadamer's concept of tradition.

Both Gadamer's indebtedness to and his criticism of the Hegelian notion of *Aufhebung*—a notion that plays a crucial role in Hegel's account of dialectic—figure prominently in Gadamer's analysis of hermeneutical experience. In explicit reference to Hegel's *Phenomenology*, Gadamer distinguishes between two senses of experience: there are those experiences that comply with our expectations and confirm them, but there are also those truly new experiences that have a dialectical and historical sense, and which have a dimension of negativity. The concept of experience that interests Gadamer is the latter, which he regards as "experience in the genuine sense." In Gadamer's view, the negativity of genuine experience has a remarkably productive meaning, because it is of "such a nature that we gain better knowledge through it." The negativity of genuine experience thus functions as a learning experience. Following Hegel's account of the dialectic in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Gadamer calls this process of learning through negative experiences "a determinate negation," that is, an experience that in a sense cannot be repeated and serves to negate our previous views (1993, 353). In describing the nature of genuine experience Gadamer particularly refers to the Hegelian notion of *Aufhebung*, i.e., the moment of supersession in which one recognises the partiality of one's knowledge and moves to a comprehensive view. But at the same time Gadamer criticises Hegel, in particular the idea of "absolute knowledge," in attempting to move beyond

human finitude. Indeed, Gadamer claims that Hegel's dialectic "does not do justice to hermeneutical consciousness" (1993, 355). Instead, Gadamer turns to the Platonic idea of dialogue and particularly the "Socratic *docta ignorantia*" to convey the human fallibility and finitude underlying hermeneutical experience, and to demonstrate that the ethical and political knowledge we acquire through such experience is never complete and absolute (1993, 362). Gadamer thus argues that it would be wrong to identify hermeneutical experience with "science" or "technical knowledge." Rather, it always implies:

"an orientation toward new experience. That is why a person who is called experienced has become so not only through experiences but is also open to new experiences. The consummation of his experience, the perfection that we call 'being experienced,' does not consist in the fact that someone already knows everything and knows better than anyone else. Rather, the experienced person proves to be, on the contrary, someone who is radically undogmatic; who, because of the many experiences he has had and the knowledge he has drawn from them, is particularly well equipped to have new experiences and to learn from them" (1993, 355).

Therefore, in contrast to the Hegelian dialectic, in which experience and the knowledge gained from it are supposed to culminate in absolute knowledge, in a final synthesis that requires no further transformations, Gadamer says that genuinely hermeneutical experience—which is akin to that mode of knowledge and experience that is captured very well by the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis* and the Platonic idea of *docta ignorantia*—leads in the opposite direction: not to absolute knowledge but to "insight into the limitations of humanity;" that is, to openness to new experiences and to an awareness of one's fallibility.⁴⁰ In this sense, what one attains through this is a

⁴⁰ To illuminate the dialectical nature of hermeneutic experience, Gadamer turns to Aeschylus' term "*pathei mathos*" ("learning through suffering")—namely, the idea that human beings become wise through suffering. What Gadamer means by this is that genuine experience is

capacity for future learning as well as openness to different, more universal ways of thinking and acting. This also implies a process of learning whereby one learns that one's own tradition is part of an incessantly articulated and changing universe of horizons, and that to try to fix this universe in a final form is to miss the point.⁴¹ Not only is this a kind of experience through which "man becomes aware of his finiteness" (1993, 357), but it is also that through which we realise that the horizons of the past and the present do not "consist of a fixed set of opinions and valuations" (1993, 306).

Gadamer's conception of tradition is thus rooted in his depiction of the hermeneutical experience, which, as we have seen, has a distinctively modern flavour—one that can be experienced only in a political culture that has undergone not only the emergence of the historical consciousness and the break with the past but also its transformation into the hermeneutical consciousness. True, Gadamer, following Platonic-Aristotelian political philosophy, tells us that ethics and politics need to be grounded in the indispensability of tradition. But like German thinkers such as Schiller, Herder, Schleiermacher and Hegel, he points to the modifications and revisions traditions undergo as a consequence of their participation in an ongoing history. Moreover, this also demonstrates that far from being a repudiation of

that which surprises us, which leads us to revise our expectations and opens new horizons to us. As Gadamer remarks, "What a man learns through suffering is not this or that particular thing, but insight into the limitations of humanity, into the absoluteness of the barrier that separates man from the divine" (1993, 356-357). Gadamer sees the same "hermeneutical" insistence on human finitude in the "Socratic *docta ignorantia*" which he thinks lies at the very heart of moral and political experience. Grondin makes this insight (i.e., emphasis on human finitude) the cornerstone of his interpretation of Gadamer's hermeneutics (1994; 2003, 3).

⁴¹ Warnke, too, provides an interpretation of Gadamer's notion of the fusion of horizons along these lines (1987, 157-158).

the Enlightenment, Gadamer's hermeneutics represents a qualified continuation of it. Nowhere does this manifest itself more explicitly than in Gadamer's account of three possible relations to "the Thou" or other people, all of which have their equivalents in our relations to the traditions to which we belong. I want to suggest that what Gadamer defines as a hermeneutical-dialogical experience of tradition perfectly reflects Gadamer's contention that the hermeneutical experience is characterised by the tension between situatedness and openness, the familiar and strange—a tension which provides both a critical form of moral and political reflection and an appreciation of a form of belonging that is not blind to the universalistic *Sittlichkeit* of modern society. Gadamer's move from the classical perspective of Plato and Aristotle to the modern idea of universality (i.e., the Kantian-Hegelian moral and political philosophy) is unmistakable in his elucidation of the hermeneutical approach towards tradition, which has its counterpart in the dialogical-hermeneutical experience of "the Thou." Let me now turn to these different modes of experience by way of concluding my analysis of Gadamer's conception of tradition.

The first experience of the Thou which Gadamer examines is one that is purely "self-regarding" and in which one is essentially concerned with making predictions about the behaviour of others. In a language reminiscent of Kantian moral philosophy, and his previous criticism of Kantian morality notwithstanding, Gadamer now reminds us that when we experience the other in such a profoundly self-regarding manner, "we understand the other person

in the same way that we understand any other typical event in our experiential field—i.e., he is predictable.” In treating the other in this way, says Gadamer, we simply consider him to be an instrument and assume that “his behaviour is as much a means to our end as any other means” (1993, 358). From this Gadamer draws the conclusion that the point of a strictly “self-regarding” relation to others is not as much to understand them as to predict their behaviour in order to achieve our own ends. Nevertheless, this attitude towards the Thou, says Gadamer, “contradicts the moral definition of man.” In opposition to this mode of experience, Gadamer explicitly invokes the Kantian idea of a dualism of Freedom and Nature, and claims that the notion of freedom implies a break with the causal sequence of nature. Gadamer here seems to be conforming totally to the Kantian idea of “the categorical imperative,” according to which “the other should never be used as a means but always as end in himself” (1993, 358).

The equivalent of this solely self-regarding attitude to others in our relation to our own traditions is the social scientific approach that is marked by a “naïve faith in method and in the objectivity that can be attained through it” (1993, 358). The problem with this type of “scientific” and “methodical” relation to tradition is that “it recognises only what is typical and regular” and “flattens out the nature of hermeneutical experience” (1993, 359). Gadamer’s argument is that just as a purely self-regarding relation to others ignores their individuality and dignity as human beings, so too does the scientific attitude

towards traditions overgeneralise from particular practices and hence fail to acknowledge the specificity of traditions.

The second way of experiencing the Thou to which Gadamer turns is equally self-regarding in the sense that although others are acknowledged as persons, “the understanding of the Thou is still a form of self-relatedness” (1993, 359). Following the Hegelian “dialectic of self-consciousness” in which there exists a constant struggle for mutual recognition, Gadamer argues that while this way of experiencing the Thou is more adequate than the first one, it simply tries to absorb others into ourselves by claiming an empathy with others that presumes to understand them better than they understand themselves. Corresponding to this type of relation to others in our relation to traditions is what Gadamer terms “historical consciousness,” which represents an attempt to understand the past in the same way that the original participants understood it, if not better than they understood themselves. In making this presumption, however, one claims to transcend one’s conditionedness, seeks to master the past, and thus allows one’s own prejudices to prevail unchecked. According to Gadamer, precisely this attitude corresponds to “the unattainable ideal of the Enlightenment” (1993, 360). But it needs to be emphasised that Gadamer’s argument is not directed against the Enlightenment or historical consciousness as such, but against the self-alienation it undergoes when it disregards its own historicity and unquestioningly accepts the method of modern social sciences as its own true nature. In doing so, Gadamer says, it simply takes its own prejudices for the

meaning of the past or tradition. Therefore, what Gadamer aims is not the repudiation of historical consciousness but its *Aufhebung*—because only through this can we acknowledge that “we are always affected, in hope and fear, by what is nearest to us, and hence we approach the testimony of the past under its influence”—without thereby ignoring that it is “constantly necessary to guard against overhastily assimilating the past to our own expectations of meaning.” For Gadamer, “only then can we listen to tradition in a way that permits it to make its own meaning heard” (1993, 305).

These two essentially self-regarding relations to the Thou dramatically differ from the third one in which one experiences “the Thou truly as a Thou.” This moral relationship to the Thou is based on openness to the other and Gadamer sees it as a dialogic relationship in which we neither instrumentalise the other nor claim to speak for him but rather let him say something to us. For Gadamer, without such openness to one another it would not be possible to speak of a “genuine human bond.” But the dialogical openness does not mean that “we do blindly what the other desires;” rather, it “involves recognising that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so” (1993, 361). Again, this dialogical/hermeneutical experience of the Thou has its counterpart in our relation to tradition. It too requires a fundamental sort of openness in which our horizons can be mediated with other horizons, “not in the sense of simply acknowledging the past in its otherness, but in such a way that it has something to say to us” (1993, 361).

At this point, the ethical and political dimensions of Gadamer's hermeneutics fully come into view—the relevance of dialogue and openness. As Gadamer writes, this mode of experience calls for “a continually recurring temptation to engage oneself or to become involved with someone.” And this means “to expose oneself and to risk oneself. Genuinely speaking one's mind has little to do with a mere explication and assertion of our prejudices; rather, it risks our prejudices—it exposes oneself to one's own doubt as well as to the rejoinder of the other” (1989b, 26). In one of his last interviews, Gadamer more explicitly admits that, compared with his interpretation of hermeneutic experience, Heidegger's conception of “*Mit-sein*” expresses “a very weak idea of the other, more a ‘letting-the-other-be’ than an authentic ‘being-interested-in-him.’” Gadamer now insists that Heidegger's conception of “Being-with” or “*Mit-sein*” is “an assertion about *Dasein*” (2004, 23). In opposition to Heidegger's view of *Mit-sein*, Gadamer tells us that his concept of hermeneutical experience is a mode of experience that always places oneself in question. As such, it is not merely “grounded on the ‘mine-ness’ of my being (*die Jemeinigkeit*) that is revealed in the possibility of death.” Rather, it “encompasses all recognition of oneself in the other, which opens up in dialogue” (1989b, 95). In this respect, to reach an understanding, which is the major problem of hermeneutics, 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 are” (1993, 379). Precisely this hermeneutic capacity for dialogue, Gadamer insists,

constitutes the universality of the hermeneutical experience. Gadamer thus presents the “capacity for understanding” as a “basic human endowment” which sustains social and political life, thereby portraying the possibility of consensus as a prerequisite of “all human solidarity and the viability of society” (1989b, 57).

