

The Search for Authentic Understanding and the Birth of Radical Hermeneutics*

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Abstract

This paper argues that it is the human search for authentic understanding that gives birth to radical hermeneutics, and not the reverse. Radical hermeneutics in the “contemporary” sense begins with Martin Heidegger’s critical reinterpretation of Immanuel Kant’s answer to the question of “What is *the* man?” (Was ist *der* Mensch?), and continues with his reflection on Being as the foundation of hermeneutics. Hans-Georg Gadamer has developed Heidegger’s thesis into what he termed philosophical hermeneutics, while Jacques Derrida seized Heidegger’s *Kehre* as the momentum to launch a typically Nietzschean interpretation, that is, to “return” to understanding in its genetic stage. Despite their difference, Gadamer and Derrida believed that authentic understanding is possible only if it is motivated by a creative force that remains loyal to humanness: identity in difference and difference in identity.

Key terms *radical hermeneutics, Kant, Heidegger, Gadamer, Derrida*

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This paper argues that it is the human search for authentic understanding that gives birth to radical hermeneutics, and not the reverse. More than exegesis and traditional hermeneutics, which aim at a “correct” understanding or a “true” knowledge in the sense of mathematical truth or, at least, of “common sense,” radical hermeneutics displays a permanent search for authentic understanding, that is, an understanding in its genetic process. The subject’s relentless quest for truth motivates the dynamics that generates understanding. Interpretation itself is the active participation of the subject in the process of coming into understanding, of renewing understanding, enriching understanding, and even of negating understanding (as seen in the case of Friedrich Nietzsche’s nihilism, and Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction).

Radical hermeneutics in the “contemporary” sense¹ begins with Martin Heidegger’s critical reinterpretation of Immanuel Kant’s answer to the question of “What is *the* man?” (Was ist *der* Mensch?), and continues with his reflection on Being as the foundation of hermeneutics. His interpretation of the principle of identity, truth, etc. is, in fact, his indirect demonstration of the thesis about hermeneutics as Being’s essential activity, and about ontological hermeneutics as the new foundation of metaphysics. Hans-Georg Gadamer has developed Heidegger’s thesis into what he termed philosophical hermeneutics, while Jacques Derrida seized Heidegger’s *Kehre* as the momentum to launch a typically Nietzschean interpretation, that is, to “return” to understanding in its genetic stage. “Differance” and “deconstruction” (*Abbau* and *Destruktion* in Heidegger’s language) are taken as both strategy and tactics to prove the “impotence” of Hegel’s dialectic, to push the Husserlian “eidetic reduction” to its limit, and to force Heidegger’s hidden “authenticity” to reveal itself.

¹ I have argued elsewhere that radical hermeneutics had been practiced even at Homer’s times in Greece, and Confucius’s time in China. Matteo Ricci, a Jesuit missionary in China at the 17th century, had applied this kind of hermeneutics in the form of “acculturation” and “in-culturation.” See Tran Van Doan, “The Radical Hermeneutics of Matteo Ricci,” in *Sogang Theology and Philosophy* (Seoul: Sogang University, July 2013).

Heidegger on Kant's Question "What is *the* Man?" (Was ist *der* Mensch?)

Kant is perhaps one of the most optimistic philosophers we have ever had. Unlike most of philosophers who never found peace with themselves, even in their final stage, Kant was convinced of his "accomplished mission" and satisfied with his meaningful life.² And, no doubt, Kant deserved it.

What made the "Chinese in Koenigsberg" satisfied is, I guess, his conviction about the adequacy of his solution to the thorny and, until then, unanswered question, "What is *the* man?/Was ist *der* Mensch?"³ With a meticulous analysis of the human faculty of knowing, moral reasoning, and the human quest for the meaning of life, Kant believed that he had, finally, found solutions to the questions "What can I know?", "What should I do?" and "What may I hope?" These three questions deal, no doubt, with the human faculties of knowing, behaving, and creative living, which constitute *the* (*der*) man. Evidently, Kant's main works, especially the three *Critiques* and the *Grundlegung*, were designed for this purpose.⁴ Kant's proposal that one may know and behave rightly only if human faculty of thinking and acting strictly follow transcendental conditions or categorical imperatives has been taken by neo-Kantians as the most adequate answer so far to the question of "What is the man?" Martin Heidegger may have been the first challenger to Kant's answer. And he had to pay a costly price for it.⁵

² Kant died on February 12, 1804, and his softly uttered final word was "*Genug*" (Enough). On the grab-stone of his tomb is carved the passage once printed in the *Critique of Practical Reason*: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me."

