CHAPTER ONE

The Philosophical Background of Philosophical Hermeneutics

§ 1. Phenomenology as a Movement beyond Neo-Kantianism

It would be insufficient for the purpose of establishing the background of philosophical hermeneutics to simply trace the development of hermeneutic theory from Schleiermacher through Dilthey and Heidegger. Although one cannot fully understand Gadamer's position without some recognition of this development—a development that Gadamer himself traces out in various essays and, in part, in *Truth and Method*—the philosophical background of Gadamer's thought requires that we follow a different line of development. We have already indicated that, along with his reading of the Greeks, it was Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity that shaped so decisively Gadamer's thinking in his own studies in Marburg in the 1920s.¹ This was the time of the full flowering of phenomenology as a philosophical movement in Germany. Not only was Heidegger drawing worldwide attention with his lectures in Marburg, but Husserl was still in Freiburg and Scheler continued to determine the course of intellectual currents from his position in Cologne. Even Nicolai Hartmann, who succeeded Paul Natorp in Marburg, proclaimed to be doing the work of phenomenology.² This was also the time when phenomenology established itself more clearly here than elsewhere in opposition to the then dominant philosophical tradition of Neo-Kantianism. The crisis in foundations that gave rise to phenomenology as a rigorous science was due in part to the unclarified presuppositions in the theoretical framework of Neo-Kantianism. In the discoveries of intentionality,
categorical intuition, and a new sense of the apriori—not to mention the concept of life-world—phenomenology engaged in a conceptual effort at overcoming the "theoretical attitude" of Neo-Kantianism that was rooted in Cartesianism and the restriction of consciousness to its own content.

Generally speaking, Neo-Kantianism refers to the philosophical movement that turned back to the philosophy of Kant in reaction to the dissatisfaction with the philosophy of Absolute Idealism that was prominent in the middle of the nineteenth century. In particular, what distinguished Neo-Kantianism from other "back to Kant" movements was the emphasis on the "critical" foundation to philosophy that is obtained in privileging the theory of knowledge. No longer was the foundation of philosophy to be provided by formal logic or logic in Hegel's sense. But Neo-Kantianism was by no means a single unified philosophical movement. In Marburg, Neo-Kantianism took shape initially with the work of Friedrich Lange and then by his successor Hermann Cohen, who is attributed with founding the Marburg school of Neo-Kantianism. Cohen emphasized the logical rather than the physiological in reading Kant's first Critique in that the object of knowledge is not given, but is constructed by apriori subjectivity. The rival to this school was the South-West German School of Neo-Kantianism that was associated with the work of Wilhelm Windelband and his student, Heinrich Rickert, and was known principally for working out the relation between knowledge and values. What was held in common for both schools was the "critical way," that is, the transcendent method in which reality is generated by pure thinking.³

This effort at overcoming the theoretical attitude (as understood by Neo-Kantians) is true of Husserlian phenomenology at least initially, and it is this same effort that defines Gadamer's own project, not withstanding the fact that Paul Natorp, Gadamer's teacher, was himself a Neo-Kantian. It is not surprising then that Gadamer, despite the fact that he draws so decisively on Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity for his theory of understanding, and thus wants to separate himself from Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, reads Husserl in a considerably favorable light.⁴ The phenomenology of both Husserl and Heidegger will call into question the form of modern ontology found in Neo-Kantianism. Accordingly, the philosophical background of Gadamer's thought begins here in phenomenology in its opposition to Neo-Kantianism.

Nowhere is this opposition of phenomenology to Neo-Kantianism more evident than in Heidegger's 1925 lecture course on "The History of the Concept of Time,"⁵ a course at which Gadamer was present. The title of
the lecture course is somewhat misleading for there is little said in this course on the concept of time itself; instead, Heidegger is concerned with establishing the conditions for a "phenomenology of history and nature," which is the announced subtitle of the course. In the long preliminary part of this published lecture Heidegger lays out the central insights of phenomenology; it amounts to what the translator of the text calls "a phenomenological reflection upon the history of phenomenology designed to point to the need for Heidegger's own problematic of Dasein, being, and time." More to the point, Heidegger uses this as an occasion to present the merits of Husserlian phenomenology against Neo-Kantianism and at the same time to criticize Husserl for failing to move phenomenology in its proper direction. Heidegger charges that in the end Husserl falls back into the conceptual framework of Neo-Kantianism.

The preliminary part begins with a brief consideration of the situation of philosophy in the second half of the nineteenth century. The collapse of the idealistic systems in the second half of the nineteenth century allowed philosophy to align itself with the situation of science as a whole which was dominated by the worldview of natural science. Philosophy, now defined in opposition to speculation and empty concepts, has the essential character of a theory of science, in which it is constantly oriented to the factual conduct of the sciences themselves. This renewal of philosophy takes place "not in an original return to the matters at issue," but in a return to Kant, which is to say to a positivistic interpretation of Kant. Neo-Kantianism interprets Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* as a theory of experience that is nothing other than scientific experience. But in carrying out a theory of scientific experience along Kantian lines, this scientific research gets caught up in a return to consciousness. According to Heidegger, "even though consciousness became a theme in scientific psychology and in epistemology in completely different ways, it nevertheless remained and until now has remained the tacit thematic field of consideration." Thus, despite the fact that Neo-Kantianism launched a strong opposition to psychology regarded as a natural science, this did not prevent the elevation of psychology, as a theory of consciousness, to the basic science of philosophy. When the work of Cohen, who had initially looked to Kant for a theory of scientific experience, was taken up by the South-West German School of Neo-Kantianism in the work of Windelband and Rickert, the theoretical clarification of science was pushed more and more in the direction of the logical structure of scientific representation. It was reduced, in Heidegger's words, "to an empty methodology."
It is in this context that we encounter Husserl. Under the influence of his teacher Brentano, Husserl extended his initial research in the logic of mathematics to the fundamental concepts of thinking as such. The results of his work on the problem of a scientific logic produced the two volume *Logical Investigations*. This ground-breaking work in phenomenology appears as a challenge to Neo-Kantianism in a double sense. Phenomenology not only corrects the false priority of self-consciousness, it also reorients the task of philosophy away from theoretical construction and the transcendental justification of scientific knowledge in particular. Gadamer’s comments on this in his essay “The Phenomenological Movement” are strikingly parallel to Heidegger’s analysis in *The History of the Concept of Time*. Gadamer writes:

In contrast to [the position of Neo-Kantianism], Husserl’s phenomenological approach meant from the very beginning the posing of a new task. Instead of the constructive mastery of reality, which has its ideal in the mathematical formalism of the natural science, the ideal of knowledge for Husserl was intuition, the concrete givenness of what is perceived. Thus he had the “natural attitude” of “immediately living” consciousness in view just as much as the convincing certainty of mathematical deductions. What interested him about the knowledge of the world in the “natural attitude” was certainly neither the fact actually encountered nor even the factual performance [*faktische Vollzug*] in which it was perceived. Rather, he was interested exclusively in the “phenomenon” in its essential nature and the corresponding apprehension of that essence by acts of consciousness. (PH 152/GW3 124)

Without directly saying so, the above passage indicates what the correction to the priority of self-consciousness is, namely, the priority of self-givenness in intuitive self-evidence. The significance of this emphasis on self-givenness cannot be overstated, for it lies the challenge to any representational view of knowledge. For Husserl, we do not refer to things in terms of inner representation; knowing is not at all a matter of a subject existing for itself that then chooses its objects. The apprehension of the phenomenon in acts of consciousness is always of a consciousness correlated with the phenomenal objects. This correlation expresses what is meant by intentionality.