Seen from this perspective, social and political interaction both in a political community and between different traditions clearly requires not only the reciprocal display of “good will,” civility and openness. But more important, it demands, to use a term to which Gadamer frequently refers, a community of “hermeneutically *trained* minds.” Gadamer’s combination of dialogue and situatedness thus seems to be what Gadamer means by *Bildung*—civic or political education—a theme which has an overwhelming presence in Gadamer’s hermeneutics, but whose connection to hermeneutical experience has been somewhat vaguely defined in the writings of Gadamer. Nevertheless, in alerting us to the role of dialogue and civility in political existence, and in stressing the political significance of *Bildung* for the formation of such a community of hermeneutically trained minds, Gadamer’s view of tradition departs dramatically from Heidegger’s political vision. Construed both as educational process or the formation of public character and as a general human task that requires the overcoming of mere particularity for the sake of something common and universal, *Bildung* broadens Gadamer’s conception of tradition and gives it a distinctively modern flavour and a humanistic dimension. Not only does such a conception of

tradition make the modern idea of freedom and its central role in morality and politics the cornerstone of Gadamer's hermeneutics as practical philosophy. But it also convincingly shows us that the possibility of a reflexive posture towards one's tradition and a dialogical attitude towards other, more universal standpoints depends upon a process of formation and political education within which the fundamental values of modernity are preserved and affirmed. True, Gadamer is in crucial respects extremely critical of modernity—as we have seen, he severely criticises some of the presuppositions of the Kantian and utilitarian variants of the Enlightenment, the individualist and formalist tendency in modern ethics, the Enlightenment's conception of tradition, the excesses of Jacobinism and social engineering, and the technological deformation of political reason. But in some other aspects Gadamer's hermeneutics is an attempt to preserve some of the fundamental values of modernity: modern freedoms, liberal democracy, a dialogical vision of political life and the idea of a peaceful coexistence and interdependence of various religions and traditions. It is therefore incorrect to characterise Gadamer's conception of tradition as a complete endorsement or rejection of modernity. Rather, Gadamer's hermeneutics represents a much more complex and nuanced assessment of the human condition than either of these alternatives. This particularly becomes manifest in Gadamer's understanding of political education which synthesises Platonic-Aristotelian political philosophy, with its emphasis on the educational role of the political community, and the modern conception of *Bildung* which Gadamer derives from the political philosophies

of early German Romanticism and Hegel. Moreover, the interdependence between *Bildung* and tradition in Gadamer's hermeneutics, as we have seen so far, shows not only the complex nature of his conception of tradition, but also the ways in which he weaves together classical and modern views of dialogue, political reason and *Bildung* to convey his hermeneutical vision of human existence. This is why it makes absolutely no sense to try to understand Gadamer's conception of tradition and dialogue in isolation from his view of *Bildung*.

CHAPTER 4: HABERMAS ON MODERNITY AND TRADITION: AN ETHICS OF UNLIMITED COMMUNICATION

"Enlightenment can only make good its deficits by radicalised enlightenment."

Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 84.

"Reason, as the principle of rational discourse, is the rock on which existing authorities are smashed, not the one on which they are founded."

Habermas, "On Hermeneutics' Claim to Universality" p. 316.

"The social and political life of mankind... is constituted by a social order that exercises a predominant influence on what is considered right... What can be submitted to reflection is always limited in comparison to what is determined by previous formative influences."

Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 571.

"'Tradition' means, after all, that we unproblematically continue what others began and have taught us... In my view, it is precisely this basis of trust which was destroyed before the gas chambers."

Habermas, *Autonomy and Solidarity*, p. 238.

4-1 Introduction

In essence, Habermas's work has two major components. The first one is to develop a conception of political reason that is not reducible to the technical-instrumental calculations of an individual subject. The second one is to show how communicative rationality can offer a novel way of articulating the modern ideal of a political community of free and equal individuals. Ultimately, these new (communicative) conceptions of reason and community, Habermas argues, will provide us with a communicative ethics, which in turn will give us a new perspective for understanding the liberating and universalist core of European modernity.

Previous articulations of reason and community in modern political philosophy, Habermas says, are deeply flawed because of their inability to resolve the conflict between the individual and the community. Either individual freedoms are given priority over collective autonomy (as in the liberal tradition)

or collective autonomy is given priority over the individual (as in Heidegger). The problem is that both perspectives ignore a notion of intersubjectivity fleshed out in communicative-rational terms. Habermas's main thesis is that the idea of *Rechtsgemeinschaft* (that is, constitutional community) in fact represents the culmination point of the gradual unfolding of communicative reason and community in Occidental history. Not only does this embody the true achievement of European modernity. But it also has a universal validity since its normative content is present in linguistic communication.

Heidegger's failure is twofold. First, he erroneously thought that the essence of modernity was technology (technical reason) and thus failed to see the rationality inherent in public discourse or intersubjective communication. Second, he wrongly claimed that the individual had to submit to the supposedly authentic *polemos* of his or her community. Both Heidegger's ontology and his diagnosis of modernity are deficient.

Habermas's interpretation of Gadamer's thought, on the other hand, is far more multifaceted. For one thing, Habermas has immensely benefited from Gadamer's hermeneutics. For another, Gadamer's account of modernity is much more nuanced than Heidegger's in that Gadamer has fully recognised the dialectic of the Enlightenment. Moreover, in Habermas's view, Gadamer has "urbanised" Heidegger by claiming that "being that can be understood is language." But because Gadamer stressed the continuity of tradition, he too fails to a great extent to take account of the critical powers of modern reason. In Habermas's view, "liberated subjects" of modernity, no longer bound and

directed by any tradition, can “fashion new commitments by the force of their own communicative efforts alone” (Habermas, 2001, 155-156).

Ultimately, neither Heidegger nor Gadamer seem to comprehend the normative substance of the Enlightenment project—that is, an ethics of unlimited communication. But what exactly does Habermas mean by the “project of the Enlightenment”? Since both his critique of Heidegger and Gadamer and his discourse ethics are closely linked to this question, I shall first look at the way in which Habermas articulates the meaning of the Enlightenment project.

4-2 The Project of the Enlightenment

Habermas’s account of modernity has three main concerns and presuppositions.

i) *The Project of Modernity*: In his assessment of the “project of Enlightenment” and the world-historical significance of “Occidental rationalism,” Habermas forcefully argues that his main concern is to produce a theory of modernity that is neither complacent nor indiscriminately critical, and which is equally perceptive of both its “pathologies” and its achievements, its failures and its still-unrealised potentials. This is what Habermas means when he states: “Enlightenment can only make good its deficits by radicalised enlightenment” (1987b, 84). Habermas argues that the project of modernity, as it is formulated by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, primarily consists in the relentless development of modern science, the universalistic foundations

of morality, and autonomous art. Precisely this differentiation of the three cultural spheres, each with its own logic or rationality—under the standards of scientific truth (objective), normative rightness (moral-practical) and aesthetic taste (subjective)—is the fount of the rationalisation of worldviews and the normative accomplishments of modernity, and constitutes the very essence of Occidental rationalism.

However, on a note largely echoing Kant's well-known critique of the Enlightenment, Habermas asserts that the partisans of the Enlightenment, such as Condorcet and his followers, have made two fundamental mistakes. First, they have erroneously entertained the extravagant expectation that the escalating development of the arts and sciences would not merely advance the control of forces of nature, but also promote "the understanding of self and world, the progress of morality, justice in social institutions, and even human happiness" (1997, 45). In so doing, and this is their second mistake, they have wrongly attempted to frame Occidental rationalism from the perspective of "purposive rationality" and the "mastery of the world," thereby reducing the power of reason to its representational, cognitive and instrumental role (1984, 180, 392). Habermas associates these two mistakes with what he calls the "paradigm of philosophy of consciousness" and regards them as the betrayal of the normative content of modernity. In order to understand the uncompleted project of modernity, Habermas contends, we must look beyond these inadequate conceptions of reason and the Enlightenment, and must identify the larger project of modernity of which they are a part.

In essence, the question we need to answer is, “Should we continue to hold fast to the intentions of the Enlightenment” however fractured they may be, or should we rather relinquish the entire project of modernity?” (1997, 45-46) Habermas argues that, and this is his major thesis concerning the philosophical discourse of modernity, if we opt for the first alternative, then we have to make a fundamental shift from the paradigm of consciousness to the “paradigm of communication”—a shift which all of the major thinkers and philosophical movements of modernity, from Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche all the way down to phenomenology, Heidegger and the Frankfurt School have failed to make.

ii) *The Paradigm of Communicative Rationality*: Habermas’s fundamental argument is thus that only such a paradigm shift from the philosophy of consciousness to the philosophy of communication can reveal the true normative content of modernity. Habermas energetically and repeatedly states that, in striking opposition to the philosophy of consciousness, which is rooted in a subjectivist metaphysics that has mistakenly privileged a technical, cognitive and instrumental account of reason and an atomistic view of political existence, the philosophy of communication entails a normative vision geared towards the “*higher level intersubjectivity of an unforced formation of will* within an unforced communication community existing under constraints toward cooperation” (1987, 40). In the first case the main purpose is instrumental control whereas in the second one it is coming to a communicative understanding and consensus, or what he calls

Verständigung (1984, 392). Moreover, Habermas points out that his ethics of unlimited communication—that is, the “paradigm of mutual understanding” between individuals who are “socialised through communication and reciprocally recognise one another”—also involves a very strong critique of the dark side of modernity. However, Habermas stresses that his is a “determinate criticism,” in which the representational, objectifying, manipulating and atomising tendencies of modernity are diagnosed as “a deficit of rationality.” In identifying and separating these two essentially distinct dimensions of modernity, Habermas believes that his project takes up again the path (not taken, but) inherent in the Enlightenment project rather than “overtrumping modernity” (1987, 310).

It is important to realise that Habermas’s central idea of the “higher intersubjectivity of unlimited communication” has both a very strong universalist leaning and a historical-evolutionary direction. The universalist dimension of Habermas’s ethic of communication is decidedly formal and procedural in that it aims to locate the Kantian categorical imperative—what Habermas calls “the moral point of view”—in the “rational structure of communication.” In Habermas’s words: “The moral point of view from which we can judge practical questions impartially... is grounded in the communicative structure of rational discourse as such” (1993b, 1). But at the same time Habermas holds the view that the communicative concept of rationality and action, which is the hallmark of Occidental rationality and modernity, is not only universal but also “historically situated” in that it is the

culmination of an irreversible historical learning process. “The release of a potential for reason embedded in communicative action,” says Habermas, “is a world-historical process;” and he maintains: “in the modern period it leads to a rationalisation of life-worlds, to the differentiation of their symbolic structures, which is expressed above all in the increasing reflexivity of cultural traditions, in the process of individuation, in the generalisation of values, in the increasing prevalence of more abstract and more universal norms” (1992b, 180). Thus, according to Habermas, although a universal constant, Occidental communicative rationality was neither an instant achievement nor, strictly speaking, peculiar to European culture but required a long process of historical maturation and learning.

iii) *Modern Pluralism*: One of the most crucial consequences of this historical learning process, Habermas argues, is the progressive rationalisation of worldviews and modes of life. This rationalisation or modernisation also entails the “decentring” of an initially unified worldview. Habermas particularly emphasises that the growing differentiation of value spheres—that is to say, the specialisation of cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and expressive types of reasoning (and hence the differentiation of questions of truth, justice and taste)—inescapably corresponds to “a decentered understanding of the world” (1985c, 206).

What Habermas means by the notion of a “decentered understanding of the world” is that the more traditions become self-reflective with the transition to modernity, the more people recognise their own cultural relativity and the

plurality of “gods and demons” (1985c, 192-193). Moreover, Habermas states that under conditions of modern pluralism—that is, in a world in which we can no longer count on a shared *ethos* and should simply accept that we live in a “disenchanted” world—philosophy should no longer deal with existential, ethical, spiritual and metaphysical issues. Rather, it should narrow its focus to the analysis of a cluster of terms that Habermas often uses interchangeably such as a “theory of rationality,” a “theory of modernity,” or the theoretical justification of “a narrow concept of morality,” which Habermas defines purely in a formal, deontological and procedural manner (1990, 196). That philosophy should no longer deal with the great questions and perplexities concerning the human condition, in Habermas’s view, is the price we have to pay in a “disenchanted” world in which, thanks to the growing rationalisation of worldviews, we have a decentered understanding of human and natural life. Habermas approvingly tells us that in such a cultural environment “all that remains of ‘the good’ is the just,” and that the only role philosophy can now play is to justify and explain, in cooperation with social sciences, a theory of procedural, formal rationality (1990, 16-17).

These three essential characteristics of Habermas’s project will be examined in more detail in the following sections, but before that let me conclude this introductory section with a brief analysis of how Habermas conceives of Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s thought, in particular their accounts of tradition, in the light of these three presuppositions of his theory of modernity.