³ The usual translation of "Was ist der Mensch?" is "What is man?" I wish to call on attention here of the article "*der*" (the) that indicates the general essence of a certain species that we refer to as "man."

⁴ *Kant's Introduction to Logic*, trans. T. K. Abbott (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1885), 15; and in Immanuel Kant, *Correspondence*, trans. A. Zweig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 458. Also, *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Koeniglich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaft, 1910), 11:429.

⁵ It is well known that Heidegger's *Being and Time* had been rejected by the Ministry of

Almost all Neo-Kantians at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century have continued Kant's project. As fervent believers, they rarely questioned the effectiveness of the solutions offered by their master. What they did was to attempt to apply Kant's main doctrines in different fields of knowledge, especially the social sciences.⁶ Heidegger was an exception. Trying to step over the limit of "transcendentalism," he tried very hard to fulfill Kant's critical project by turning the Kantian system upside down. In fact, the allegation leveled against Heidegger by the Neo-Kantians of his time,⁷ that his interpretation did violence to Kant, did not stop him from claiming for himself the role of Kant's inheritor. A controversial but thoughtful claim! One may say that Heidegger, a "prodigal" son (in the eyes of Neo-Kantians), had ventured to prove himself the true heir of Kantianism. So heretical, so blasphemous was Heidegger in the eyes of Neo-Kantians! And so is Jacques Derrida towards Heidegger with his controversial claim that the latter's "onto-theology" is a system of presence, logocentrism, and phonocentrism.⁸ The

Education as the thesis for the chair of professorship, and by the publishing house in his first attempt. Thanks to Edmund Husserl, Heidegger's *opus magnum* had been published in *Phenomenological Research*, and he succeeded in getting the chair at Freiburg University as Husserl's successor in 1928. One among well-known Kantians, Ernst Cassirer has openly dismissed Heidegger's interpretation of Kant in a review of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. See Ernst Cassirer, "Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik, Bemerkungen zu Martin Heidegger's Kant-Interpretation," *Kant-Studien* 36, no. 1/2 (1931): 17. See also John Michael Krois, "Cassirer's Unpublished Critique of Heidegger," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 16, no. 3 (1983): 147–59.

⁶ The revival of Kantianism was initiated by philosophers who were unhappy with Hegelianism. Hermann Cohen in the 19th century, and then the Marburg School and the Southwest School in the beginning of the 20th century, represent the trend of neo-Kantianism. While the Marburg School (with P. Natorp, E. Cassirer, and others) concentrated on Kant's epistemology and logic, the Southwest School (with W. Windelband, H. Rickert, E. Troeltsch, and others) explored Kant's view of culture, values, etc. To the field of social sciences, Georg Simmel and Max Weber had a great contribution.

⁷ Ernst Cassirer, "Martin Heidegger's Kant-Interpretation," 17.

⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1974), 22. D. Michelfelder and R. Palmer noted, "In seeking to find a source for the divergence of these two powerful currents of contemporary European thought (hermeneutics and deconstruction), one immediately runs up against the body of thought and texts bearing the signature of Heidegger." (*Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, ed. Diane Michelfelder and Richard Palmer [New York: State University of New York Press, 1989], 1.)