In the 1925 lecture course Heidegger explicitly defends Husserl’s concept of intentionality against its Neo-Kantian misinterpretation. He begins by pointing to the way in which intentionality, as the manner in which I
am directed toward objects, structures lived experience (Erlebnisse). In every
lived experience I am directed toward something. In natural perception—
for example, in the perception of a chair which I find upon entering a
room—I move about my world not in detached perception, but "in order
to orient myself, to pave the way in dealing with something."9 It is a mistaken
interpretation of intentionality to say that it is the coordination of a psychic
occurrence inside with a physical thing outside. Such an interpretation could
easily be refuted by the fact of hallucinations in which case intentionality,
as directing itself toward something, is not true of every perception.

Heidegger asks us to consider the interpretation more pointedly. Is it not
the case that even in hallucinations the deceptive perception as such remains
a directing-itself-toward? The point is that intentionality is not a property
that adheres to perception, but that perception is "intrinsically intentional."
Every attempt at retaining the distinction between psychical and physical,
consciousness and reality, spirit and nature hinders the efforts at arriving
at the original thematic field of phenomenological investigation. It is
precisely this that is misinterpreted by the Neo-Kantian Rickert. He reserves
intentionality for the comportment relating to judgment, but drops it for
representing. Heidegger insists that he maintains this position because he
is trapped in the dogma that representing does not get out to the object.
For Rickert, representing is not knowing.

It is only when Heidegger pursues the matter of intentionality further
that the problem of Husserl’s falling back into Neo-Kantianism emerges.
After discussing the basic character of phenomenology in § 9 "The Clarification
of the Name ‘Phenomenology’ " in which one can already see
Heidegger’s distinctive interpretation of phenomenology emerging,10 Heideg-
ger asks: How is intentionality as the structure of lived experience first
given? How, in other words, are the comportments in which the structure
of intentionality is read accessible? According to Husserl, the accessibility
of the comportments is through the phenomenological field of pure con-
sciousness, which is for Husserl the sphere of absolute being. In positing
pure consciousness as the sphere of absolute being, Heidegger accuses
Husserl of failing to take up the question of the being of intentional acts
and the question of the meaning of being which would naturally follow
in a genuine turn to the matters themselves. Husserl’s falling back is
consequently attributable to a lack of genuine radical inquiry into the matters
themselves. In connection with this, Heidegger is more than suspicious
of Husserl’s further refinement of the task of phenomenology in the Ideas.
Husserl saw the need for a further reduction beyond the eidetic reduction
that would achieve for the first time an idealism of a really transcendental character. The ultimate foundation for a rigorous science is obtained through a transcendental reduction, grounded in a transcendental ego. The transcendental reduction suspends or brackets all posited reality for the sake of the phenomena and thus provides science with a new clarified basis. In its fundamental outline, this position remains close to Neo-Kantianism. In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, a lecture course given two years later, Heidegger writes: "The view [of Neo-Kantianism] that knowledge equals judgment, truth equals judgedness equals objectivity equals valid sense, became so dominant that even phenomenology was infected by this untenable conception of knowledge, as appears in the further investigation of Husserl's works, above all, in the *Ideas toward a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* (1913)."¹¹ Heidegger insists in the 1925 lecture course that it was Dilthey who was a major contributor to the further advancement of phenomenology. Heidegger goes so far as to say that Dilthey was the first to understand the aim of phenomenology. What Heidegger means here is that Dilthey is credited with formulating a psychology that is concerned with life itself in its structure, as the basic reality of history, and that this psychology stands in marked contrast to a psychology fashioned after natural science.¹² "Man" is not regarded for Dilthey as a thing of nature to be explained by other universal laws of events, but is understood as a living person actively involved in history. Heidegger wants to credit Dilthey for moving in the direction of his own project. Phenomenology, reinterpreted by Heidegger, is to take as its subject matter not just the theoretical but also the practical, and this means the factual life, the great "fact of life."¹³

Ironically, for the same general reason that Heidegger wants to give credit to Dilthey in this lecture course, namely, because Dilthey is concerned with factual life, Gadamer wants to do the same for Husserl. In the concept of the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) Husserl is seen to be continuing his project of getting at the pre-reflective givenness of things; in this case, the concept of the life-world serves to get behind the objectivism that has its roots in Galilean science. Gadamer is well aware that the turn to the life-world has its precedence in the earlier philosophy of life that is found in the works of Nietzsche, Simmel, Bergson, and Dilthey. Nevertheless, Gadamer can still read Husserl favorably because of this explicit thematization of the concept of the life-world.

The issue for Gadamer is not the place of Husserl's *The Crisis of the European Sciences* (1936) (in which the concept of the life-world is explicitly made thematic) within the phenomenological movement; that is, it is not

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a question of whether or not Husserl is changing his position late in his life under the influence of Heidegger's analytic of Dasein in *Being and Time*. There is evidence to suggest that the concept of the life-world was already formulated by Husserl in the 1920s.¹⁴ For Gadamer, the issue of the life-world is Husserl's insight "that the task of justifying knowledge did not mean scientific knowledge as much as it did the totality of our natural experience of the world" (PH 152/GW3 124). In this sense the introduction of the concept of the life-world must be seen in the context of the movement beyond Neo-Kantianism.

But Gadamer is by no means blinded to the inherent difficulties in Husserl's analysis of the life-world. Because Husserl's style of thinking blurs the distinction between self-correction and self-criticism, Gadamer feels that the concept of the life-world can be read in an ambiguous way. On the one hand, the concept of life-world describes the originary phenomenological approach that Husserl chose for his phenomenological investigation that distinguishes him and his philosophical interest from the dominant Neo-Kantianism and positivistic scientism (PH 182/GW3 147). In this sense the concept of the life-world is interpreted broadly by Gadamer to indicate the intention of phenomenology to get behind the whole of scientific experience to a wide field of everyday experience. It is a return to a pre-given world that does not abandon reason per se, but only the objectivist reason that reductively extends positive science to the whole of life. On the other hand, it is "a new self-criticism" that would appear to make Husserl's goal to found philosophy as a rigorous science attainable. Husserl's description in the *Crisis* of the history of objectivism that arises out of the influence of Galilean science simply serves to bring Husserl's phenomenological program into explicit historical relief.

Gadamer recognizes, however, that the old goal of a transcendentalist phenomenology, based on the transcendental ego, is never left behind. When Husserl notes in the *Crisis* that the "dream is over" for philosophy as a rigorous science, Gadamer insists that we interpret this as a view that Husserl did not share. Actually, Husserl is challenged by this pronouncement to renew his reflections—in this case, it is historical reflection that is needed to offset that danger of the very future of philosophy. And it is in this context that Gadamer interprets the *Crisis* to be concerned with carrying out a really defensible transcendental reduction.