The major problem with Heidegger's politics of authenticity and *polemos*, Habermas continually stresses, is that it ultimately represents an "undermining of Western rationalism."¹ Two crucial misunderstandings, in Habermas's view, seem to be at the heart of Heidegger's confusion and his diagnosis of modernity. Not only does Heidegger fail to acknowledge "the already operative potential for rationality contained in the everyday practices of communication." Moreover, Heidegger follows the Nietzschean "path of a totalising critique of reason" by denying "all of the normative orientations" contained within the project of the Enlightenment. The main reason for this, Habermas argues, is that Heidegger has never really got rid of the notion of objectifying, manipulating reason. This is why Heidegger's critique of the Western emphasis on *logos*, and by implication his criticism of the differentiation of cultural value spheres characteristic of the Enlightenment project since Kant, proceeds in a destructive manner. Unable to recognise the "dialectic of modernity," Heidegger "throws the baby out with the bathwater" (1985c, 196).

Consequently, Habermas characterises the Heideggerian politics of authenticity and *polemos*—which he regards as "Heidegger's fascist error"—as a further manifestation of his faulty understanding of Occidental rationalism and the Enlightenment project (1987, 159). Habermas provides ample textual and historical evidence to support his contention that Heidegger's thought

¹ It must be noted that the title of the chapter devoted to Heidegger in Habermas's *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* reflects Habermas's interpretation of Heidegger's thought: "The Undermining of Western Rationalism through the Critique of Metaphysics" (1987, 131).

does not take cognisance of the emancipatory potential contained within the project of modernity. The “collectivist” and “elitist” language of *An Introduction to Metaphysics*; the denigration of the communicative practice of everyday life and of publicness in *Being and Time*; Heidegger’s outright rejection of modern pluralism, humanism, cosmopolitanism and liberal democracy as manifestations of the technological understanding of the world, of “the darkening of the earth”—all of these, in Habermas’s view, bespeak an undeniably dismissive and unappreciative attitude towards the achievements of modernity. In this respect, Heidegger’s ontological project and his diagnosis of modernity, and the kind of politics he derives from this critique, fail to recognise the “Janus-like quality” of modernity.

Habermas’s response to Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics is more complicated. As we have seen in Chapter 1, from his initial debate with Gadamer in the 1960s to his more recent essays on discourse ethics, Gadamer’s hermeneutics has been a part of Habermas’s overall project. Nonetheless, just as in his early debate with Gadamer he has accorded hermeneutics a secondary position in relation to emancipatory, critical social theory by resolutely rejecting the universality of hermeneutics, likewise in his later writings Habermas affirms the priority of the moral point of view over hermeneutics. While throughout his writings Habermas continues to acknowledge Gadamer’s contribution, he is primarily concerned with preserving a realm outside of hermeneutical understanding that will enable modern human beings to reflect critically on traditions.

In contrast to Heidegger, argues Habermas, Gadamer rejects neither the normative achievements of modernity nor the heritage of Occidental rationalism. This is the sense in which Habermas interprets Gadamer's hermeneutics as an "urbanisation of the Heideggerian province." But at the same time Habermas regards the hermeneutical claim to universality as a politically dangerous route since he thinks that it eventually leads to an underestimation of the power of reflection. Ultimately, Habermas finds Gadamer's criticism of the excessive rationalism of the Enlightenment, as well as his conception of tradition, very problematic. According to Habermas, Gadamer appears to overturn the Enlightenment appeal to reason in favour of constantly moving horizons of traditions: "Gadamer's prejudice for the rights of prejudices certified by tradition denies the power of reflection. The latter proves itself, however, in being able to reject the claim of tradition" (Habermas, 1977, 358).

As we will see more fully in the last section of this chapter, the differences between Gadamer and Habermas can be effectively grasped in relation to question of tradition and how they conceptualise it. To amplify an earlier point, it may be of interest to recall Ricoeur's assessment of the differences between Gadamer and Habermas. As one of the leading proponents of hermeneutical thinking and a well-known commentator on continental philosophy, Ricoeur offers a very interesting interpretation.²

² Ricoeur's interpretation (1973) has been very influential in the literature on hermeneutics and the Gadamer-Habermas debate. See also Gadamer's response to it in his essay "Hermeneutics of Suspicion" (Gadamer, 1984b).

According to Ricoeur, we can conceive of the dispute between Gadamer and Habermas in terms of their adherence to two different hermeneutic traditions. In Gadamer's hermeneutics, Ricoeur observes the characteristics of a "hermeneutics of recollection," where the term "recollection" signifies the function of recollecting meaning from past traditions in order to make sense of the present, its possibilities and limitations. Correspondingly, Ricoeur states that Habermas's critical theory, because of its distrust of the authority of traditions and its passionate defence of the Enlightenment ideals of moral autonomy and freedom, is indicative of a "hermeneutics of suspicion." In portraying his own perspective in terms of a "depth hermeneutics" that is solely guided by reason rather than by adherence to tradition, Habermas's own remarks in his review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* seem to support this interpretation. Indeed, in his later writings on discourse ethics Habermas still admits the "ethical," "cultural" and "existential" significance of hermeneutics. And yet Habermas insists that we ascribe a secondary position to hermeneutics in relation to the moral point of view. Why is that so?

This question will be addressed in the final section of the chapter (Section 4-5). But before that I shall look at Habermas's view of modernity by piecing together the historical and philosophical accounts of the Enlightenment project that he provides in a variety of contexts in his writings (Section 4-3). This will also enable us to understand more fully Habermas's conception of tradition. I shall then be able to discuss what exactly Habermas means by an ethics of unlimited communication community (Section 4-4).

4-3 Modernity versus Tradition

Ever since Gadamer has pointed out that Habermas's ethics of unlimited communication reflects a fanatical demand, namely, an ideal of total enlightenment, Habermas has repeatedly argued that this characterisation is a misunderstanding of his theory of *communicative action*, that his ethics of communication by no means suggests a "rationalistic utopia," and that on no account could his defence of the Enlightenment project be so construed as to refer to the ideal of a fully transparent society. Habermas also asserts that the notion that his ethics of unlimited communication exposes itself to the charge of justifying some kind of Jacobin fanaticism or revolutionary action by an *avant-garde* is a distorted view of his project.³ Habermas tends to identify those who make such criticisms as some sort of conservatives who either totally disregard or are inadequately appreciative of the universalistic achievements of modernity.⁴ But what is the sense we can make of Habermas's contention that "reason, as the principle of rational discourse, is the rock on which existing authorities are smashed, not the one on which they are founded" (1985a, 316)?

³ In one of his interviews Habermas remarks: "My Marxist friends are not entirely unjustified in accusing me of being a radical liberal. Nothing makes me more nervous than the imputation that... the theory of communicative action... proposes a rationalistic utopian society. I do not regard the fully transparent—or indeed a homogenised and unified—society as an ideal" (Habermas, 1992b, 171). For his response to the charge of Jacobin fanaticism, see Habermas (1990, 208).

⁴ Habermas's tripartite classification of different types of conservatism contained within twentieth-century philosophy is a good case in point. For Habermas's discussion of "three conservatisms" (the old, young and new conservatives, which he associates with premodernism, antimodernism and postmodernism respectively), see Habermas, (1997, 53-54).

In this connection, it may be of interest to recall the importance Habermas attaches to the issue of rationalisation in volume one of *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984). One of his sympathetic commentators (Wellmer, 1985, 41) has pointed out that Habermas's conception of rationality has a striking affinity with that of Weber in that it is essentially related to an attitude free from all illusions and self-deceptions. For Habermas, rationality inevitably signifies the "disenchantment" caused by the de-sacralisation of the natural and social world. Rationalisation, in his view, goes hand in hand with disenchantment and the gradual replacement of *mythos* with *logos*.

Reflection upon reason, Habermas argues in the opening chapter of his major work, has always been the main task of philosophy: "Philosophical thought originates in reflection on the reason embodied in cognition, speech and action; and reason remains its basic theme. From the beginning philosophy has endeavoured to explain the world as a whole, the unity in the multiplicity of appearances, with principles to be discovered in reason." However, Habermas states that after the collapse of the holistic aspirations of traditional philosophy in the modern age, philosophy cannot any more seek to provide a unified worldview, i.e., an ontology⁵: "Philosophy can no longer refer

⁵ It must be noted that here Habermas does not use the term "ontology" in the sense in which it is used by Heidegger and Gadamer. Recall that Heidegger's fundamental ontology is an attempt to go beyond the kind of ontology to which Habermas refers here: an account of being which does not take into account historicity and change. Habermas does not address this issue here, but he does in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* where he strongly criticises Heidegger's ontology as well—not only because it lacks a "normative dimension" but also because it is based on a resolute repudiation of the political ideals of modernity.

to the whole of the world, of nature, of history, of society, in the sense of a totalising knowledge” (1984, 1).

This situation is partly a result of the collapse of all efforts to found a “first philosophy.” In Habermas’s view, “all attempts at discovering ultimate foundations” have been shattered. This development, in turn, is ascribed to the progress of the modern-empirical sciences and the historical-social “learning processes” accompanying this progress. But in a way the task of philosophy, Habermas insists, remains the same: philosophy must continue to be the “guardian of rationality.” In other words, it still has to provide a “theory of rationality” but without any “ontological hopes for substantive theories” of nature, history and society and without “transcendental-philosophical hopes for an aprioristic reconstruction of... a non-empirical species subject, of consciousness in general.” Rather, philosophy today must solely deal with the analysis of the “formal conditions of rationality in knowing, in reaching understanding through language, and in acting” (1984, 2).

Habermas’s primary purpose, to repeat once again, is to demonstrate that the increasing specialisation of science, morality and art in modern culture as three main arenas of discourse, with their own knowledge claims and corresponding modes of rationality, is an indication of a general evolution towards a growing expansion of rationality. This issue emerges more clearly in Habermas’s portrayal of the historical evolution of Occidental rationality—particularly in his account of the three stages of cultural modernisation: the stages of “mythical,” “traditional” and “modern” cultures (1984, 43-74). Relying

on the works of leading sociologists such as Gellner, Habermas presents this development as a progressive rationalisation of worldviews—that is to say, rationalisation not merely in the sense of knowing and mastering external nature, but more significantly in the sense of “communicatively achieved understanding” (1984, 71). Thus Habermas argues that mythical worldviews, which present the sharpest contrast to the understanding of the world in modern societies, are essentially characterised by “closedness” (1984, 63-66). Myths, Habermas says, are narratives that present a “hollow” and “round” world picture in that they integrate many different aspects of life within a single intellectual domain (1984, 44, 46).

Precisely at this point Habermas introduces the concept of *Lebenswelt*—a concept that is of utmost importance in the works of Heidegger and Gadamer as well. But Habermas radically transforms the meaning of this concept which has played a crucial role in twentieth-century continental philosophy. While Habermas, like Heidegger and Gadamer, interprets the concept of *Lebenswelt* as the taken-for-granted universe or horizon that is “*immer schon*” there as an all-encompassing background, he wishes to develop a rationally more adequate approach to the problem of *Lebenswelt*.⁶ In Habermas’s view, neither Heidegger’s ontology nor Gadamer’s hermeneutics takes sufficient account of the critical powers of human reason and the spirit of modern, rationalised lifeworlds.

⁶ In his highly illuminating “Introduction,” McCarthy provides a fine discussion of the significance of the concept of *Lebenswelt* for Habermas’s ethics of communication. See McCarthy (1984, xxv-xxvi).

To overcome this insufficiency, Habermas returns to the communicative practice of everyday life. Habermas contends that there exists a so-called built-in “extra-hermeneutical” criterion inherently present within the rationalised lifeworlds of modern societies. In both mythical-archaic and traditional societies, on the other hand, rationality and different knowledge claims are submerged in an unquestionable life-praxis. These societies present an antithesis to the modern understanding of the world in the sense that in archaic and traditional societies “the burden of *interpretation* is removed from the individual member, as well as the chance for him to bring about an agreement open to criticism” (1984, 71, emphasis added). Habermas interprets Piaget’s theory of cognitive development as a psychological-historical demonstration of the development of Occidental civilisation, the unfolding of the rationalisation of modern lifeworlds, and a social scientific articulation of the moral superiority of modern societies in terms of cognitive development.

“Cognitive development,” Habermas writes, “signifies in general the decentration” of our understanding of the world. “Only to the extent that the formal reference system of the three worlds is differentiated can we form a reflective concept of ‘world’ and open up access to the world through the medium of common interpretive efforts” (1984, 69). Habermas, like Heidegger and Gadamer, argues that the lifeworld is a pre-interpreted background within which social life unfolds, and that it “stores the interpretive work of many preceding generations.” But at the same time Habermas observes that the

expansion of rationalisation leads to the diminution of the hold of this unquestioned, unreflective, premodern lifeworld (which, for Habermas, is the mark of both mythical-archaic worldviews and religious-metaphysical-traditional societies). Habermas rounds off his discussion of the rationalisation of the lifeworld by saying:

“The more the worldview that furnishes the cultural stock of knowledge is decentred, the less the need for understanding is covered in advance by an interpreted lifeworld immune from critique, and the more this need for understanding is covered by the interpretive accomplishments of the participants themselves, that is, by way of risky (because rationally motivated) agreement, the more frequently we can expect rational action orientations” (1984, 70).