“illegitimate pupil”⁹ has brilliantly twisted the master’s insight of the constitution of metaphysics into the art of *différance* by “deconstructing” the master himself.¹⁰

Indeed, Heidegger’s opponents like Cassirer had to concede that Heidegger had developed the Kantian heritage to the farthest limit, precisely by “deforming” it, making it more Heideggerian and less Kantian.¹¹ His *Being and Time* (1927) could be seen as Heidegger’s attempt to overcome Kant’s metaphysics and to lay the foundation for ontology. As a matter of fact, *Being and Time* can be seen, rightly, as Heidegger’s own answer to Kant’s question of “What is *the* man?” By objecting to Kant’s understanding of the human based on transcendental categories, Heidegger had “overthrown”—“deconstructed” in Jacques Derrida’s language—Kant’s transcendental system. He constructed the so-called “existential categories” in order to get an authentic picture of man. His “revolt” against Kant took the path similar to that once adopted by Karl Marx against Hegel’s dialectic, that is, a revolution that aims at correcting the course of history by redirecting it to its authentic end. Similarly, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1929) was designed as a more radical revolution, turning Kant’s metaphysics into an ontology. In Heidegger’s view, not metaphysics (either in the Aristotelian or Kantian sense) but only ontology can serve as the foundation of an authentic “anthropology.”

The violence of Heidegger’s hermeneutics is its radical character. No compromise, no middle way is tolerated! Radical means to submerge oneself in the root, to go to the extreme; and to go to the extreme means to return to the origin (*Kehre*). Heidegger’s relentless question, “Why are

⁹ John Caputo, in his essay “Gadamer’s Close Existentialism: A Derridean Critique,” has placed Gadamer in the camp of the “right wing,” while Derrida in the “left wing” of Heideggerianism. (In Michelfelder and Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, 258–64.) The left wing Hegelians have never been direct pupils of Hegel, but they developed Hegelianism to a new stage beyond their master. Karl Marx, just as Ludwig Feuerbach, David Strauss, Max Stirner, and others, are rightly considered as the “illegitimate pupils” of Hegel.

¹⁰ Robert Bernasconi, in “Seeing Double: *Destruction* and Deconstruction,” even argued that Derrida has misinterpreted Heidegger’s “*Destruction*,” by putting in Heidegger’s mouth what the latter did not intend. (In Michelfelder and Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, 233–50.)

¹¹ See Cassirer, “Martin Heidegger’s Kant-Interpretation.” See also Peter E. Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

there essents (*Seiendes*) rather than Nothing (*Nichts*)?”¹² clearly indicates his stubbornness in his search for the final answer. For him, the last is also the first, the deepest, the widest, the greatest, etc., and that is the question of Being itself.¹³ In this sense, a true and rigorous science (phenomenology) should not be allowed to satisfy itself with a phenomenal reduction, or even an eidetic reduction, as Husserl insisted (here is the sign of a rift between Heidegger and his master). Like Johannes Fichte, Heidegger saw in Kant’s defiant insistence on the “unknowable-ness” of the thing-in-itself the insurmountable obstacle preventing Kant from going farther and deeper beyond the sphere of phenomena. Consequently, Kant’s answer goes only halfway to the final one that is expected by Heidegger. No true and exact answer can be found on the surface, because the true answer lies deeply at the bottom; it can be retrieved only if it is unearthed from and out of the world of phenomena. Here is the reason why Heidegger would chide Kant for the latter’s wrong direction. The latter scratches where it does not itch!¹⁴

Of course, Kant, confidently relying on the strength of Newton’s science, was certain of the rightness of his approach. The undeniable effect of the new science supports him in his merciless assault on the stronghold of traditional metaphysics (*Prolegomena for Any Future Metaphysics* [1783]). Only much later in his life did Kant begin to entertain second thoughts about the “real” effectiveness of his solutions. In his later writings, despite his attempts to convince his critics—especially those of his deontology—of the tenability of the thesis, he had to indirectly concede that his prescriptions could be best applied to the fixed, unchangeable, and isolated world, but they would not work effectively in practice in dealing with the human realm.¹⁵

¹² Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1960).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1–4ff.

¹⁴ Heidegger echoed Nietzsche’s critique and depicted the whole Western philosophy as Platonism. See Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 2 vols. (Pfullingen: Neske, 1961).

¹⁵ Kant indirectly “confessed” his doubt about the practical validity of his moral principles in a small work, published much later in his old age: “Ueber den Gemeinspruch: Das mag richtig in der Theorie sein, taugt aber nicht fuer die Praxis.” (Immanuel Kant, *Werke in zwölf Bänden*, vol. 11 [Frankfurt a. M., 1977], 127–30.)