When we view the volume as a whole, the principle of its composition is unmistakable. It is concerned with carrying out a really
defensible transcendental reduction. The elaborate survey of the
history of objectivism serves the purpose primarily of bringing
his own phenomenological program into explicit historical relief.
A "transformation of the task of knowledge" is achieved through
phenomenology. There is no more assumed experiential basis for
it. Even that universal belief in the world, which, as the natural
reflective life of man, supports the ground of experience in every
case of doubt regarding the contents of experience must be sus-
pended and must find its constitution in the transcendental ego.
To that extent, the method of phenomenology, in contrast to all
scientific methods, is a method dealing with that which has no
foundation, the way of a "transcendental experience," not an
empirical induction. For it must first create its ground for itself.
(PH 159–60/GW3 130)

The doctrine of the life-world, which points to the original horizon of lived
meanings, is intended to make the transcendental reduction flawless.

The question in Gadamer's mind is whether this attempt to secure
transcendental phenomenology as the final meaning of the history of phi-
losophy, through historical self-clarification, can really be successful.
Gadamer is most suspicious at the point at which Husserl attributes historical
considerations to transcendental phenomenology. For Husserl, the self-
reflection that is tied to this new form of science would culminate in a
"universal praxis" of humanity. To the extent that Husserl retains the
connection between philosophy and science in this new form of science
in which there is a universal account of things derived from life interests,
this is indeed the promise. Gadamer wants to know if there is not an illusion
present in the claim "that from science—in whatever style—rational
decisions can be derived that would constitute a 'universal praxis'" (PH
196/GW3 158). The mistake is to think that behind our practical decisions
there lies a knowledge based on the application of science. Gadamer does
not think that the gulf between practical judgment, which characterizes
human activity in the life-world, and the anonymous validity of science
can be bridged in this way.

But Gadamer's suspicion at this point is not so overwhelming that the
fundamental significance of the life-world is overlooked. "What confronts
us here is not a synthesis of theory and practice nor science in a new style,
but rather the prior, practical political limitation of the monopolistic claims
of science and a new critical consciousness with respect to the scientific
character of philosophy itself” (PH 196/GW3 158). The issue for Gadamer becomes the issue of an account of hermeneutic experience that will address the problem of “reason in the age of science.” In connection with this Gadamer will link the older tradition of practical philosophy to the “moral impulse” that lies at the basis of Husserl’s idea of a new kind of life-world praxis.

§ 2. Kierkegaard’s Philosophy of Existence

When Gadamer concludes his essay “The Science of the Life-world” with the claim that what confronts us in the notion of the life-world is “a new critical consciousness with respect to the scientific character of philosophy itself,” we could say, with proper qualifications, that this is also true of the Kierkegaardian philosophy of existence. In its own way, it too emerges as a corrective to the one-sidedness of the scientific methodology of Neo-Kantianism. In following the development of phenomenology to Heidegger’s hermeneutics of facticity, and ultimately Gadamer’s own project, we must recognize that one of the strands that weaves itself into the phenomenological movement, broadly understood, is Kierkegaard’s philosophy of existence. This is not to suggest that Being and Time represents a philosophy of existence, for everything Heidegger has said about his own work contradicts such a claim. At the same time, there would be something insufficient in an account of hermeneutic phenomenology if the Kierkegaardian influence is denied by substituting Dilthey for Kierkegaard. This is especially true considering that it is Gadamer’s position that we are ultimately moving toward. Not only does he claim that the philosophy of existence is decisive for Heidegger, that Heidegger was influenced by Kierkegaard early on with the appearance of the German translation of the Danish, and is thus essential to the whole development of a hermeneutics of facticity; but, more importantly, it is decisive for Gadamer himself. Gadamer tells us that early on in his life his reading of Kierkegaard’s Either-Or had a profound impression upon him; the second part of the book in particular, he notes, “awoke in me a sympathy for Judge Wilhelm and, unsuspectingly, for historical continuity.” Elsewhere, in commenting on his own point of departure for an analysis of hermeneutic experience, Gadamer indicates how Kierkegaard’s theory of contemporaneity helped in the conceptual labor of posing a counter-position to understanding at a distance.

What is it, though, that is so decisive for Heidegger and Gadamer in Kierkegaard’s philosophy of existence? Interestingly enough, it is a concept that
Kierkegaard ultimately traces to Aristotle, namely, repetition (Gjentagelse). There is no exaggeration in John Caputo's remark that what we call hermeneutics "defends the view that repetition is possible and indeed that everything in hermeneutics turns on its possibility." In the broadest terms, the character of hermeneutics in Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology of the 1920s pertains to the opening of life, from within life, toward itself. Hermeneutics is about the awakening of life toward itself. Repetition, quite simply, is the name for this movement of life. What is called repetition by Kierkegaard becomes for Heidegger Wiederholung, the opening of life that occurs by retrieving, literally fetching-back, possibilities in life. In Being and Time there are several senses in which this repetition is in play. We see it in the hermeneutic situation of the "hermeneutic circle" as the projective stretch in existence in which Dasein makes its way about. More importantly, we also see it in Heidegger's analysis of the temporal determination of the Being of Dasein. In terms of temporality, Dasein's resolve manifests itself as a retrieval: Dasein takes over its past through repetition by fetching back time and again its possibilities. In its fullest sense, in retrieval/repetition Dasein comes toward its authentic potentiality for Being when it comes back to itself, when it comes back to that which it has been all along.

Now, if it is the case that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics does indeed take over as its starting-point the historicity of understanding gained from a hermeneutics of facticity, then we should expect to find repetition here as well. Certainly one does not have to look far to see how repetition is a feature of hermeneutic experience. The activity of understanding—the task of appropriating the self-same message of the transmitted text to the situation of the present—is nothing less than an exercise in repetition. Philosophical hermeneutics recognizes that temporality demands a creative repetition in all our projects.

In order to see precisely how repetition is in play in hermeneutics, we have to see, first of all, how it is understood by Kierkegaard. The concept of repetition is the focus of Kierkegaard's analysis in the book Repetition, An Essay in Experimenting Psychology. The pseudonymous author of Repetition, Constantin Constantius, reports on a conversation with a young man who is madly in love with a young girl. As it turns out, the young man's love for the girl is "poetic;" he has turned this relationship with the girl into an "ideality." The love for the girl is a love that he recollects but cannot repeat, he cannot make the relationship real by living in the ongoing
faithfulness of hard work that the relationship demands. As a consequence of this situation, the young man is melancholic, he is most unhappy.

He was deeply and fervently in love, that was clear, and yet a few days later he was able to recollect his love. He was essentially through with the entire relationship. In beginning it, he took such a tremendous step that he leaped over life. If the girl dies tomorrow, it will make no essential difference; he will throw himself down again, his eyes will fill with tears again, he will repeat the poet’s words again. What a curious dialectic! (R 136)

As one would suspect from Kierkegaard, the issue here is not limited to the characters in this mini-drama; it is not really about just this young man and his willingness to commit to the relationship, reversing the course of his love for the girl that at this point in the story is such that it essentially leaps over life. For Kierkegaard the story is an occasion to make a point about existence itself, about the ability to move forward in life as such. All life is repetition, and the question of living is about the extent to which real repetition is possible. This question is, for Kierkegaard, the question of modern philosophy.