Habermas thus concludes that the chief characteristic of the rationalised lifeworlds of modern societies, in sharp contrast to those of mythical or traditional societies, is that the former involve the replacement of the “normatively ascribed agreement” with a “communicatively achieved understanding” (1984, 70).

In the conclusion of his analysis of the mythical and modern ways of understanding the world, Habermas indicates the prominent features that cultural traditions have to exhibit in modern societies. First, the cultural tradition must permit differentiated validity claims (propositional truth, normative rightness, subjective truthfulness) and must make room for a corresponding differentiation of basic attitudes (objectifying, norm-conformative, expressive). Second, the cultural tradition must encourage “a reflective relation to itself; it must be so far stripped of its dogmatism as to permit in principle that interpretations stored in tradition be placed in question

and subjected to critical revision.” Third, the cultural tradition must not only permit the differentiation of science, morality/law/politics and art. Furthermore, relying chiefly on Weber’s work, Habermas argues that such a differentiation must also encourage the institutionalisation of purposive-functional-technical action, that is, action which is oriented towards the achievement of specific goals, and which can be assessed in terms of its technical effectiveness. The two main arenas in which purposive rational action becomes institutionalised are the capitalist market economy and the modern bureaucratic state. Habermas points out that both the differentiation of cultural value spheres, with their own distinctive rationality claims, and the formation of institutional forms geared towards purposive-rational action (market economy and modern state) are central to modernity (1984, 71).

Here as elsewhere Habermas skilfully combines the basic assumptions underlying Kant’s and Weber’s works to defend the achievements of modernity not only against the so-called “premodern,” “antimodern” and “postmodern” conservatives but also against Adorno and Horkheimer who, particularly in their later writings, tend to characterise modernity solely in terms of “an instrumental reason gone wild” (2001, 141).⁷ True, European modernisation is a world-historical disenchantment in that it leads to the radical transformation, and ultimately dissolution, of holistic religious, metaphysical worldviews, as

⁷ Habermas’s lecture “Conceptions of Modernity: A Look Back at Two Traditions” (included in an excellent collection of his political essays, *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*) communicates well with the main themes of both *The Theory of Communicative Action* and *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Moreover, this lecture may well be seen as a succinct summary of his understanding of modernity.

they gradually lose their meaning-giving and orienting power in cultural, social and political life. Moreover, under conditions of “late capitalism,” not only do state and market economy, both of which are the “evolutionary achievements of social modernity,” pave the way to “social uprooting.” But they also create “alienation effects” by “monetarising” and “bureaucratising” the communicatively structured areas of the private and public spheres of the lifeworld, thereby giving way to what Habermas calls the “social pathologies of modernity” or the “colonisation of the lifeworld” (2001, 138-153).

But Habermas passionately argues that this is not the whole story: Modernity cannot be reduced to its pathological aspects. From Hegel, Marx and Weber to Heidegger, Horkheimer, Adorno and Lukacs, none of the leading voices within the European tradition of social and political philosophy, according to Habermas, have been able to show how “reification” or the hegemony of technological-instrumental rationality are connected to the deformation of the communicative basis of the modern lifeworld.⁸ Precisely this “ambivalence of modernity,” Habermas says, is overlooked in this “classical conception of modernity.” In Habermas’s words: “Philosophical lenses now demand a stereoscopic view of the ambivalence of modernity. The analysis must keep in mind both the emancipating, unburdening effects of a communicative rationalisation of the lifeworld, and the effects of a functionalistic reason run wild” (2001, 156).

⁸ For an overview of Habermas’s critique of the philosophical impasses of Marxism and of Critical Theory, see Wellmer’s discussion (1985), which also has specific references to Habermas’s appropriation of Hegel, Marx, Weber and Lukacs. For a brief summary, see especially pp. 51-52.

Habermas continually emphasises that the discredited classical conception of modernity needs to be replaced with a “neoclassical conception of modernity” which promises a new conceptual framework uncontaminated by the pathologies of modernity. To put it differently, all we need to do is to translate the theory of modernity from the philosophy of consciousness, geared towards a subjectivistic, atomistic account of political community and a domineering, manipulative, instrumental conception of reason, into the philosophy of communicative action and mutual understanding (1984, 385-386, 389-392; 2001, 155). The concluding pages of volume one of *The Theory of Communicative Action* give a full-blown articulation of Habermas’s main thesis. Habermas’s contention is that the higher form of intersubjectivity expressed in communication makes possible:

“a mutual and constraint-free understanding among individuals in their dealings with one another, as well as the identity of individuals who come to a compulsion-free understanding with themselves—society without repression. This means, on the one hand, a change of paradigm,...and, on the other hand, a change of strategy in an effort to reconstruct the modern concept of rationality that became possible with the decentration of our understanding of the world...The focus of investigation thereby shifts from cognitive-instrumental rationality to communicative rationality. And what is paradigmatic for the latter is not the relation of a solitary subject to something in the objective world that can be represented and manipulated, but the intersubjective relation that speaking and acting subjects take up when they come to an understanding with one another about something” (1984, 391-392).

And Habermas concludes by emphasising that his philosophy of communication has a decidedly normative dimension, which he considers to be vaguely expressed in the later writings of Adorno and Horkheimer, and completely absent in Heidegger’s thought:

"In contrast to representation or cognition, coming to an understanding requires the rider uncoerced, because the expression is meant to be used here as a normative concept. From the perspective of the participants, coming to an understanding is not an empirical event that causes de facto agreement; it is a process of mutually convincing one another in which the actions of participants are coordinated on the basis of motivation by reasons...It is for this reason that we may hope to obtain a concept of rationality by clarifying the formal properties of action oriented to reaching understanding" (1984, 392).

As Wellmer (1985, 53) observes, Habermas's ethics is based on a "reflexive conception of human communication" in that it does not allow for *any* arguments to be exempt from critical assessment and public debate. Habermas's critique of mythical and traditional societies is meant to show that his ethics of communication reflects nothing less than the cognitive and moral condition of humans in a disenchanted world—that is to say, in a world in which the unquestioned dogmatism of traditional societies has been shattered once and for all.

Before we look more closely at Habermas's attempt to reconstruct the meaning of modernity as a philosophical discourse, three observations are in order. First of all, Habermas's comparative analysis of the status of the lifeworld in mythical, religious-metaphysical-traditional and modern societies is impressive for its commitment to modern rationality. Habermas wishes to demonstrate that the rationality expressed in the Occidental understanding of the world cannot be reduced to a reflection of the particular features of a culture stamped by scientific and technological rationality. On the contrary, in Habermas's view, it may rightfully raise a claim to universality (1984, 53). In essence, therefore, Habermas's emphasis on the significance of the communicative dimension in human existence and political life is an eloquent

affirmation of the hope that ethical norms could assume the status of meaningful universals in terms of which people might recognise standards of mutuality to which they ought to aspire as human beings. At the same time, such a normative vision, Habermas points out, represents a universal ideal in the light of which any and all inherited traditions may be subjected to rational critique.

But, and this is my second point, Habermas seems to be making two claims that cannot be easily reconciled. On the one hand, Habermas argues that communication by its very nature is oriented to discourse, and that it is thus inherent in the communicative structure of language. As Habermas writes: “In argumentation and in everyday practice as well, communicative reason is always at work” (2001, 152). But at the same time he argues that rationalisation of the lifeworld, i.e., the development of an ethics of communication, is a result of historical learning—a process within which both the differentiation of value spheres and a decentred understanding of the natural and cultural world take place. Are these two arguments really compatible?⁹ This is not simply a problem of consistency or of elementary formal logic: the universality of Habermas’s ethics of communication hinges upon his thesis that reason is incarnated in everyday practice and language. Even if we leave aside this problem for the moment, we have to ask ourselves whether or not it is reasonable to presume that the very affirmation of

⁹ For a criticism of Habermas’s understanding of communicative reason along these lines, see Dallmayr (1988, 561).

modernity and of the Enlightenment project is predicated on a change of paradigm—from the philosophy of consciousness to the philosophy of communication. It seems as if Habermas assumes that modernity stands and falls with the transition from one conceptual framework or paradigm to another.

My third point is concerned with Habermas's account of tradition and his dispute with Gadamer. It is clear from Habermas's account of communicative reason that Habermas considers the ontological claims of Heidegger's and Gadamer's thought as normatively inadequate. This is why Habermas argues that although members of a lifeworld first and foremost draw on inherited values and norms, in the course of rationalisation of the lifeworld, i.e., with the transition to modernity, this "ascriptive background consensus" shatters: in modern societies "it has to be replaced by the interpretive accomplishments of communication participants themselves" (2001, 154). Habermas thus continually stresses that whereas in traditional societies there is no room for interpretation and open criticism, modernity requires nothing less than "a culture's becoming self-reflective." The universal cultural significance of Occidental rationalism, according to Habermas, stems precisely from the recognition of the "cultural relativity of one's tradition", which in turn relies on a tacit acceptance of both the decentred understanding of the world and the universality of a *deontological* "moral point of view." But if the recognition of cultural plurality and a strong emphasis on the interpretive capacity of human beings are the *sine qua non* of Habermas's project, then this means that Gadamer and Habermas should be in complete agreement

over the meaning of tradition. Gadamer, as we have seen, vigorously rejects the view that traditions are something merely given, nature-like entities, operating as all-encompassing subjects behind our backs, and hence stand beyond the creative interventions and critical interpretations of human beings. In this sense, for Gadamer, traditions are alive when they are open to discursive questioning.

But in fact Gadamer and Habermas disagree on a number of issues. For one thing, Habermas does not endorse the hermeneutic claim to universality. For another, and this is the direct result of his repudiation of the priority of hermeneutics, Habermas seeks to find a criterion beyond hermeneutics, which is for Gadamer an impossibility, a “fantastic overestimation of the power of human reason,” one of the “excesses of the Enlightenment.” But how can we more adequately grasp the differences between Gadamer and Habermas? I shall come back to this point in the final section of the chapter. Let me now turn to Habermas’s account of the philosophical meaning of the project of modernity.

What exactly does Habermas mean by “modern”? In defining modernity as a “discourse,” Habermas alludes to the plurality of voices contained within modern social and political philosophy (Dallmayr, 1997, 59). In maintaining that the philosophical discourse of modernity involves unbridgeable oppositions or alternatives, Habermas aims to show us that it is not possible to reduce modernity, as Heidegger does, to a single discourse of the unstoppable march of global technology and subjectivist metaphysics through

the ages. Habermas also points out that there exists a history of the term “modern.” To begin with, it meant being of the present time, but gradually it came to carry a sense of novelty. The word was used particularly to articulate the consciousness of a new era. Modern meant something that had never existed before and the idea was conceived that the future would be different from the past and the present.

The word “modernus,” Habermas says, was first used in the late fifth century to distinguish what had become a Christian present from a pagan Roman past. Thus, from the very beginning the term has carried the overtone of a deliberate break between the present and the past, between the new and the old. However, Habermas instantly qualifies this observation by stating that initially this distancing from the immediate past functioned with special reference to antiquity or any other period depicted as classical and hence worthy of imitation. Thus, for instance, the Renaissance and Reformation, with which the European conception of the “modern age” begins and which heralded an implicit break with the medieval past, referred back to classical Greece in this manner. In pointing to the history of the term *modern*, Habermas wants to suggest that the notion of a distinctly modern period has emerged gradually. “But with the close of the eighteenth century,” Habermas writes, and this is his main thesis concerning the meaning of modernity, “a new, general historical consciousness arose that, in the end, seized even philosophy itself. Hegel is explicit in identifying the ‘break’ that the French

Revolution and the Enlightenment signified for the more thoughtful of his contemporaries” (2001, 131; 1987b, 6-7).