The main problem of Kant, Heidegger argued, is that Kant did not deal more thoroughly with the question “What is *the* man?” since Kant was convinced of the identical essence of natural laws (of Newton) and human laws. He treated man as an object, a general object indeed, and not as a specific subject. Kant did not discover that *the* man is both of general and unique essences. What he found is the general man, or the man of the “*volonté générale*” (Rousseau), that is, an entity “enchained” by the transcendental categories and transcendental logic, which are founded on the principle of identity. Detached from the real man, Kant’s categorical imperatives are “soulless,” and “senseless,” merely by virtue of their “transcendentality.” Like space and time, the external and internal conditions of cognition, the categories are objective, independent of experiences and other human factors. The question now is, if morality requires an abdication of any inclination (towards happiness, interests, pleasure, and even God’s love), and requires that one act only for the sake of duty, then categorical imperatives are, in a certain sense, not human—they are “beyond” human or even inhuman. Indeed, his transcendental categories are constructed from such a “non-human” world.

Kant’s view that a thing must be forced by the subject to appear in conformity to the transcendental rules contradicts the fact that the human in particular may appear, grow, change, disappear, transform, and so on, in accordance with its own nature. Kant’s hasty identification of the world of phenomena with the human world, of natural laws with human laws, in accordance with the logical formula of $A=A$, forces him to pay a dear price: the false reduction of the human world.

Long before Heidegger, Nietzsche had already discovered this grave mistake of Kant. In Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche, any reduction of the human and the human world would result in the so-called “oblivion of Being” (*Seinsvergessenheit*); and any attempt to equate Being with beings (entities) would impoverish Being itself. In Heidegger’s view, Kant had

clearly headed toward a wrong direction.¹⁶ Kant's stubborn "loyalty" to the idea of the "unknowable-ness" of the thing-in-itself, and his treatment of human beings as objects prevent him from heading to the right direction. Being content with an analysis of the phenomenal world, Kant may see no need to penetrate deeper into the root of humanity and to discover its kernel, since the thing-in-itself cannot be known anyway, and the human is also (conceived as) a thing-in-itself.

By relegating the kernel of the thing (the soul of man) to the noumenal, that is, the source and the force generating phenomena (or human behaviors), Kant felt that what alone is left for us to do is to restore the subject's power of subjugating, arranging, or ordering phenomena in accordance with laws (discovered by the subject). As such, he tacitly conceded that the human is unable to go beyond the border of the world of phenomena. Excluded from his "rational discourse" is the world of noumena, and the most fundamental questions determining human nature, namely those about God, freedom, and the immortality of the soul. Kant unconsciously restrained the potential growth of the human as a creative subject.

To remedy the difficulty posed by Kant, Heidegger proved in *Being and Time* that the "what-ness" (of something) can be known only by its "how-ness" and "why-ness," and that Being is in an acting and self-revealing process. Therefore, to deal thoroughly with the question of "what is," one has to inquire into the core of the question of "why" and of "how." This means that any rigorous phenomenology is not possible without being grounded in an ontology. Furthermore, in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1929), Heidegger made clear that he had to find an answer to the question about the nature of human self-development and its reason that he had already explored in *Being and Time*. Man, in the philosophical concept of

¹⁶ Actually, Johannes G. Fichte, Wilhelm F. Schelling, and then Georg F. Hegel had raised their objection to Kant's view of *Ding-an-sich* that they regarded as the obstacle for the advancement of knowledge, and hence, philosophy.

Being, is not and cannot be treated as an object, the way Kant did. It is neither the impersonal, a-temporal and non-spatial categories nor the transcendental conditions which determine man; it is man as the active subject who decides man himself. Acting means living (F. Schelling), and living is a permanent process of acquiring experiences (*erleben*) and generating new knowledge about man (*Erlebnis*). Anthropology thus means not a system of static knowledge about man, but the study of how man lives, that is, how the human acts, generates, forms, and transforms oneself.