[T]his question [whether repetition is possible] will play a very important role in modern philosophy, for repetition is a crucial expression for what “recollection” was to the Greeks. Just as they taught that all knowing is a recollection, modern philosophy will teach that all life is a repetition. . . . Repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward. Repetition, therefore, if it is possible, makes a person happy, whereas recollection makes him unhappy. (R 131)

This passage tells us several things. First of all, repetition for Kierkegaard is not recollection, but the contrast is subtle inasmuch as repetition and recollection “are the same movement.” Here recollection is equivalent to Platonic recollection understood in its traditional sense as a speculative grasp of existence that is itself a movement away from existence. Recollection wants to solidify becoming, to see the present in terms of the past by repeating backwards to what was already—an existence finished, in a sense already at its end. In the case of the young man, he
recollects his love by retreating backward to poetic eternity. Recollection thus pertains to the peculiar relation between time and eternity where temporal existence is the repetition of eternal pre-existence. But this Platonic recollection could just as well be Hegelian recollection. Kierkegaard tells us that "repetition proper is what has mistakenly been called mediation" (R 148). If mediation as recollective movement brings to unity thought and being, ideality and reality, existence as a movement of repetition keeps the two separate. This is most evident in ethical existence that is characterized by Kierkegaard as the "volitional activity in which [the individual] struggles to become a living expression of the ideal he has reflectively conceived."\(^{23}\) For Kierkegaard the struggle for this identity of thought and being is the real constant, for ethical life is essentially historically emergent.

With respect to the claim in the above passage then that recollection takes place in the order of knowledge whereas repetition is in the order of existence, it appears that Kierkegaard does indeed have Hegel in mind. Existence—temporal becoming—cannot adequately be explained by the logical process of mediation, for logic itself, Kierkegaard insists, cannot admit of movement. The order of knowledge is timeless and Hegel's Logic in particular, in which the logical and the real are closely associated in a way that Aristotle could not imagine, interprets reality as a timeless, rational process where logical necessity rules. But Kierkegaard argues, specifically in Concluding Unscientific Postscript, a logical system of existence is impossible, for in such a system existence itself is lost; the process of mediation cannot account for the temporal movement of self toward its possibilities. Kierkegaard thinks the Greeks knew better than Hegel that mediation does not explain movement.

There is no explanation in our age as to how mediation takes place, whether it results from the motion of two factors and in what sense it is already contained in them, or whether it is something new that is added, and if so, how. In this connection, the Greek view of the concept of \(\chi\nu\eta\alpha\is\) [motion, change] corresponds to the modern category "transition" and should be give close attention. (R 149)

The Greeks, in other words, either denied movement, or claimed that all is movement, but did not presume to account for movement in mediation.

In his Papers, Kierkegaard provides a more explicit account of what he means here. Mediation, he contends, helped to make the transcendence of movement—real movement (\(\chi\nu\eta\alpha\is\))—illusory, but this transcendence
of movement that is, in effect, the sphere of freedom is precisely what is to be captured by repetition.

When movement is allowed in relation to repetition in the sphere of freedom, then the development becomes different from the logical development in that the transition becomes [vorder]. In logic, transition is movement’s silence, whereas in the sphere of freedom it becomes. Thus, in logic, when possibility, by means of the immanence of thought, has determined itself as actuality, one only disturbs the silent self-inclosure of the logical process by talking about movement and transition. In the sphere of freedom, however, possibility remains and actuality emerges as a transcendence. Therefore, when Aristotle long ago said that the transition from possibility to actuality is a ἄλησις [motion, change], he was not speaking of logical possibility and actuality but of freedom’s and therefore he properly posits movement. (R 309–10)²⁴

Genuine repetition then is the movement of transcendence from potentiality to actuality in the sphere of freedom. But strictly speaking, repetition is not something that occurs in freedom, it is freedom itself.²⁵ To become a self, as defined by freedom, requires then repetition, that renewal of a commitment one has made before.²⁶ For the young man to be happy he must have a “resolve” through which his love is made real.²⁷ In the end the young man is not capable of this and he flees in the face of it.

In characterizing repetition in this way, as the work of selfhood and existence, the scope of the category of repetition within Kierkegaard’s philosophy becomes apparent. As we already mentioned, the category of repetition, first of all, enters into the choosing of oneself that is demanded of ethical existence. But here Kierkegaard is not alone. This repetition of choosing of oneself runs parallel to the activity of practical excellence in Aristotle’s analysis of practical life.²⁸ According to Aristotle repetition appears in the work of living (well) insofar as it is practice that brings to fruition the natural potential for virtue: “we did not acquire the faculty of sight or hearing by repeatedly seeing or repeatedly listening, but the other way about—because we had the sense we began to use them . . . the virtues on the other hand we acquire by first having actually practiced them.”²⁹ For Aristotle the virtues are not acquired by nature but by nature there is the capacity for virtue which is them brought to maturity by practice, and practice toward the good is something engendered out of a lifetime.
Of course this original potentiality for excellence may or may not be realized in one’s life just as in Kierkegaardian fashion one can fail to become a self. There is, however, a fundamental difference between Kierkegaard and Aristotle that should be noted. In Aristotle’s model of ethical development the repetition is linked to the formation of habits which affect future choices. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, makes no provision for habit; the resolute choice is repeated anew on each occasion.30

Within Kierkegaard’s philosophy, the category of repetition, as an expression of the proper relation between being and becoming, also pertains to the proper character of Christian existence. The question of repetition for Christian existence is how the relation between time and eternity is thought differently when eternity is the goal of existence and not something behind (prior to) existence as the original for the image. Kierkegaard’s Christian perspective, unlike the Platonic perspective, does not move backwards from time to eternal pre-existence and to find the theological self as recollected presence. Rather, the individual moves forward to a presence yet to be realized, to a self that is not yet. In recollecting forward, in this temporal movement of the self towards its future possibilities, one re-commits oneself to the possibilities that are recognized as one’s own. Such recommitment/repetition is metaphysical as the “moment” in which one is contemporaneous with Christ. To be in the moment means to be present in the presence of the eternal in time. For religious existence the moment is not an abstraction from time as it is for aesthetic existence. That is to say, for religious existence the moment is not simply a succession of moments which are disconnected from one's past and future, and neither is it disconnected from the eternal. “Eternity is a qualification of existence which transfigures the temporality of the self in the moment of decision.”31

The eternal intersecting the temporal is of course a paradox, but this is precisely what Christian experience entails for Kierkegaard. The point is that the repetition will move through time without negating time. Past possibilities of action become future possibilities and are repeated in the moment of decision.

From what has been said, one can understand why Kierkegaard speaks about a possibility of repetition, for it requires courage to will repetition. One can also understand why Kierkegaard would say that if repetition is possible, it makes one happy. It is the “unhappy consciousness” that has its identity with itself separated by the beyond of eternity. In repetition one escapes the condition of longing for the “other” of one’s self.32
Finally, in linking repetition to the future, to freedom itself, it should be apparent that genuine repetition is fundamentally dynamic and should be distinguished from a static sense of repetition. A static repetition repeats the same; it is a literal recurrence analogous to recollection as the reproduction of life. A dynamic repetition, on the other hand, is creative as the production of life itself. For Kierkegaard, as we have seen, the dynamic repetition is the very production of self. Moreover, this dynamic repetition is inseparable from the character of truth in ethico-religious existence. Recall how Kierkegaard describes this truth in the Postscript: “an objective uncertainty held fast appropriation process of the most passionate inwardness.”33 As an objective uncertainty, truth is not the identity of thought and being; it is rather an appropriation process in which the individual continually approximates the ideal (of its own being), and thus truth is the “self-activity of personal appropriation.” Static repetition does not belong here. When repetition is static it is, at best, related to truth as an indicator of something being true. The test of scientific objectivity, for example, displays the feature of repeatability, but what it repeats is always the same; the repeatability is an indication that something is the case. Dynamic repetition, on the other hand, as a feature of ethico-religious existence is more closely connected to the very emergence of truth. Dynamic repetition is what must be gone through in order to arrive at the true: truth is in the “how” (truth is subjectivity).