Habermas thus locates the origin of the elusive concept of modernity in the eighteenth century—and in particular in the experience of living in a society and a time in which all pre-given models and norms are supposedly disintegrating, and in which people have to discover their own models out of almost nothing (1992b, 225). In Habermas’s eyes, modernity is the very symbol of an absolute break with the past, with tradition and is thus the heritage of the Enlightenment political legacy. Just as Habermas has shown in *The Theory of Communicative Action* that the rationalisation of the lifeworld signifies a moral progress which rests on the awareness that the cultural and political life requires argumentative justification without any appeal to tradition, so too does he argue in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* that because modernity understands itself in opposition to tradition, it is obliged to create its own “normativity” from the only authority remaining, namely, the authority of reason (2001, 132-133). As Habermas says: “Modernity can and will no longer borrow the criteria by which it takes its orientation from the models supplied by another epoch; *it has to create its normativity out of itself*” (1987b, 7).

Let me now state very clearly the major issue that stands at the forefront of the dispute between Gadamer and Habermas: as Habermas develops his interpretation of modernity in opposition to tradition, and in relation to the formal, procedural sense in which rationality obtains in the

rationalised lifeworlds of post-traditional societies, the question inevitably arises as to whether modernity has the character of a historical experience or is simply a set of formal requirements applying to all ages and places. Both Gadamer and Habermas provide very complex and nuanced accounts of modernity, pointing out its promises as well as its dark side. But the dividing issue between them is that while Gadamer tends to see modernity itself as a historical experience occurring within a tradition, Habermas appears to be more inclined to emphasise its formal character. This also explains Habermas's insistence on an extra-hermeneutical criterion and his repudiation of the universality of hermeneutics. Quite simply, Habermas wishes to strictly universalise the political agenda of modernity as the unique carrier of moral progress. In the final analysis, we are presented with two accounts of modernity in Gadamer and Habermas: modernity as a cultural inheritance or an outcome of a tradition (Gadamer) versus modernity beyond traditions (Habermas).¹⁰

Habermas's intentions can unmistakably be observed in the opening pages of *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, where Habermas begins his investigation with a discussion of three main "sociological" approaches to modernity. Weber's interpretation, Habermas says, is based on the recognition that modernity is firmly rooted in the European historical and cultural context. On this interpretation, Europe is the region in which religious and metaphysical

¹⁰ For a discussion of why Habermas rejects an ethics based on the forms of life existing within a culture, see Rasmussen (1990, 56-57).

worldviews were first transformed into a rationalised and hence secular and modern culture. Thus, for Weber, there seems to be an inevitable connection between modernity and the intellectual orientation of Occidental rationalism. Other sociologists such as Durkheim and Mead, Habermas points out, offer similar views, according to which the secularisation and rationalisation of modern societies is brought about by the aging of traditions which have become self-reflective, a view that has found an echo in Habermas's work. Rather than explicating modernity as a historically specific experience, a third group of social scientists view it as an evolutionary social dynamics, a general scheme of social development consisting in a number of social conditions, thereby completely separating it from its modern European origins, that is, from the original intellectual and cultural context in which it has first come into existence (1987b, 1-3).

Habermas's reflection on modernity combines elements from all of these sociological approaches, but it also revives the philosophical perspective offered by two leading thinkers of modernity who, in Habermas's view, have inaugurated the philosophical discourse on the project of modernity. The thinkers singled out by Habermas are Kant and Hegel. Habermas points out that they have been the first two thinkers who have vividly articulated the philosophical meaning, as well as the moral and political import, of the Enlightenment project, and who have thus captured the guiding thrust of modernity.

First of all, Kant and Hegel have expressed the new consciousness of modernity—namely, the notion that the modern world now stands opposed to the old world—by defining the spirit of the Enlightenment in terms of an opposition to the past. Habermas continually emphasises the significance of this critical, oppositional spirit: “Modernity prides itself in its critical spirit, which accepts nothing as self-evident except in light of good reasons” (2001, 133). As “demythologisation,” “the process of enlightenment leads to the desocialisation of nature and the denaturalisation of the human world.” And Habermas tells us once again that this is essentially what he means by a “decentring of worldview” (1987b, 115). Moreover, on a very provocative note, Habermas adds that the modern spirit needs to be understood as an opposition and counterforce to the past: “As *opposition*, because it opposes the unforced force of the better argument to the authoritarian normativity of a tradition interlinked with the chain of the generations; as counterforce, because it is supposed to break the spell of collective forces” (1987b, 107).

Habermas reminds us that contained in this spirit is a related normative ideal—namely, the principle of subjective freedom which grants freedom through reflection.¹¹ The same principle is also conveyed within Kant’s differentiation of modern domains of science, morality and art—the three segregated arenas of discourse whose foundation is subjectivity. Thus Habermas contends that demythologisation, which disenchant nature, at the

¹¹ By the principle of subjectivity, Habermas, like Kant and Hegel, means the notion of individual freedom, and this in three senses: “as scientific freedom, as freedom as self-determination and as freedom as self-realisation” (Habermas, 1992b, 225).

same time liberates the knowing, acting and creating individual. But Habermas argues that in Kant we still do not see a full-blown account of modernity. It is Hegel who has picked up Kant's latent theory of modernity and translated it into a clear conception of modernity by situating the core of modernity explicitly in the principle of subjectivity (1990, 3-4). As Habermas remarks: "Subjectivity' has both a universalistic and an individualistic meaning. Each person deserves the equal respect of all. At the same time, each person should be recognised as the source and the final judge of her particular claims to happiness" (2001, 133).

Habermas concludes his investigation with a recapitulation of the central themes of his own project, which echoes almost exactly the conclusions that he has reached in *The Theory of Communicative Action*. But what is important for the purposes of my inquiry is that for Habermas, modernity is essentially characterised by a new historical consciousness that has two chief characteristics. First, it reflects a self-critical attitude towards all tradition. Second, it entails the moral ideals of self-determination and self-realisation. But these conclusions do not turn Habermas into an arch-individualist. Habermas asserts that this has been the fate of the classical conception of modernity which has taken the wrong path and which has relied on a wrong paradigm. Habermas's solution is to shift from the "philosophy of consciousness" to the "paradigm of communicative action" or an ethics of unlimited communication—which reflects, we are told, a "neoclassical conception of modernity" that recognises a conception of a "linguistically

embodied, situated reason” which is not monological but dialogical (2001, 130).

4-4 The Idea of an Unlimited Communication Community

The major crux of Habermas’s ethics of unlimited communication, which is also the dilemma he faces in his dispute with Gadamer’s hermeneutics, is to find a way of reconciling Kant and Hegel. In fact, the title of one of his essays (in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*), which deals with the criticisms directed at his discourse ethics, reflects precisely Habermas’s aspiration to synthesise Kant and Hegel: “Morality and Ethical Life: Does Hegel’s Critique of Kant Apply to Discourse Ethics?” (1990, 195). Habermas’s reply to this question is negative. But I would like to suggest that far from reconciling Kant and Hegel, Habermas in fact seems to be constantly oscillating between them.¹² We have seen a similar version of this oscillation in Habermas’s conception of the *Lebenswelt*. It has also resurfaced in Habermas’s attempt to synthesise a strictly universalistic account of modernity with a historical account. This tension reappears in Habermas’s approach to hermeneutics, for he similarly wishes to integrate hermeneutics into his eclectic system to avoid the spectre of an abstract and consciousness-oriented account of the human self, and an unhistorical and atomistic view of political existence. Nonetheless, noticing the affinity of this account with “mere” hermeneutics (and hence the spectre of contextualism), Habermas redirects

¹² Bernstein, one of Habermas’s most sympathetic commentators, agrees on this when he remarks that Habermas speaks with two (conflicting) voices (1983, 184). For a stronger criticism of this oscillation between these two voices, see Dallmayr (1997, 86-88).

attention to the “powers of critical reason.” Ultimately, we have to ask ourselves whether Kant and Hegel can be reconciled, and the ambivalences of modernity can be overcome, solely with the help of a social scientifically sophisticated analysis of the communicative powers of language. I shall return to this question shortly, but before that allow me one more remark about Kant and Hegel since the tension between their differing projects also has significant bearing on the tension within Habermas’s own conflicting aspirations, as well as on his quarrel with Gadamer.

As is well-known, the crucial difference between Kant and Hegel is concerned with the problem of establishing a basis for a modern ethics. Kant’s attempt to build a moral theory on the basis of a notion of rationality alone has the advantage of avoiding recourse to inclinations, traditions and history. This is the sense in which Kantian morality is called “deontological.” The term deontology has its etymological roots in the Greek word *deon*, which means duty or that which is binding. In the Kantian tradition, with which Habermas associates himself, the term deontological has come to be understood as duty for the sake of duty alone—a completely unconditioned and binding characteristic of the moral point of view. Another way to express this is to say that the category of right has a priority over that of good, and reason over history and tradition.

Hegel’s response to Kant’s view of morality, which echoes that of Gadamer to Habermas’s project, is that the principles of rationality should already be embedded within the development of that tradition. Otherwise, it

remains not only abstract but also dissociated from forms of life as represented in modern history and culture. Thus, in turning from *Moralität* to modern *Sittlichkeit*, Hegel definitively discredits Kant's attempt to ground ethics in abstraction from politics and history. Now we should look more closely at Habermas's ethics of unlimited communication to see whether it overcomes, as Habermas himself claims, the Hegelian criticism, or oscillates, as I argue, between Kant and Hegel.¹³

Habermas argues that his ethics of unlimited communication ultimately aims at revising the fundamental premises of Kantian moral philosophy in such a way that neo-Aristotelian, Hegelian and hermeneutical objections can be accommodated within a deontological framework (1993a, 116). In so doing, Habermas contends, his project shares with Kant a strictly deontological account of morality, and with the second group an "intersubjective approach" towards the constitution of the self in particular and political existence in general. With this combination, Habermas says, his discourse ethics synthesises the best of both worlds—that is, it combines the political ideals of liberal freedoms, rights and justice with the republican, communitarian ideals of the common good and solidarity, thereby overcoming the Kantian dichotomy between reason and tradition.

It is also vital to realise that Habermas's fundamental argument is that there are universal moral standards that we can use in making moral and

¹³ For an overview of the differences between Kant's and Hegel's views, and Habermas's position within this influential debate in modern political philosophy, see Rasmussen (1990, 56-58, 65-67).

political judgements, and which provide a normative standpoint for criticising unjust social arrangements and policies, and coercive traditions. Regarding the nature of these standards and the moral point of view, Habermas makes four basic arguments. First, they have an epistemic status. Second, they are reached through an impartial and intersubjective process of public deliberation. Third, morality cannot be reduced to “ethical” or “hermeneutical self-understanding.” Fourth, morality is essentially concerned with the question of norms in accordance with which practical conflicts among human beings can be solved in the common interest of all. In this respect, moral questions, Habermas argues, not only need to be detached from the “egocentric perspective of the individual,” but they also necessarily transcend the social and historical context of a particular tradition and its “culture-specific” and “ethnocentric” lifeworld horizon (1993a, 24).

Thus Habermas contends that moral questions cannot be reduced to questions of “purposive” or “pragmatic” action, which are concerned with the choice of the purposively acting subject who makes his or her decisions on the basis of subjective preferences through “prudential reasoning.” Nor can they be identified with “ethical” or “hermeneutical questions of self-understanding,” which are related to life histories or the historical horizon of a customary *ethos*. In this tripartite classification, we also see how Habermas strictly distinguishes what he calls the “pragmatic,” “ethical” (i.e., “hermeneutical”) and “moral” employments of practical reason (1993a, 6-10). Morally relevant practical questions are concerned with the question of reaching “an agreement

concerning the just resolution of a conflict in the realm of norm-regulated action” (1993a, 9). Differently put, the ultimate aim of moral questions is not to highlight the *telos* of a human life with a view to answering the question of “Who am I?” or “What kind of life should I lead?” or “What is the good life?” Instead of diving into such a hermeneutical reflection or ethical questioning, which can only be done by individuals themselves under conditions of modern pluralism, moral and political philosophy attempts to resolve the categorically different question of how practical-interpersonal conflicts can be settled in the common interest of all (1993a, 24). This is what makes ethics of unlimited communication *deontological* (1990, 196). A deontological moral theory, which in Habermas’s view is all that has remained practically and politically relevant for modern societies, deals with the impartial treatment of questions of justice—i.e., defining the viewpoint from where moral questions or practical disputes can be judged impartially.