Knowledge or Knowing: Heidegger's Approach to the Problem of Knowledge

Ever since Plato, knowledge has been conceived as a static state of knowing. Plato's insight of the εἶδος as the fixed and eternal origin of knowledge has been "uncritically" taken for granted, and so has the idea of science (*Wissenschaft*). Since Descartes, such a view of science has been intensified by and cemented with mathematical (and logical) proofs. Descartes's merit, his discovery of method, however, is also his burden. There is less critical questioning about his insistence on intuition and deduction, actually and primarily used in mathematics as the correct methods, but more about his claim of them as the sole means of discovering truth and for warranting it. That leads to his extravagant claim of the absolute power of the method in warranting all truths, and in being the foundation of science. As such, methodology, contrary to Descartes's intention, took the place of metaphysics.

If knowledge is founded on truth, and if there is only one truth, then such knowledge must be true. Truth, therefore, is defined by sameness. Furthermore, if truth can be known and be warranted only by the most effective method, then not metaphysics but methodology must be the most noble and fundamental science. Metaphysics is, logically, reduced to epistemology, and epistemology is, in turn, reduced to methodology. Now, the one who has the best method possesses truth, that is, true knowledge.

Needles to say, such a view has been endorsed by rationalists and empiricists alike. Truth takes the form of either common sense (Locke), or most certain idea, that is, universal and necessary idea (Descartes's *idea clara*

et distincta), of either indubitable or evident fact (the early Wittgenstein) or verified fact (Popper). It can be attained either by an *a priori* method (intuition and deduction) or by *a posteriori* means of observing, experiencing, inducing, synthesizing, and systematizing. Since truth is implicit in the world of phenomena, and since the thing-in-itself cannot be known, what can be observed, justified, and verified are phenomena themselves, that is, external facts or data. Truth is hence defined as the correspondence between fact and concept, or in St. Thomas Aquinas's expression, *adaequatio intellectus et rei*. The theory of reference and of correspondence, once regarded as the foundation of knowledge, are therefore logical products of the belief in the evidence of the phenomenal world and in science as universal and necessary knowledge.

Nietzsche has been the first modern philosopher who waged a merciless war on such truism. In the *Fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1887–1888) and especially in the posthumous *Der Wille zur Macht*, Nietzsche attempted to entirely reject the edification of this traditional view of truth based on reality, and consequently, the traditional sciences. He argued quite differently that it is not truth which is based on reality, but reality on truth; and that truth can be possible only in relation to the will-to-power.¹⁷ Will-to-power is the driving force in man, underlying all reality, which pushes man towards a self-mastering and self-overcoming. It is the foundation of truth and knowledge.

But it was Heidegger who was the most eloquent and tenacious fighter for a “non-modern” view of science. He succeeded in turning the tide, putting the camp of traditional truth on the defensive. His war against the view of truth in terms of the equation $A=A$, that is, in terms of the principle of identity, is carried out further by Max Horkheimer and

¹⁷ “Der wahrhaftige versteht sich gewissermassen als Personification des Willens zur Wahrheit”. *Wille zur Macht*, XVI, 48, in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967) ; and “Wille zur Wahrheit selber nur ‘ein Mittel’ dieses Willens zur Macht sein.” (*Wille zur Macht*, XV, 411). See also Wolfgang Mueller-Lauter, *Nietzsche: Seine Philosophie der Gegensätze und die Gegensätze seiner Philosophie* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971), 97–99.

Theodor W. Adorno.¹⁸ It reached its climax with postmodernism, and ended with the extravagant claim about the end of modernity.¹⁹ Michel Foucault first,²⁰ and then Derrida,²¹ among others, fired their deadly bullets upon the body of modernity, arguing for a “new” science in the spirit of Giambattista Vico’s *La Scienza Nuova* (1725), that is, upon the idea that all sciences, including mathematics, are constructed on human life and not the reverse. Life with its main activities such as reproduction, death, and religion must be the foundation of all sciences.