This distinction between dynamic and static repetition will prove to be decisive in a consideration of hermeneutic experience. It is by virtue of human finitude that I subject everything to review and revision, and consequently, a dynamic repetition would seem to be universal for the kind of knowledge at issue in hermeneutic experience. Gadamer’s claim that understanding is always understanding differently makes sense from the from the point of view of dynamic repetition. In dynamic (hermeneutic) repetition, what is understood is not merely repeated. The event of understanding is not a mere re-production of meaning. Despite the fact that Gadamer relies heavily on the language of Plato, which is to say the language of μνημοσύνη and ἀνάμνησις, the event of understanding is not a simple reiteration of an original.34

A dynamic repetition, then, can be displayed in all the dimensions of hermeneutic experience. A dynamic repetition is what defines the character of the presentation (Darstellung) in aesthetic understanding in which there is an “accretion of reality” (Zuwachs an Sein). A dynamic repetition
is what defines the character of historical understanding where the tradition
speaks again, speaks in a new voice. A dynamic repetition also identifies
the basic trait of linguistic understanding insofar as our finite discourse
"brings a totality of meaning into play, without being able to express it
totally" (TM 458/GWI 462). In all these instances, it is never a question
of willing repetition as it is for Kierkegaard. But this difference is under-
standable in as much as it is not a question of selfhood for hermeneutics.
In a sense, the paradox, for which repetition is demanded, shifts. For
Gadamer the paradox is not of the eternal in time, but of the selfsame
message that, by virtue of tradition, is always understood differently.35

§ 3. Heidegger’s Hermeneutics of Facticity

Within the constraints of the task at hand, namely, of providing the philo-
sophical background for Gadamer’s hermeneutics, the significance of
Heidegger’s project for Gadamer’s own work cannot be worked out in full
detail. For that a separate work is required. Even within the scope of this
book, it remains to be seen how the work of the later Heidegger serves
to guide Gadamer’s own path of thought. The more economical account
provided here focuses on two considerations in Heidegger’s hermeneutic
phenomenology, in which one must include Heidegger’s hermeneutics of
facticity (1919–23),36 that are most germane to Gadamer’s own work. The
first consideration is determined by the scope of the philosophical back-
ground as it has been presented thus far. We need to see how hermeneutics
is incorporated into the phenomenological movement such that phenome-

ology is itself transformed. Additionally, because the historicity of under-
standing plays such a crucial role in the development of a philosophical
hermeneutics in Truth and Method, a second consideration must be given
to Heidegger’s analysis of the historicity of existence.

The incorporation of hermeneutics into phenomenology is guided by
the very project that gave rise to phenomenology in the first place, namely,
the movement beyond the theoretical attitude of Neo-Kantianism. Through
the lecture courses that are now being published in the collected edition
of Heidegger’s works, we now know that Heidegger’s philosophical project
was already taking shape early on in the 1920s.37 At this time, Heidegger
was attempting to bring together his philosophical concern for the question
of being, which was shaped by his reading of historical and theological
sources, with the insights of Husserlian phenomenology.38 From the work
of his dissertation and his immersion in the scholastic philosophy of realism,
Heidegger understood the order of being to be simply “whatever can be experienced and lived, in the absolute sense whatever stands over against consciousness, the ‘robust’ reality which irresistibly forces itself upon consciousness and can never nor again be put aside and eliminated.”39 This meant for Heidegger that the analysis of being must pass through what comes to be the central concept throughout the lecture courses during this time, namely, the concept of factual life. Here the question of being is not yet explicitly formulated as such, at least not in the way it comes to be expressed in *Being and Time*, but is simply the question of being in the historical situatedness of factual life.

Gadamer has pointed out that this word “facticity” was initially used by Rothe and other theologians of the post-Hegelian generation as a word in the dispute over faith in the Resurrection. When this word was taken over by Heidegger it remained fused with the concept of life. “Facticity means the fact [*Faktum*] in its being a fact [*Faktum-sein*], that is, that behind which and back of which one cannot go” (GW3 422). Facticity is, in a sense, the particularity of life that is inescapable, designating the “character of our own Dasein,” Dasein in its “there.”40 This notion of factual life we also find in Dilthey (and also in Nietzsche, Bergson, and Natorp, according to Gadamer), but when Heidegger speaks of a “hermeneutics of facticity” there is no doubt that it is Kierkegaard (the “how” of existence) and Aristotle (life understood as self-movement) who echo most decisively in the understanding of this notion.41 A hermeneutics of facticity pertains to the way in which this factual life is accessed and explicated,42 which is to say it designates the manner of the self-interpretation of factual life: factual life lays itself out (*auslegen*). It does this, not by bringing concepts to bear on it, but as itself “a kind of conceptual speaking that wants to hold onto its origin, and with that its own life’s breath [*Lebensatem*], when it becomes translated into the form of a theoretical statement” (GW3 422).

Just as for Kierkegaard the Hegelian logic cannot explain the movement of life, so too for Heidegger life cannot be grasped in theoretical reflection but only in its enactment (*Vollzug*). Hermeneutics (of facticity) is thus neither exegesis in its traditional sense, nor a theory of interpretation as in Dilthey, but the manner by which existence is awakened to itself.

How, though, does this hermeneutics of facticity, constitute a movement beyond Neo-Kantianism? In these early lectures, and especially in the “Aristotle-Introduction” that was sent to Marburg, Heidegger maintains that philosophy itself must be understood in terms of factual life. Philosophy must take its departure from factual life experience and always turn back
into factual life experience. All philosophical research, in other words, takes its orientation from the lived situation out of which and for the sake of which one is inquiring. As a consequence of this determination of philosophy, philosophical research is from now on hermeneutical, as the manner of grasping something concretely in act. In Heidegger's words: "philosophical research is the explicit actualization [Vollzug] of a basic movement of factual life and maintains itself always within factual life."43 The hermeneutics of facticity, in effect, names the very operation of philosophy.

The significance of this new approach cannot be overstated. In Gadamer's essays, in which he gives an account of this period of transformation in phenomenology, he remarks about the impact that Heidegger had on him and others in showing the way out of the "circle of reflection." He recalls specifically how in his lectures Heidegger had pointed out the significance of the scholastic distinction between actus signatus and actus exercitus. As Gadamer explains it:

There is a difference between saying "I see something" and "I am saying that I see something." But the signification "I am saying that . . ." is not the first awareness of the act. The act originally taking place is already such an act, which is to say it is already something in which my own operation is vitally present to me. (PH 123/GW4 17)44

There is meaning "in the exercise," in the doing, before it becomes the property of a theoretical consciousness. A hermeneutics of facticity, soon to become a hermeneutic phenomenology, wants to provide that description of the 'here I am' within the act of existing. Accordingly, "knowing" is a matter of interpreting that in which and from which I already am. It is a knowing that takes place "in the exercise," and as such it is first an event of being before it is our own doing.