As Habermas points out, this is the motivation behind Kant’s categorical imperative as well, which aims to provide a criterion to test the validity claims of moral judgements and which functions as a principle of justification that differentiates valid and invalid norms in terms of their universalisability. This universalisability test requires that moral questions be decided with regard to what all human beings can will (1993a, 118). This test is one of the crucial aspects of Habermas’s ethics of unlimited communication and makes his *Sprachetik formalist*. But this also requires the participants in an agreement to transcend the social and historical context of their particular community or

tradition with its particular values and ends, and adopt the perspective of all those possibly affected. The ideal of unlimited communication thus in no way reflects the tradition of a particular political community. It is universally valid and includes all those affected.

But Habermas argues that, while Kantian *Moralität* is superior to Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* in that it enables Kant to construct a new model of ethics that will not succumb to the distortions of potentially destructive and coercive traditions, it shares the underlying logic of the classical conception of modernity—that is, the philosophy of consciousness—with its subjectivism and monologism. With the notion of monologism, Habermas wants to underline two concomitant features of the Kantian perspective. The first one is the solitary nature of the categorical imperative: the mental experiment in which one asks oneself whether one's actions are in conformity with a principle according to which all human beings would choose to act in any culture, tradition or at any time in history. The second one is the priority of subjectivity over intersubjectivity in the Kantian account of individual freedom: this paves the way to a conception of freedom as a natural given for human beings as opposed to the outcome of their rational communicative action. Habermas's ethics of unlimited communication attempts to capture this communicative dimension by situating moral norms, and hence Kantian morality, within the intersubjective context of communication, one in which opinions and moral decisions are shaped through intersubjective dialogue. Capturing communication at this dialogical level, in Habermas's view, implies a radical

shift from the subject-centred paradigm of consciousness (or monologism) to the paradigm of communication. Habermas's crucial argument is that to overcome monologism, and all the problems related with it, all we need to do is to replace the Kantian categorical imperative with "a procedure of moral argumentation"—a procedure which states: "Only those norms may claim to be valid that could meet with the consent of all affected in their role as participants in a practical discourse" (1990, 197). The moral point of view defined in this way, Habermas says, represents the perspective from which we can assess controversial normative claims impartially: "Argumentation insures that all concerned in principle take part, freely and equally, in a cooperative search for truth, where nothing coerces anyone except the force of the better argument" (1990, 198). In Habermas's view, the universality of such a moral point of view stems from the nature of language. As such, his discourse ethics simply theorises this basic intuition that "a *telos* of mutual understanding is built into linguistic communication" (1992b, 100). This implies that every time human beings communicate with one another, they automatically commit themselves to the possibility of a freely achieved dialogic agreement in which the better argument will win. In the end, what Habermas calls communicative action appears to be nothing more than the residue of rationality built into our everyday communication. Habermas's ethics of unlimited communication, then, presumes to derive a universalistic morality from the general presuppositions of argumentation. The implicit message is that discourse is "a more exacting type of communication, going beyond any particular form of life"

and including “competent subjects beyond the provincial limits of their own particular form of life” (1990, 202).

The question that still needs to be answered is, “How does this portrayal of (communicative) rationality and action overcome the Hegelian critique of Kantian morality?” Habermas argues that for all its affinities with Kant’s moral philosophy, ethics of communication is radically different. Let us look more closely at Habermas’s argument to see if that is really the case. Habermas suggests that Kantian philosophy offers by far the most superior account of morality insofar as Kant’s conception of formal, differentiated reason implies a theory of modernity and rationality (1990, 3-4). In addition, its procedural form of rationality—that is, the universalisation principle—“acts like a knife that makes razor-sharp cuts between... the good and the just” (1990, 104). Habermas goes even further in his approval of Kantian morality when he states: “Kant alone reserved a place for moral judgement in the realm of practical reason and thereby upheld its status as genuine knowledge. In Kant’s view all judgements raise a claim to validity that can be supported by appeal to good reasons” (1993a, 117). While Gadamer’s notion of political reason, with its roots in Aristotle and Hegel, focuses on the link between *ethos* and *logos*, Habermas’s suggestion is that Kantian morality is superior precisely because Kant has restricted practical reason to questions of normative justification in such a radical manner that “no tradition or way of life, however deeply rooted in our everyday praxis, can escape problematisation” (1993a, 120).

But then Habermas finds problematic precisely those aspects of Kantian philosophy that he has praised so much. Now we are told that, as Hegel's critique has shown, it has some "unfortunate consequences." It presupposes an atomistic, radically individualistic conception of the person and a contractualist view of society (1993a, 121). In addition, Habermas now appears to be fully recognising the superiority of Hegel's criticism of Kant:

"Theories of duty have always centred on the principle of justice, whereas theories of the good have always emphasised the common weal. Hegel was the first to argue that we misperceive the basic moral phenomenon if we isolate the two aspects, assigning opposite principles to each. His concept of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) is an implicit criticism of two kinds of one-sidedness, one the mirror image of the other" (1990, 201).

And yet Habermas is unwilling to fully accept this Hegelian view; rather, he asserts that his fundamental task, we are told once again, is "to modify the Kantian approach to take account of legitimate objections" (1993a, 122).

First, his discourse ethics, Habermas argues, gives up Kant's dichotomy between a noumenal realm comprising duty and freedom, and a phenomenal realm comprising inclinations, traditions, and political and social institutions. Second, as we have seen, ethics of communication rejects the monological approach of Kant. Ethics of communication, Habermas writes, "prefers to view shared understanding about the generalisability of interests as the *result* of an intersubjectively mounted *public discourse*" (1990, 203), which is an ongoing process of communication and negotiation in which moral and political decisions, agreements and conflicts are matters of common concern and public debate. The context of public discourse provides a discursive space in which "nothing is fixed once and for all" prior to argumentation. This also

means, Habermas emphasises, that there are no presocial conceptions of the self prior to language and communication, save the “universals of language use.”

This has a further moral and political implication which turns Habermas’s project into a certain type of “republican communitarianism,” which is neither closed nor exclusivist: Habermas points out that within this universe of communication, there is no privileged standpoint that lies beyond the intersubjectively shared ethical and political world of deliberating participants. What Habermas calls “an unlimited communication community” is another name for this uncoerced, higher form of intersubjectivity, which is achieved through an inclusive, open process of communication or public discourse (1993a, 51-52). In returning to the problem of “belonging” and “community” in such a manner, Habermas wants to underline that his ethics of unlimited communication is tailored to suit the fragility of human existence by solving two tasks at once. On the one hand, discourse ethics emphasises “the inviolability of the individual by postulating equal respect for the dignity of each individual.” On the other hand, it also aims at protecting the “web of intersubjective relations of mutual recognition by which these individuals survive as members of a community.” These two complementary aspects correspond, Habermas points out, to the “principles of justice and solidarity”:

“The first postulates equal respect and equal rights for the individual, whereas the second postulates empathy and concern for the well-being of one’s neighbour. Justice in the modern sense of the term refers to the subjective freedom of inalienable individuality. Solidarity refers to the well-being of associated members of a community who intersubjectively share the same lifeworld” (1990, 200)

The interdependence between justice and solidarity, between individual and community, between reason and context, Habermas argues, is fundamental to his ethics of unlimited communication. But we must ask Habermas how this interdependence figures in his overall project in general and in his discourse ethics in particular. We must also ask ourselves whether this suggestion unproblematically fits into his *Sprachetik*.

Although Habermas claims that his project picks up the fundamental Hegelian aspiration (that is, to overcome two kinds of one-sidedness) and seeks to redeem it with Kantian means, he skilfully avoids addressing the fundamental Hegelian question—not only here but also in his quarrel with Gadamer—which is, “Can one formulate concepts like justice, normative rightness, the moral point of view and freedom independently of any tradition and of any vision of the good life?” or “Can one really isolate (as Habermas does) the hermeneutical and ethical self-understanding (what Habermas calls the ‘ethical/hermeneutical use of practical reason’) from morality?” Habermas addresses these questions in various essays in which he responds to some of his critics. Let us consider two more qualifications that Habermas introduces to the Kantian project.

First, Habermas admits that discourse itself cannot be the mere embodiment of the claims of his ethics of communication. At the same time Habermas wants to combine the ideal of justice and freedom with that of community and solidarity. The ideal of justice and freedom, according to Habermas, is guaranteed by the procedural rationality inherent in discursive

communication. The uncoerced agreement reached through public discourse is accomplished thanks to a procedure that affords everyone the opportunity to influence the public debate with his “yes” or “no” responses, thereby taking account of modern individual freedoms. The ideal of solidarity and community, on the other hand, is also implied within communication: Habermas’s chief contention is that public debate, by its very nature, induces participants in public discourse to become aware of their membership in an unlimited communication community.

But since Habermas is disillusioned with Kant’s monologism and Hegel’s appeal to *Sittlichkeit* as the final court of appeal, as well as with the lack of a strictly universal normative criterion not only in Heidegger and Gadamer but also in Western Marxism and Critical Theory, he turns to the social sciences to find “more secure ways” to reconcile these two ideals without any metaphysical presuppositions. Hence, Habermas argues that the claims of ethics of unlimited communication are complemented by Lawrence Kohlberg’s developmental psychology. Echoing his analysis of the differences between traditional and modern societies in *Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas now claims that discourse ethics offers a moral and political description of post-conventional moral reasoning and identity defined by Kohlberg. Habermas’s argument is that Kohlberg’s developmental psychology provides us with an understanding of post-conventional morality which demands of all modern individuals “an act of selfless empathy through ideal role taking.” Empathy, Habermas says, is a “requisite for ideal role taking,

which requires everyone to take the perspective of all others.” In Habermas’s view, this has a close affinity with his discourse ethics: “To view something from the moral point of view means that we do not elevate our own self-understanding and worldview to the standard by which we universalise a mode of action but instead test its generalisability also from the perspectives of all others” (1993a, 174-175).

Second, although Habermas’s discourse ethics is based on an ardent insistence on formulating a normative perspective that is more securely and scientifically backed up by the social sciences, and which allegedly goes beyond “mere” hermeneutics, he once again admits that “Hegel is right” because

“unless discourse ethics is undergirded by the thrust of motives and by socially accepted institutions, the moral insights it offers remain ineffective in practice... This much is true: any universalistic morality is dependent upon a form of life that meets it halfway. There has to be a modicum of congruence between morality and the practices of socialisation and education... In addition, there must be a modicum of fit between morality and socio-political intuitions. Not just any institutions will do. Morality thrives only in an environment in which postconventional ideas about law and morality have already been institutionalised to a certain extent” (1990, 208).

With this concession, Habermas comes very close to Gadamer’s hermeneutics since what he says in this passage vividly sums up Gadamer’s fundamental objection to the idea of an ethics of unlimited communication. And yet just as Habermas still continues to distinguish the ethical-hermeneutical use of practical reason from the moral use of reason on the grounds that it is subjective and/or ethnocentric, he likewise dismisses, even in his most recent writings and interviews, Gadamer’s account of tradition as

embodying conservative and relativistic implications. Why is that so? Let me now turn to this debate one more time to spell out more clearly how we can read the differences and similarities between Gadamer and Habermas, what we can make out of this debate, and in what ways it sheds light on the themes of my inquiry.

4-5 Hermeneutics of Recollection or Hermeneutics of Suspicion?: Gadamer or Habermas?

As many scholars have emphasised, the positions taken by Habermas and Gadamer in the debate that took place between them in the 1960s are now of primarily historical interest. This is mainly because Habermas has taken to heart some of Gadamer's criticisms (for instance, regarding Habermas's earlier reliance on psychoanalysis as a model for social criticism and ideology critique) and also in part because after that debate Gadamer has enlarged the focus of his hermeneutics, devoting much greater attention to the ethical and political dimensions or implications of his thought and stressing the critical thrust of philosophical hermeneutics. And yet there is a striking continuity in the way in which hermeneutics and the concept of tradition have been defined in Habermas's work.

In his early work in the 1960s, Habermas has claimed that his emancipatory critical theory subsumes the hermeneutical dimension as a social scientific method without recognising its universality. According to Habermas, there are basic cognitive interests that guide and motivate critical social theory, and which find their place in a tripartite schema that lays the

groundwork for a “philosophical anthropology of knowledge.” These three cognitive interests are technical, hermeneutical (existential) and emancipatory interests. In his most recent writings on the moral and political implications of communicative action, we find an almost identical tripartite schema concerning the three uses of practical reason: technical, hermeneutical (ethical or existential) and moral employments of practical reason. True, Habermas does not any longer speak of an “emancipatory interest.” But just as he claimed the priority of the emancipatory interest over the hermeneutical in the 1960s, Habermas now asserts the priority of the moral over the hermeneutical. This is why many commentators have characterised Habermas’s perspective as “in-depth hermeneutics,” or “critical hermeneutics,” or “demystifying hermeneutics,” or “hermeneutics of suspicion.”