If science is closely associated with human life-activity, and if life is in a permanent process of growing and declining, or of being born and dying, then any idea of “transcendental” knowledge, aloof from human life, seems to be, at the very least, impractical. Heidegger’s criticism of the traditional interpretation of truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei* or as the identity of idea and thing, and his reinterpretation of Parmenides’s $\tau\omicron\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron$ (the sameness) clearly indicated his strong objection to the positivist approach to truth and also to the rationalist method of deduction. Authentic knowledge cannot be retrieved from the act of examining phenomena, that is, of cutting them in pieces and rearranging them in a certain (transcendental) system. Knowing cannot be reduced to a simple act of fitting itself to a certain framework or a schema, or to the act of constructing a (static) state of knowledge in accordance with an artificial model or structure. Paradigms are constructed from knowing and not the reverse. If knowing is an act of Being in full freedom, then truth must reflect this free knowing: “The Essence of truth is freedom” (*Das Wesen der Wahrheit ist die Freiheit*), as Heidegger often repeated in his brief but very thoughtful *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* (1930).²² As such, the self-sameness of truth cannot be that of mathematical identity that excludes the possibility

¹⁸ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

¹⁹ Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*, trans. Jon R. Snyder (Garzanti, 1985; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

²⁰ Michel Foucault, *Archéologie du Savoir* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966).

²¹ Jacques Derrida, *La Voix et le Phénomène* (Paris, 1967)

²² Martin Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* (Frankfurt a. M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1967), 71ff.

of any freedom, be it the “freedom-from” or the “freedom-to” (Isaiah Berlin).²³ Factual knowledge cannot represent truth *in toto* (*die volle Wahrheit*). In short, no fixed state of knowing can truthfully represent truth. It is a mistake to identify a static state of knowledge as science, and the act of knowing as understanding. The illusion of having truth in the form of geometrical beauty and mathematical sublimity is born from the false conception of perfection as the most universal and necessary character of truth.

Compatible to his view of truth as Being’s self-disclosure, Heidegger in his *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* offers a new and radical understanding of science, not in terms of static, universal, and necessary knowledge, but rather in terms of the free act of self-disclosure.²⁴ Science (*Wissenschaft*) is grounded on the truth of Being and not on the truth of beings. This means that truth must be grounded on Being which freely acts, that is, freely reveals itself. Being is by no means restricted by transcendental categories or static conditions. For Derrida, such a science would be possible if the hurdles limiting its growth are dispelled. Destruction, deconstruction, etc., must be the prerequisites to the reconstruction of authentic truth (Derrida) while openness and unrestricted growth are the essences of true sciences (Popper).

Heidegger’s View of Identity and Difference: The Beginning of the Right and Left Wings of Hermeneutics

The search for authentic understanding does not end with a revolution against traditional metaphysics and modern epistemology. Actually, such a revolution has never fully taken place. Thus, for Heidegger, the battle must be carried on by an attack on all fronts. Traditional logic, which traditional sciences have relied upon, must be put on trial, and its principles—namely, the principle of identity, the principle of non-contradiction, and the

²³ Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

²⁴ Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*, 94. “Die Offenstaendigkeit des Verhaltens als innere Ermoeglichung der Richtigkeit gruended in der Freiheit.” Or, “das volle Wesen der Wahrheit das Unwesen einschliesst und vor allem zuvor als Verbergung waltet.”

principle of the excluded middle—must be tested with fire. Since, the last two principles are actually deduced from the first—namely, the principle of identity—Heidegger concentrated his attack on this principle. The principle of identity must be reinterpreted, no longer in terms of the logical principle of $A=A$, but rather in the light of the essence of truth.²⁵

Against the interpretation of identity in terms of sameness, and of the equation of $A=A$ as a tautology, Heidegger suggests: (1) Identity does not mean the same, since it suggests at least two elements “One A is equal to another”²⁶ and the other is not the same first element. Hence, “the formula $A=A$ speaks of the equality of two elements. It does not define A as the same.”²⁷ Taking Plato’s saying, “Each one of them is different from the (other) two, but itself the same for itself,”²⁸ Heidegger argued that identity is actually not the principle but the very act of self-presenting of Being. As self-presenting, or self-disclosing, identity refers to the act of self-appropriating, the act of “belonging together” and the act of synthesis of itself. It refers also to the act of departing from oneself and the act of returning to oneself.²⁹

Appropriation (Ereignis)

Appropriation is primarily an event,³⁰ a peculiar event that happens only once, and only for someone: “What it indicates happens only in the singular, no, not in any number, but uniquely.”³¹ But this uniqueness

²⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

²⁶ Ibid., 23.