In the 1921–22 winter semester course, "Phenomenological Interpretations to Aristotle," Heidegger described this "hermeneutical situation" in terms of the sense of having (Haben).45 That there is first factual life, that life makes its claim upon me, means that my questioning is determined in advance by the way in which I have things. This having is not to be understood as possession, but as the simple apprehension and determination of an object. The hermeneutic situation is thus one in which the object is held and already grasped, and philosophy is understood accordingly as the knowing comportment with respect to this holding. Philosophical

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research differs sharply from scientific research, as we find expressed by Neo-Kantianism, because scientific research proceeds in abstraction from the full concretization of factual life. If philosophical research remains bound to the impulses of science, a claim that in retrospect Heidegger himself makes against this early formulation of his project, it can only be understood as a non-theoretical science, at least in the traditional understanding of the theoretical.

In the 1922 summer semester course on Aristotle, Heidegger again set out to reinterpret the basis and essential character of the theoretical, this time drawing from the first book of Aristotle's Metaphysics. The opening line of that book, which we usually translate as "all men by nature desire to know," becomes under Heidegger's guidance "the urge to live in seeing, the absorption in the visible, is constitutive of how the human being is." The most obvious difference in Heidegger's reformulation of this classic statement is the interpretation of knowing (εἰδέναι) as a continuous progression of seeing. More important for us is his interpretation of the starting point of this progression in what Aristotle calls experience (ἐμπειρία). According to Heidegger, experience includes the double character of getting around (Umgehen) and know-how (Auskennen). If all the other stages of life are to be understood as a development of this starting point, which is never left behind, then the character of research in general pertains to an interpretive moving about and making one's way in the business of life.

But in what particular way is philosophy this interpretive moving about in the business of life? According to Aristotle, philosophy begins in wonder, first at difficulties close at hand, then at difficulties about greater matters. In response to these difficulties one pursues knowledge in order to understand, that is, philosophy is done for its own sake. For Aristotle this is borne out by the actual course of events, and then he adds that philosophy takes place in the space of leisure: "for it was when almost all the necessities of life were supplied, both for rest [οσιστων] and tarrying [δικωγωγή], that such thinking [φύσιμα] began to be sought." Despite the word that Aristotle uses to designate thinking here, we know that what Aristotle is after in this context is authentic understanding (σοφία). Here, then, our question becomes intensified: How is philosophy an interpretive moving about within this halt in the pressing business of life? According to Heidegger, the tarrying, which is the tarrying of θεωρειν, "bestows a different tempo to life, which proves to be the very essence of life, life at its fullest." The theoretical life is a movement of life, a way of going along with the
world, but in a different tempo. It is, to use the language from his “Aristotle-
Introduction” written later in the same year, a way of making one’s way
in life by “taking-a-pause.” In tarrying we are drawn back to the questions
of life as a whole, but not life in the abstract; rather, with respect to δια-
γωγή, we are drawn into the passing of life, how it is carried through to
its fullness (voll-zogen), and so takes (its) place. In the halt in the pressing
busyness of life, there is the opportunity to discover life because life is
given its autonomy, at least for a while. In this reading, then, θεώρια, as
the pure beholding of authentic understanding, is the way to be in which
life has first and last autonomy. “In this original movement we discover
the true sense of life as life, in which the ultimate sense of its movement
is fulfilled.”

But in saying this we have to see, at the same time, how Heidegger
has not strayed far from Kierkegaard. We should recall that for Kierkegaard
as for Heidegger the task is to awaken life to itself, a task that is accomplished
for Kierkegaard in repetition. Repetition is the movement of life whereby
life comes to itself. Heidegger’s hermeneutics of facticity wants to say the
same thing; it too is about repetition. Heidegger appears to use the word
repetition for the first time in the 1921/22 lecture course on Aristotle when
he comments on a passage by Rickert in which Rickert uses the word in
his criticism of philosophies of life. In the quoted passage Rickert says
that one should give up seeing in philosophies of life a mere repetition
(Wiederholen) of life. Philosophy means to create and the insight into the
distance that separates the created from life must leave life and philosophy
content. Immediately following the quoted passage Heidegger responds:
“everything depends on the meaning of repetition. Philosophy is a funda-
mental how of life itself, such that it fetches it back [wieder-holt] properly,
seizes it back from falling away [from itself]. This seizing itself back, as
radical research, is life.” Against Rickert’s separation of knowing from
life, Heidegger claims that knowing is not in the concept but in life. And
insofar as there is a duality between object and knowledge for phenomen-
ology, phenomenology too stands under this conviction.

All this is carried over into the announced project in Being and Time,
where, in an explicit hermeneutic phenomenology, factical life is now Dasein
and the determination of the Being of Dasein becomes the issue for the
sake of the ultimate question concerning the meaning of Being. The
existential analytic of Dasein that comprises the first part of Being and
Time will not be a deduction from the “emptiest of concepts” but precisely
that description of the experience of being-here (Dasein). Such a description
is not to be confused with a philosophy of life (Dilthey) or philosophy of existence (Jaspers), for the descriptive analysis of Dasein is to be an analysis of the ontological structure of human reality. At the same time, Heidegger's ontological analysis shares with these "philosophies" the view that being here, existence, is always prior to the reflective ego. In taking over Dilthey's claim that "we cannot go behind life," Heidegger, in his own way, wants to point to the habitual experience of circumspective concern from which reflective experience is derived. Quite pointedly, in Being and Time the theoretical attitude emerges as a secondary phenomenon to the pre-reflective basis of our cognition. Hermeneutic phenomenology is an articulation of this experience that precedes the "theoretical" encounter with the world.

Heidegger's articulation of the distinctive character of hermeneutic phenomenology is for the most part well known, the formal expression of which is found in section 7. Heidegger traces the concept of phenomenology to its Greek roots: φαινόμενον and λόγος. The Greek expression φαινόμενον is derived from the verb φαίνεσθαι which means to show itself. Φαίνω means that which shows itself, the manifest. The φαίνω is related to the Greek φῶς as that wherein something can be manifest, brought to light. Phenomenon thus signifies that which shows itself in itself. This is what the Greeks identified with ta onta, the things that are. Λόγος, which gets translated as "reason," "judgment," "concept," "definition," "ground," or "relationship," pertains fundamentally to discourse or speech. But speech itself must be interpreted. Aristotle understood the function of discourse as ἀποφαίνεσθαι. What is conveyed in discourse is also a letting something be seen. In genuine discourse, what is said is drawn from what the talk is about; that is, genuine discourse lets us see something from the very thing which the discourse is about. Taken together, "'phenomenology' means ἀποφαίνεσθαι τὰ φαινόμενα—to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (SZ 34). This formal meaning of the term expresses, for Heidegger, the real sense of Husserl's maxim "To the things themselves!"