Habermas’s Early Work			Habermas’s Recent Work		
<i>Cognitive Interests</i>	<i>Aim</i>	<i>Discipline</i>	<i>Uses of Practical Reason</i>	<i>Aim</i>	<i>Discipline</i>
Technical	Functional success	Natural sciences	Pragmatic	Purposive	Rational choice theory
Hermeneutical (existential)	Understanding of meaning	Humanities	Ethical (hermeneutical-existential)	Good (and hermeneutic self-understanding)	Humanities-ethics
Critical-emancipatory	Freedom in a free community	Critical social sciences	Moral	Unconstrained communication in a just society	Moral theory

The crucial characteristic of Habermas's thought has always been to retain the hermeneutical dimension without recognising its superiority and to formulate an extra-hermeneutical dimension that accounts for a universally valid normative perspective. This seems to be the crux of his debate with Gadamer. There are basically two fundamental (and interrelated) objections that Habermas expresses against Gadamer's conception of tradition. Let me briefly analyse these two objections and Gadamer's response to them.

The first one is closely linked with the hermeneutic claim to universality. For Habermas, this claim is not only politically suspicious but also social scientifically wrong. The concept of tradition, in Habermas's view, is essentially a sociological concept: it simply denotes cultural traditions of different societies. In this respect, as Jay (1982, 99) has rightly observed, Habermas is compelled to challenge the ontological reading of hermeneutics and is determined to return to the more modest (pre-Heideggerian) Diltheyan notion of hermeneutics, according to which hermeneutics is a method of the humanities and tradition merely means cultural tradition.

Habermas's second objection, which is merely a corollary to his pre-Heideggerian notion of tradition and hermeneutics, is concerned with the way in which he defines the meaning of tradition. In Habermas's view, tradition simply means that "we unproblematically continue what others began and have taught us" (1992b, 238). According to this sociologically informed conception of tradition, traditions are the "blind, nature-like" contexts of meaning. However, Gadamer points out that in defining traditions as the

radical opposite of rational freedom and seeing in them a historical givenness of a quasi-natural kind, Habermas continues with the old Enlightenment dichotomy between reflection and tradition. In response, Habermas argues that the aura of traditionalism, which allegedly pervades Gadamer's work, harks back to the conservatism of a Burke, and that the hermeneutic claim to universality amounts to nothing less than treason to the heritage of the Enlightenment (1977, 357). Ultimately, Gadamer, Habermas says, fails to do justice to the power of reflection. More specifically, Habermas states that a reflective appropriation of tradition breaks down its "nature-like" substance, and that, with the Enlightenment, this way of interpreting traditions have become part of our historical consciousness and altered our relation to traditions under scrutiny.

Gadamer refuses Habermas's proposal to reduce his ontological account of tradition to the idea of a "cultural tradition," which, according to Habermas, can only be criticised by means of a sociologically and scientifically empowered critical rationality (1993, 546, 572). Gadamer, in a passage reminiscent of Hegel's critique of abstract freedom in chapter VI of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* on Absolute Freedom and Terror, regards "the faith in unconstrained dialogue" as a clear impossibility for finite, historical beings and repudiates the language of emancipation because of its dangerous political implications. Gadamer's main objection to the Habermasian project of unconstrained dialogue, an intellectual marriage of Kantian moral philosophy

and the neo-Marxian tradition, comes out very clearly in his “Afterword” to

Truth and Method:

“On one side there is the faith in ‘unconstrained dialogue,’ the ideal of Habermas and many others who follow the old Enlightenment slogan: to dissolve obsolete prejudices and overcome social privileges through thought and reflection... On my side, by contrast, there is a deep scepticism about the fantastic overestimation of reason by comparison to the affections that motivate the human mind” (1993, 567).

And Gadamer adds:

“Blindness to the fact of human finitude is what leads one to accept the Enlightenment’s abstract motto and to disparage all authority—and it is a momentous misunderstanding when the mere recognition of this fact is taken to express a political position, a defence of the status quo. In truth, the talk about progress or revolution—or even—conservation—would be mere declamation if it laid claim to an abstract, a priori saving knowledge. It may be that under revolutionary conditions the emergence of the Robespierres, the abstract moralists who want to remake the world according to their reason, will win applause. But it is just as certain that their hour is appointed. I can only consider it a fatal confusion when the dialectical character of all reflection, its relation to the pre-given, is tied to an ideal of total enlightenment” (1993, 571).

Ultimately, Gadamer argues that it would be wrong to posit a polarisation between an ongoing tradition and the reflective appropriation of it.¹⁴ Moreover, as my interpretation has shown, Gadamer’s hermeneutics expresses a weak understanding of tradition, which fully recognises that the idea of an unbroken stream of tradition or the notion of a tradition without reflection is utterly inconceivable in modern societies. In fact, a hermeneutical appropriation of tradition is intrinsically reflective and has a built-in critical dimension. In this respect, while contributing to the literature on Gadamer and Habermas in an illuminating way, Ricoeur’s characterisation of Gadamer’s perspective merely

¹⁴ As Nicholson remarks: “Gadamer’s entire strategy is a flight from dualism; Habermas’s entire strategy consists in polarising reason against the powers of tradition.” For a discussion of the dualism of reason and tradition in Gadamer and Habermas, see Nicholson (1991, 157-158). See also Mendelson’s illuminating commentary (1979, 59-61).

as a hermeneutics of recollection is misleading. It would be a grave misunderstanding of his thought to argue that Gadamer's hermeneutics denies the possibility of reflection. Gadamer's chief claim is that hermeneutical understanding has a universal validity in that it articulates the conditions for the possibility of any understanding whatsoever: it is temporally situated, requires a moral and intellectual reservoir of historical and political experience, stands in a horizon of expectations and is articulated in language, i.e., in works of art and in philosophical and literary works, as well as in the totality of customs that comprise the social and political culture of an entire civilisation. Thus, one's standards of critical reflection also come from tradition. Admittedly, all these do not provide a theoretical basis as solid as Habermas demands. But Gadamer's contention is that in his quest for a more solid basis, Habermas perhaps still tends to think in terms of the "modern viewpoint," with its "scientific" or even positivistic and technological conceptions of truth based on making, producing and constructing. Echoing Aristotle, Gadamer argues that this mode of knowledge does not suit the question under consideration, that is, the ethical and political dimensions of human existence. In the end, while Habermas accuses Gadamer of idealism because he allegedly absolutises hermeneutical understanding, Gadamer's response to Habermas is that his critical theory is deeply rooted in an idealistic and technical understanding of reason insofar as he overestimates the power of reflection.

Habermas's followers such as Wellmer have carried Habermas's critique of hermeneutics even further by questioning Gadamer's interpretation

of the Enlightenment. In Wellmer's view, in all matters concerning public agreement, the Enlightenment requires that reason be established as the principle of unconstrained communication, as opposed to a tradition distorted by force:

“The Enlightenment knew what hermeneutics forgets: that the ‘conversation’ which, according to Gadamer, we ‘are’ is also a nexus of force and for precisely that reason is not a conversation... The claim to universality of the hermeneutical approach can be held only if one starts from the recognition that the context of tradition, as the locus of possible truth and real accord, is at the same time the locus of real falsehood and the persistent use of force” (cited in Habermas, 1985a, 314).

Gadamer finds such criticisms problematic in that he always perceives traces of rationalist illusions in them. In response to those objections, Gadamer reiterates that no amount of reflection can remove our belonging to traditions, and that the complete opposition between *logos* and *alogos*, between reason and tradition, between freedom and *ethos* is unrealistic and false both anthropologically and ontologically. On this hermeneutical view, reason, like interpretation, always remains historically situated in tradition. It can bring before us something that otherwise happens behind our backs. Nonetheless, Gadamer immediately adds: “Something—but not everything, for... *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* is inescapably more *being* than consciousness, and being is never fully manifest” (38). Gadamer always tends to underscore the tension between tradition and reason, as well as the limits to dialogue and reflection. In his view, it is Habermas who is being dogmatic when he claims that reflection always shakes life-praxis and that the normative

content of the ideal of unconstrained dialogue is built into linguistic communication:

“Habermas accuses me of false ontologising, e.g., because I am not able to see authority and enlightenment as mutually exclusive. According to Habermas, this is false as it presupposes that legitimising recognition can come into play both without force and without the agreement that is the foundation of authority... I myself did not have such 'ideal' conditions in mind, but rather all the circumstances of concrete experience in terms of which one speaks of natural authority and the following which it finds. It seems to me a dogmatic prejudice concerning what one means by human 'reason' to always speak in such cases of coercive communication; e.g., where love, the choice of ideals, submissiveness, voluntary superiority or subordination have reached a level of stability. Thus, I am not able to see how communicative competence and its theoretical mastery in the social sphere are supposed to eliminate the barriers between groups, groups which in reciprocal critique charge each other with harbouring a coercive character in their present ways of understanding. In this instance... the acceptance of the claim of a completely different type of competence, that of political activity, [seems indispensable]. The goal of this activity is to bring about possibilities of communication where they had previously been absent” (287-288).

Thus, in opposition to Habermas, Gadamer stresses the impossibility of a totalising critique of inherited practices and ways of thinking (i.e., tradition).¹⁵ The problem with the idea of an unlimited communication is that it is a hermeneutical impossibility. The only way we can critically reflect upon certain aspects of our traditions is by tacitly appealing to others. This, Gadamer points out, is the meaning of the Hegelian critique of the excesses of the Enlightenment. Ricoeur (1973; 1990), commenting on the differences between Gadamer and Habermas, has correctly argued that an exhaustive criticism of tradition is not viable since there is no such thing as a “zero point” from which it could proceed. To insist on it not only amounts to a fanatical demand, but it also verges on the pathological because a super-critical hermeneutics of

¹⁵ For a commentary on this issue and in relation to the same passage, see Zuckert (1996, 101-102).

suspicion automatically assumes that tradition is inevitably the source of illusion and deception. This is why some Habermasians have sought to amend his ethics of communication in this regard. Seyla Benhabib, for instance, invoking the name of Gadamer, has attempted to “save discourse ethics from the excesses of its own rationalistic Enlightenment legacy” (Benhabib, 1992, 8).

But does Habermas, one might ask, ever claim to achieve such total transparency? Is Habermas’s ethics of unlimited communication really based on a complete negation of all traditions? If this is the case, that might indeed imply an incredible sociological naivety on Habermas’s part. To explain why Habermas so resolutely insists on subsuming hermeneutics within his critical theory without sacrificing any of its rationalistic legacy, some commentators have turned to biographical details and pointed out that the motivation behind this insistence on a break with all traditions is Habermas’s anxiety concerning Germany’s recent past. One of his sympathetic commentators, for instance, has argued that for Habermas, born into a world which has been shaped by National Socialism, the dilemma of a hermeneutical solution is clear: “an ethic based on the forms of life existing within a culture, would, in fact did, legitimate acts which we know to be the very contradiction of ethical behaviour. So the problem becomes one of finding a way to anchor an ethics in the dilemmas of modernity while at the same time avoiding the potentially destructive influence of essentially corrupt and distorted cultural traditions” (Rasmussen, 1990, 57).

Habermas's solution for this dilemma or anxiety is his ethics of communication.¹⁶

Some scholars have pointed out that Habermas's discourse ethics differs from Gadamer's hermeneutics in its excessive intellectualism (Grondin 2003, 104; Madison, 2000, 470) or in its overestimation of the power of theory over that of practice (Beiner, 1997, 83-94). This indeed seems to be the major difference between Gadamer and Habermas: Gadamer's hermeneutics—which is much more sensitive to both the ambiguities of human existence and the tension between *ethos* and *logos*, between tradition and dialogue—accentuates more than Habermas does the imbrication of reason and cultivation. This is why Gadamer lays greater emphasis on tradition and *Bildung*. Beiner underlines the “tremendous modesty” that characterises Gadamer's hermeneutics and argues convincingly that the quarrel between Gadamer and Habermas ultimately comes down to a question of the relative priority of theory and political experience or education:

“For Habermas, any practical judgement insofar as it has not been theoretically validated is to that extent somehow suspect, or clouded by suspicion, as to its possible groundlessness. For Gadamer, on the other hand, any theoretical judgement as such carries a certain measure of stigma insofar as it stands unmediated by the concreteness of a particular social experience... The issue is not one of truth versus relativity, as Habermas tends to present it, nor of validated knowledge versus unvalidated opinion; the issue, rather, is one of the truth of generality versus the truth of specificity—that is, truth at the level of abstract principles versus truth embedded in immediate circumstances” (Beiner, 1997, 90).