²⁷ Ibid., 24.

²⁸ *The Sophist*, 254d, quoted in Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 24.

²⁹ Ibid. “The dative *heautō* means: each thing itself is returned to itself, each itself is the same for itself within itself.”

³⁰ Ibid., 36. “The words event of appropriation, thought of it in terms of the matter indicate, should now speak as a key term in the service of thinking. As such a key term, it can no more be translated than the Greek *Logos* and the Chinese *Tao*. The term event of appropriation here no

longer means what we would otherwise call a happening, an occurrence. It now is used as a ‘singulare tantum.’ What indicates happens only in the singular, no, not in any number, but uniquely.”

³¹ Ibid.

would not be known if it is excluded from the “frame,” that is, from the constellation of Being.³² At the same time, uniqueness would resist any temptation to be sucked into the frame. Uniqueness remains only if it keeps its origin. Any authentic appropriation must be original.³³ In a word, it is not the origin, or the uniqueness that changes, but it is the frame that is transformed:

Such a transformation of the frame into the event of appropriation, by virtue of that event, would bring the appropriate recovery—appropriate, hence never to be produced by man alone—of the world of technology from its dominance back to servitude in the realm by which man reaches more truly into the event of appropriation.³⁴

In short, appropriation is the act of Being, expressing its uniqueness and originality, and as such, a peculiar aspect of identity: “The appropriation appropriates man and Being to the essential togetherness.”³⁵

Belonging together (Zusammengehören)

The peculiar act of appropriating “appropriates” all other activities and aspects of Being and makes each of them “unique.” Uniqueness or particularity does not refer to the only one, but expresses rather all the characteristics of Being, which are constituted so that Being appears in its uniqueness. Thus, the key element is the force that relates all elements and unifies them into one. That is the essence of Being. That is the force that Heidegger identified as the act of “belonging together.” All elements bear in themselves the “togetherness” that internally and dynamically forces them to be unified: “However, belonging together can also be thought of as *belonging* together. This means: the ‘together’ is now determined by the belonging.”³⁶

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 37

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 38. Also: “The essence of identity is a property of the event of appropriation.”

³⁶ Ibid., 29.

If belonging together is the essence of Being, then togetherness must be its nature. It is in this sense that togetherness is interpreted by Gadamer as the common horizon, as *sensus communis*, as tradition, and as *Bildung*. It is also in this sense that Heidegger reinterpreted Parmenides's view of Being in its most authentic nature, and not dualistically: Being both in its holistic and genetic nature: “το γὰρ αὐτο νοεῖν ἐστὶν τε καὶ εἶναι” (For the same perceiving [thinking] as well as being.)” (ID 27). This means that diversity does not contradict uniqueness. In contrast, it rather enriches it, and makes it more unique: Being reveals itself as the same in its diversity. The act of self-revealing of Being shows that the same is the same by virtue of its difference, and difference is different by virtue of its sameness: “Different things, thinking and Being, are here thought of as the Same.”³⁷

Even the act of *belonging* means more than belonging in the ordinary sense. *Belonging, gehören* . . . already and implicitly points to a source to which it is belonging. And this source is Being itself from which beings are appearing, and to which beings are orienting. Revealing diversely and differently and remaining the same, that is the very essence of Being: “The question of the meaning of this Same is the question of the active nature of identity.”³⁸ In other words: “Now it becomes clear that Being belongs with thinking to an identity whose active essence stems from that letting belong together which we call appropriation. The essence of identity is a property of the event of appropriation.”³⁹

The Claim of Authentic Understanding or the Battle of Hermeneutics and Deconstruction

As I have argued, contemporary hermeneutics has been rooted in Heidegger's radically ontological “reduction” (in the sense of *εποχή*) back to the most original beginning, or the root of life, in which identity and

³⁷ Ibid., 27. Such view is repeatedly chanted by Heidegger as a refrain in his song of Being: “thinking and Being belong together in the Same and by virtue of the Same”; or, “For the same are thinking as well as Being” (Parmenides, quoted in Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 38).