Beyond this formal meaning of phenomenology, Heidegger then indicates the hermeneutical character of the investigation:

Our investigation itself will show that the meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation. The λόγος of the phenomenology of Dasein has the character of ἐγκυμνεύειν, through which the authentic meaning of Being, and also those basic structures of Being which Dasein itself possesses, are made known.
to Dasein's understanding of Being. The phenomenology of Dasein is a hermeneutic in the primordial signification of this word, where it designates the business of interpreting. (SZ 37)

Interpretation as phenomenological description is required precisely because the Being of Dasein is not seen; it is not fully in sight, but is for the most part concealed. The self-showing of the phenomenon—Dasein's making itself known to itself—is complicated. But its concealment is not oblivion. The laying out of that which it is and how it is can proceed on the basis of the way in which Dasein is available to itself already. A hermeneutic phenomenology proceeds at the outset as a reflective recovery of the vague average understanding of being. The hermeneutics of Being and Time is accordingly, a hermeneutics of retrieval (Wiederholung), of laying out by fetching back again Dasein's understanding of its Being. The transformation of phenomenology to a hermeneutic phenomenology rests on Heidegger's paradoxical emphasis on the hiddenness, the un-givenness, rather than the givenness, of the phenomenon.

That Heidegger is now far removed from the Neo-Kantianism of his day is strikingly evident by the way in which the method of Being and Time is itself grounded in the subject matter. The method of hermeneutic phenomenology mirrors the way to be of the being at issue; or, in different words, the interpretative effort that marks the procedure of the treatise follows from the anticipatory projection of the Being of Dasein. This interpretive structure at the very core of existence—the ontological basis of understanding—is articulated by Heidegger in a consideration of how the Da of Dasein, Dasein's openness to the world, is constituted (§29–34).

Again, Heidegger's analysis here is for the most part well known, but deserves repeating for the sake of the ultimate clarity it can bring to Gadamer's own position. To be brief and to limit ourselves to only part of Heidegger's analysis here, in §99 Heidegger characterizes this openness first of all in terms of its ontological disposition of Befindlichkeit. The existential structure of Befindlichkeit means that Dasein is always already placed. In effect, it expresses the factum of our existence. Dasein is always already affected and thus disposed in its Being. Heidegger characterizes this disposition as being in a mood (Stimmung), being attuned to the world in some fashion. Significantly, this original disposition is, according to Heidegger, disclosive of Dasein's Being; it informs it about its position in the midst of things in the world (SZ 134). Mood reveals to Dasein the pure "that it is," and not the "whence" and "whither." In being aware of
its own Being, of the fact that it is, Dasein's Being appears to itself as thrown (Geworfenheit). Dasein finds itself thrown into life, it finds itself "there," the result of which Dasein is aware not only "that it is," but "that it has to be."

Not only is Dasein's way to be that of being already disposed, Dasein's Being is determined equiprimordially by understanding (Verstehen). Understanding is not a concrete mode of knowing and even less is it to be considered an operation of a psychological faculty. As a mode of Being of Dasein, understanding is a "being able to." Dasein, in others words, is not something present-at-hand, but is primarily being-possible; it stretches out, projecting itself into a world of everyday concerns and projecting itself into its own possibilities of Being. In this structure of a project (Entwurf), in this pressing forward into possibilities, Dasein "understands" its world and itself. Echoing Heidegger's description of research in his 1922 summer semester course on Aristotle, we can say that Dasein throws itself forward upon possibilities within which Dasein must make its way about. Of course, Dasein's possibilities are not logical possibilities as if Dasein can be whatever it wants; Dasein's possibilities are in terms of its ability to be in a world that it is already delivered over to. Thrownness qualifies the character of Dasein's projection. For Gadamer, in his re-appropriation of Heidegger, this qualification of Dasein's understanding (especially as it pertains to historical existence) is decisive. "The Dasein which is projected towards its future 'potentiality-for-being' is a being which here and now has been, so that all of its unrestrained posturing comes up against and is halted in the face of the facticity of its own being" (PHC 27). And yet, as Gadamer points out for us, "the unilluminable obscurity of our facticity sustains and does not merely set limits to the projective character of Dasein" (RAS 41). For Gadamer, it is precisely this paradoxical situation of the hermeneutics of facticity, which is set against transcendental phenomenology, that inspires him.

At the beginning of §32 Heidegger introduces the concept of interpretation as the way in which understanding elaborates itself:

The projecting of the understanding has its own possibility—that of developing itself. This development of the understanding we call "interpretation" [Auslegung]. In it the understanding appropriates understandingly that which is understood by it. In interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself. Such interpretation is grounded in that understanding; the latter does not arise form the former. (SZ 148)
Interpretation is an exposition, laying out that which has been projected by understanding. The direction in the identification of interpretation and understanding is significant. The identification is not one in which there is first interpretation and on the basis of this understanding always follows. It is the reverse that is the case: interpretations are the working-out (Ausarbeitung) of the possibilities which are projected in understanding. Heidegger then proceeds to show us exactly what this working-out entails. At the pre-predicative level of experience that occurs in our everyday concernful dealings with things, we are guided first by a certain kind of understanding, a circumspective concern, in which things are interpreted. The carpenter, for example, in a circumspective concern, is aware of the what-for of the tool he or she encounters. The interpretation of the tool in a circumspective concern occurs when the tool is lifted out of its vague meaningfulness and is made explicit as something “in order to” (the hammering of the hammer). In its serviceability the tool is taken as something. This filling in of understanding by taking something as something, the rendering explicit of the hammer, is interpretation.

Then to emphasize the circularity of this movement of understanding—that is, it is not the case that when we interpret we “throw a signification over some naked thing which is present-at-hand,” but that “the ready-to-hand is always understood in terms of a totality of comportments” (SZ 150)—Heidegger lays out the fore-structure (Vorstruktur) of understanding that constitutes his version of the hermeneutic circle. Every interpretation depends on a fore-having (Vorhaben) or prepossession, a fore-sight (Vorsicht) or preview, and a fore-conception (Vorgriff) or preconception. More specifically, every interpretation is grounded in something we have in advance in the sense that the interpretation has already a totality of involvements which is already understood. Furthermore, every interpretation is grounded in something we see in advance in the sense that there is a point of view with respect to what is understood. And finally, every interpretation is grounded in something we grasp in advance in the sense that there is a conceptual scheme, drawn either from the entity itself or from something outside it, that guides the interpretation. Here we have Heidegger’s explicit account of the hermeneutic situation in Being and Time. This circle of understanding, in which what is understood is drawn from anticipatory projections which are themselves worked out in terms of the things themselves, declares that interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehension of an object. In the appeal to get at what “stands there” in the text, for example, one finds nothing other than the undisussed assumption
(Vormeinung) of the person who does the interpreting; something has been taken for granted in the interpretation as such. What has been taken for granted is that which is presented in the fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. But we should not be misled by the above example into thinking that the pre-understanding is a matter of simply having our own prior view of the matter. If such were the case it would be difficult to understand Heidegger’s assertion that in the circle is to be found a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing. Moreover, the issue of a vicious circle, the intrusion of the logical on the ontological, only obscures what is at issue in the circle. Heidegger is quite emphatic in insisting that the fore-structures are to be worked out in terms of the things themselves. According to Heidegger: “we genuinely take hold of this possibility [of the most primordial kind of knowing] only when, in our interpretation, we have understood that our first, last, and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular opinions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves” (SZ 153).