¹⁶ Many commentators have drawn attention to this connection between Habermas's ultra radical expectations from a critical theory of society and his biography. See, for instance, Bernstein (1983, 177). Habermas's own remarks on his intellectual formation appear to confirm this interpretation. For a strong criticism of this issue, see Strong and Sposito (1995, 265-267).

Almost all of Gadamer's remarks on Habermas's work confirm this interpretation. But perhaps the most forceful and clearest evidence appears in Gadamer's letter to Richard Bernstein: "I too am in favour of a government and politics that would allow for mutual understanding and freedom of all. But this is not due to the influence of Habermas. It has been self-evident to any European since the French Revolution, since Kant and Hegel" (1983, 265).

CONCLUSION

The question that needs to be addressed is, “What, then, do we make of these interpretations of tradition, modernity and human existence?” Throughout my discussion of Gadamer, Heidegger, and Habermas, I have sought to elicit the political implications of their views of tradition and modernity, without denying the important differences and similarities among their perspectives. In all of them we have sensed countless currents of thought that keep drawing us to not only the central anxieties and quandaries of modernity but also some of the controversial issues within modern political philosophy. Despite the many and substantial differences among them, Gadamer, Heidegger and Habermas share a constellation of themes such as technical and political reason, freedom and community—a cluster of concepts through which they endeavour to understand, among other things, the meaning of tradition and modernity. Now that I have shown their views of tradition and modernity, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the significance of their perspectives for contemporary political philosophy and practice.

Habermas argues that, while the emergence of modernity is (correctly) characterised as a process of rationalisation and disenchantment, modernity, with its clear manifestation of structures of communicative rationality, should be seen primarily as a progressive development and a universally significant achievement in human learning. While Gadamer is in fundamental agreement

with this interpretation, it would not be wrong to suggest that in Heidegger this conception of modernity as a process of disenchantment has been replaced by a disenchantment with modernity itself. This can be seen unmistakably in Heidegger's repudiation of the humanistic heritage of Europe and in his identification of technological thinking and the forgetfulness of being with universalism and modern freedoms. For Heidegger, these freedoms are merely "negative" freedoms. Authentic freedom, in his view, requires the subordination of the individual to a collective purpose and common destiny. As we have seen, in *Being and Time* Heidegger argues that authentic political community has to be violently wrested from the inauthentic publicity and spiritual emptiness characteristic of modern technological society. Relying chiefly on the pre-Socratic understanding of human existence or being as *polemos*, Heidegger argues in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* that human beings understand their existence only in terms of a world into which they are thrown and which they have not made. In discovering the ultimately groundless character of human existence, a people can resolutely project their past into an unknown future. Nonetheless, what they project, Heidegger insists, is not simply their own creation: it is the way of life they have acquired from the community in which they live. An authentic political community is essentially a *Volk* which has inherited its practices and way of life in the form of customs from their ancestors and communal heritage. Heidegger's attack on public life and the "dreary technological frenzy and organisation of the average," therefore, must be seen as a criticism of both a progressive vision of

history and the achievements of modernity. Heidegger's response to modernity is to advance a vision of authentic political community, which is in the process of continuously being created anew under the leadership of great creators, and in which the creative reappropriation of tradition and the reassertion of collective particularity are the leading ethical ideals.¹ What is questionable, therefore, is not the absence of an ethical and political perspective in Heidegger, for surely his critique of modernity is ultimately rooted in a rival political outlook. Rather, what is problematic is his rejection of publicity and modernity *tout court* in the name of an ethics of *polemos* that is supposed to bring about a completely new type of dwelling and a new relation between man and being on this earth. The historical examples of traditions and communities that seem to be most conscious of their “inherited, yet chosen destiny” such as fanatic religious, ideological and racial wars in which certain peoples appoint themselves to the mission of destroying others make us extremely doubtful as to whether or not such “common destinies” arise from an extreme self-loss and nihilism rather than “authentic freedom” or “authentic happening” of traditions.

Gadamer and Habermas, in stark opposition to Heidegger, are one in affirming the moral and political achievements of European modernity. Although the dispute between Gadamer and Habermas has received much

¹ Precisely such a radical critique of modernity as Heidegger's—i.e., a totalising critique of modern freedoms, universalism and fundamental modern institutions such as parliamentary democracy and democratic public sphere—is viewed as embodying some of the chief characteristics of “radical European conservatism” in Muller's discussion of the varieties of conservatism (1997). See especially pp. 27-31.

more critical attention, the differences between Gadamer and Heidegger, as I have shown, are more fundamental in terms of the political implications of their thought. Not only do both Gadamer and Habermas agree that there are different kinds of reason. But they also argue that the modern principle that all are free and equal can never again be shaken. Moreover, my interpretation of Gadamer's hermeneutical account of tradition as a weak, post-traditional vision of tradition has aimed at highlighting the common ground that Gadamer and Habermas share. My fundamental argument has been that Gadamer's view of tradition is superior to Habermas's in view of its recognition of the priority of education and cultivation, as well as its acknowledgement of the excesses and limits of Habermas's rationalism and his ethics of unlimited communication. In emphasising the role of *Bildung*, Gadamer appears to be a twentieth-century follower of Schiller: like Schiller, Gadamer is neither a conservative nor a radical.² Likewise, Gadamer's account of tradition reflects his determination to provide a view of human existence that is attentive to human historicity and finitude, and which is not at odds with human autonomy. Nothing in what has been said throughout my analysis, therefore, should be construed to imply that Gadamer's vision of tradition, because it is attentive to the embeddedness of human experience, endorses cultural relativism or a celebration of traditionalism. In this respect, what Gadamer's perspective certainly is not, is the perspective of a traditionalist.

² The affinity between Gadamer and Schiller can be observed in the first part of *Truth and Method* where Gadamer presents his view of *Bildung*, but it particularly becomes manifest in Gadamer's short essays in *Praise of Theory*. See pp. 114-122.

By way of concluding I would like draw attention to two main political implications that directly flow from Gadamer's hermeneutics, and which provide some insightful underpinnings for current debates about multiple modernities and intercivilisational dialogue.

First, it is important to realise that for Gadamer, the humanities and the European humanistic tradition, perhaps more significantly than modern scientific thinking and technology, are not only heir to Europe's most distinctive civilisational, ethical and metaphysical concerns. Furthermore, Gadamer argues that they place the accent on the significance of historically grown political, moral and intellectual traditions. As a concerned European citizen and a philosopher with a truly secular vision, Gadamer stresses that the deeper significance of Europe or its genuine legacy, a legacy that may also serve as an exemplar to all modern societies, resides in its diversity of national and historical paths, in the multiplicity of its spiritual, literary and religious traditions and in its multilingual and multicultural character. Yet, Gadamer is certainly aware that an emphasis on cultural distinctness or local traditions may harbour the peril of a retreat into fanaticism or parochialism. But it must be noted that just as Gadamer argues that the diversity of traditions in a narrow space is the deeper meaning of Europe, he likewise contends that this diversity is by no means incompatible with tolerance and cross-cultural or intercivilisational dialogue, provided that different traditions also recognise the principal contribution of European modernity to the world civilisation—that is, the capacity for hermeneutical reflection which requires modern societies and

communities to take a reflexive posture concerning everything handed down by traditions. This is essentially why Gadamer's hermeneutics contains a weak conception of tradition. In this sense, no interpretation of Gadamer's hermeneutics could be more deficient than the one which claims that it is relativistic. As Gadamer remarks: "The conflict of traditions we have today does not seem to me to be anything exceptional. *Phronesis* is always the process of distinguishing and choosing what one considers to be right" (1983, 264-265). Thus what Gadamer calls for is a historically and pluralistically enlightened universalism, which perhaps represents a middle path between Heidegger and Habermas.

The second insight we can derive from Gadamer's hermeneutics also appears to be indisputably at odds with Heideggerian type self-assertion of particularity. Gadamer's chief contention is that the capacity to question oneself and to see oneself through the eyes of others, both of which are the crucial aspects of his hermeneutics, is an equally distinctive feature of European modernity.³ The ideals of tolerance and criticism, Gadamer says, are not neutral ideals, but represent the unique achievement of the European humanistic tradition and its hermeneutical consciousness. But this humanism, Gadamer reminds us, is not the humanism which has been the target of

³ But it must be noted that Gadamer sees the roots of this capacity to question oneself in ancient political philosophy—particularly in Plato's dialectic. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer reinterprets this as "the logic of question and answer" and makes it the cornerstone of his own hermeneutics. As always, Gadamer is determined to build a bridge between ancient and modern political philosophy. See especially, pp. 362-379. His most inspiring assessment of this "Socratic wisdom" can be found in the chapter entitled "Socratic Knowing and not-Knowing" in *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy* (1983).

Heidegger's criticism in his well-known "Letter on Humanism." Rather, it is a humanism defined by the idea of incompleteness, finitude and fallibility underlying the human condition. Relying chiefly on this humanistic tradition, Gadamer points out that there is a third way beyond the spirit of technology or a planetary civilisation and blood-and-soil fanaticism. Europe's genuine legacy and promise for the world—that is, its multiplicity and its critical spirit—is invoked precisely in his hermeneutical vision of tradition: we need to deny, Gadamer urges us, once and for all, the idea of traditions as hermetic, sealed and internally self-consistent wholes which are beyond rearticulation, reasoned criticism and reinterpretation, and ponder the idea that every specific view of tradition, as well as every argument in the political sphere, is necessarily partial, fallible and corrigible in the light of new encounters and experiences. The genuine inheritance of European civilisation, the most distinctive characteristic of Europe's moral and political horizons, and perhaps Europe's most important contribution to the future of humanity, Gadamer says, consists in its determination to combine diversity with freedom, continuity with reasoned criticism, tradition with interpretation:

"We all, as humans and as peoples and nations, break the laws of such coexistence infinitely often, and yet in actual life, with the good will of partners, something common is always rebuilt. In general this appears to me to be the same task everywhere. And it appears to me that here, the diversity of languages, this neighbourhood of the other in a narrow space, and the equality of the other in an even narrower space, are a true training ground... We have to learn together what our European task means to us and we have to do this for the future of humanity as a whole" (Gadamer, 1992a, 234).

Thus Gadamer certainly is not a utopian, for he repeatedly emphasises that the "nature" of human beings does not change dramatically, and that the

abuse of power is one of the original problems of human coexistence.⁴ This is why Gadamer immediately qualifies his interpretation of the legacy of Europe and the humanistic tradition by pointing out that tolerance implies neither disregarding oneself nor tolerating fanaticism:

"Today's tendency toward unification and the levelling of all differences should not lead to the mistaken thought that the deeply rooted pluralism of cultures, languages and historical fates can actually be suppressed or even should be suppressed. The task could lie in the opposite direction: to develop within a civilisation of ever increasing uniformity the authentic life of the regions, the human groups and their forms of life. The homelessness with which the modern industrial world threatens humans drives one to search for home. What follows from this? With such ideas of the coexistence of differences, one must take care not to introduce a false claim for tolerance or better a false concept of tolerance. It is a widespread mistake to take tolerance to be a virtue which abandons insisting on one's own position and represents the other one as equally valid... The acceptance of the other certainly does not mean that one would not be completely conscious of one's own inalienable Being. It is rather one's own strength... which permits one to be tolerant... The authentic task of the human future which has truly gained global significance lies in the area of human coexistence... That Europe consciously preserves the essential particularity of lived traditions in the competition and exchange of cultures appears to me to be like a most visible sign of life and like the deepest spiritual breath, through which Europe becomes conscious of itself. To participate in this appears to me to be the continuing contribution which the humanities must perform not only for the future of Europe but for the future of humanity" (206-208).

⁴ Gadamer's interpretation of "Plato's educational state" in *Dialogue and Dialectic* directly addresses this problem (1980, 73-92).

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