³⁸ Ibid., 38–39.

³⁹ Ibid., 39

difference are its “constituting” parts. His reflection on the onto-theological constitution of Being gave impetus to the further development of radical hermeneutics, either from the standpoint of identity in the sense of belonging together (Gadamer), or from that of appropriation in the sense of *Ereignis* (Derrida).

Inspired by Heidegger’s thesis of identity as belonging together, of beings as the *multi facie* of Being in its self-disclosure, Gadamer develops further the process of coming into understanding as the process of Being’s self-disclosing. If *Dasein* means Being’s existence in the state of *hic-et-nunc*, then “Being-in-the-world,” “being-with” are, actually, the activities of Being’s self-disclosing in the spatial and temporal dimension. In each stage is born a new form of understanding, or a new horizon, common to and accepted by those who are actively engaging in such a world. The existing horizon represents commonality. For this reason, Gadamer stresses human temporal conditions, human “transcendental” knowledge and morals, etc., as the conditions and mediums for understanding. His objection to Kant’s absolute and universal categories as well as his critique of the abuse of any application of scientific criteria to human sciences reflect his attempt to rebuild a *Wissenschaft* in the context of the process of coming into understanding. It is in this sense that his reinterpretation of “tradition,” “prejudice,” “*sensus communis*,” culture (*Bildung*), “common taste,” etc., must be understood as different forms of commonality, and not just as criteria in the sense of Kant’s categories.

From another perspective, Derrida puts emphasis not on commonality, but rather on authenticity. His strong request for the uniqueness of the human act and of human knowing is rooted in his belief that each event (*Ereignis*), each moment, is a unique moment of Being’s self-revelation. It cannot be repeated. And if it “repeats” itself, in the widest sense, then it would not repeat in the same way or in the same form. Consequently, any form of identity in the sense of $A=A$, or even “belonging together,” is unacceptable; any form of commonality (common sense, *sensus communis*, culture, etc.) would endanger authenticity. His strategy and tactics of “deconstruction” (or *différance*) and his insistence upon difference as the essence of understanding are carefully choreographed in order to show

that authenticity and not commonality is the essence of Being. Here he follows Heidegger to the letter. The latter once wrote: “What differs shows itself as the Being of beings as such as a whole, it represents beings in respect of what differs in the difference, and without heeding the difference as difference.”⁴⁰ Or more explicitly: “The onto-theological constitution of metaphysics stems from the prevalence of that difference which keeps Being as the ground, and beings as what is grounded and what gives account, apart from and related to each other; and by this keeping, Perdurance is achieved.”⁴¹

But, of course, one can hardly deny the fact that these two directions of radical hermeneutics come from the same source, Heidegger’s ambiguity. However, one would be unable to explain the almost irreconcilable opposition between Gadamer’s and Derrida’s hermeneutics without the Hegelian factor. The ghost of Hegel is visible in Heidegger’s *Destruktion*, and even more visible in Derrida’s *deconstruction*. And equally visible is Hegel’s spirit in Gadamer’s attempt to build the new horizon in which emerges a more encompassing and “original” vision—“original” in the sense of being the first vision to appear, and “authentic” in the sense of being unique. To Derrida, it is the second stage of dialectics, that is, negation, which is the decisive force in preserving authenticity. Authenticity means the not yet alienated essence, the intact uniqueness, which refuses to be defined by “universal, transcendental categories” and to be absorbed into the reified market.

Despite their difference, Gadamer and Derrida are still regarded as the most brilliant and creative followers of Heidegger’s enterprise: they jealously insist on radical reduction and unconditionally advocate the insight of creative force. Inspired by Nietzsche and Heidegger, Gadamer and Derrida believe that authentic understanding is possible only if it is motivated by a creative force that remains loyal to humanness: identity in difference and difference in identity.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 70.

⁴¹ Ibid., 71.

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