§ 4. Hermeneutics and Historical Existence

What remains to be seen, as we look ahead to the issue of understanding historical tradition, is precisely how, given the outcome of Heidegger’s analytic of Dasein, Dasein’s historicity is understood. The question of historical existence is taken up in Being and Time in division 2 in the discussion of Dasein’s temporality. Prior to the actual discussion of historicity (Geschichtlichkeit) Heidegger established that temporality constitutes the horizon for understanding the Being of Dasein. The meaning of Being found in care is itself grounded in temporality. But Heidegger sees that at this point the question of Dasein’s wholeness may not have been thoroughly dealt with. Dasein’s being-unto-death is simply one of the ends by which Dasein’s wholeness is enclosed. There is also birth. Dasein exists in the continuity of life (Zusammenhangs des Lebens) stretching between birth and death. This continuity of life is not a sequence of experiences in time, but, considered from Dasein’s temporal constitution, is the movement of existence that Heidegger calls the “coming to pass or historizing of Dasein” (Geschehen des Daseins).57

According to Heidegger, the condition for the possibility of Dasein’s historizing, its stretching along between birth and death, is found in the
existential-ontological constitution of historicity, which is rooted in temporality. But this phenomenon has been covered over by the way Dasein’s history is ordinarily interpreted. Heidegger begins, then, by distinguishing the various ways that history and historical (Geschichte und geschichtlich) have been used. Geschichte, historical reality, refers first of all to something past; but it also refers to the past that still has an effect as “we cannot get away from history.” In another sense, history is not so much the past but a context of events running through past, present, and future. In a third sense, history refers to that which is distinguished from nature; it refers to an existence determined by spirit and culture. Finally, history refers to that which is handed down by tradition (SZ 378–79).

In all four meanings history is seen to be that specific historizing of Dasein which comes to pass in time. Together, the meanings relate to man as the subject of events, but the question remains unanswered as to how the historizing character of such events is determined. Is the historizing a sequence of processes? In what way does the historizing of history belong to Dasein? Is Dasein something present-at-hand that on occasion can get into a history? Or is it that the being of Dasein is constituted first of all through the historizing because Dasein is historical in its being? The upshot of these questions is to point out that Dasein does not simply have a history but is historical in its very being, and it is so because temporality constitutes the being of Dasein (SZ 379).

How, then, are we to understand Dasein’s historicity? Heidegger introduces three terms: heritage (Erbe), fate (Schicksals), and destiny (Geschick), which are thought in terms of Dasein’s authentic temporality. As a thrown project, Dasein is delivered over to itself, it has been submitted to a world in which it existsfactically with others. In resoluteness, Dasein comes back to itself; that is to say, resoluteness “discloses current factual possibilities of authentic existing, and discloses them in terms of the heritage which that resoluteness, as thrown, takes over” (SZ 383). At the same time, in grasping the finitude of its existence, which Dasein does in its anticipatory grasping of death, Dasein is brought into an awareness of the “simplicity of its fate.” Fate is not a predeterminism but the recognition of limited possibilities and the significance of one’s decisions in view of these possibilities. Fate, Dasein’s authentic resoluteness in which it “hands itself down to itself, free for death, in a possibility which it has inherited and yet has chosen,” is Dasein’s primordial historizing (SZ 384). At the same time, Dasein’s fate is inseparable from community: our fate is always guided in advance in being with one another in the same world. This co-historizing...
is Dasein’s destiny. “Dasein’s fateful destiny in and with its ‘generation’
goes to make up the full authentic historizing of Dasein” (SZ 385).

The condition of the possibility of fate, authentic historicity, Heidegger
now says is care, that is, temporality:

Only an entity which, in its being, is essential futural so that it
is free for its death and can let itself be thrown back upon its factual
“there” by shattering itself against death—that is to say, only an
entity, which as futural, is equiprimordially in the process of
having-been, can, by handing down to itself the possibility it has
inherited, take over its own thrownness and be in the moment of
vision for “its time.” Only authentic temporality which is at the
same time finite, makes possible something like fate—that is to
say, authentic historicity. (SZ 385)

In identifying the finitude of temporality as the hidden ground of
historicity, we have come back to the hermeneutical situation, for repetition
is what characterizes the “mode by which Dasein exists explicitly as fate.”
We take over our fate, our personal destiny as well as our collective destiny,
in the act of repetition. Repetition, in other words, is the explicit handing
down (ausdruckliche Überlieferung), the going back into the possibilities
of the Dasein that has-been-there. One hears the echoes of Kierkegaardian
repetition when Heidegger goes on to say that the repetition does not “bring
again [Wiederbringen] something that is past.” The repetition cannot be
understood as a mechanical or literal repetition; it is rather the retrieval
or reclaiming of possibilities (of an existence which has been). The move-
ment here is essentially futural, just as the future has priority in the ecstatic
character of time. This means “that history has its essential importance
neither in what is past nor in the ‘today’ and its ‘connection’ with what
is past, but in that authentic historizing of existence which arises from
Dasein’s future” (SZ 386).

It is only after the historicity of existence has been clarified that the
question of a science of history can be addressed. Since a science of history
is always a science of Dasein’s history, the historical (historische) disclosure
of history (Geschichte), whether it is factically accomplished or not,
is, in accordance with its ontological structure, rooted in the historicity
(Geschichtlichkeit) of Dasein. The thematization of historical reality carried
out by historical research presupposes that the past as such should already
be disclosed and the access to the past be open. This is precisely what
is made possible by the historicity of Dasein’s being. Once it is recognized
that historical research is rooted in historicity, Heidegger thinks we are able to determine what it is that is thematized in such research. It is a theme that must be in conformity with the character of authentic historicity, that is, in conformity with repetition as the disclosure of what has-been-there. "The 'birth' of historical research from authentic historicity therefore signifies that in taking as our primary theme the object of historical research we are projecting the Dasein which has-been-there upon its ownmost possibility of existence" (SZ 395). History is not the study of facts, for what has been is nothing other than the "existentiell possibility" in which fate, destiny, and world-history have been determined. Historical research will disclose the "silent power of the possible." In this sense history is neither the study of universal laws nor particular events (what has happened only once).

Heidegger concludes his analysis with an opening for further analysis. It is an opening that is taken up initially by Dilthey, but in point of fact, it is an opening that is ultimately carried though by Gadamer. Heidegger writes:

The historical thematization has its main point in the cultivation of the hermeneutical situation which . . . opens itself to the repetitive disclosure of what has-been-there. The possibility and the structure of historical [historischen] truth are to be expounded from the authentic disclosedness ("truth") of historical [geschichtlichen] existence. But since the basic concepts of the historical sciences . . . are concepts of existence, the theory of the human sciences presupposes a thematic existential interpretation of the historicity of Dasein. (SZ 397)

The statement with which the above passage concludes could serve, at the same time, as the point of departure for Gadamer's hermeneutics of the humanities. Commenting on his own point of departure in "The Philosophical Foundations of the Twentieth Century," Gadamer writes:

Heidegger was no longer concerned with conceiving of the essence of finitude as the limit at which our desire to be infinite founders. He sought instead to understand finitude positively as the real constitution of Dasein. Finitude means temporality and thus the "essence" of Dasein is its historicity. These well-known theses of Heidegger's were meant to serve him in asking the question of being. The "understanding" that Heidegger described as the
basic dynamic of Dasein is not an “act” of subjectivity, but a mode of being. By proceeding form the special case of the understanding of tradition, I have myself shown that understanding is always an event. The issue here is not simply that a nonobjectifying consciousness always accompanies the process of understanding, but rather that understanding is not suitably conceived at all as the consciousness of something, since the whole process of understanding itself enters into an event, is brought about by it, and is permeated by it. The freedom of reflection, this presumed being-with-itself, does not occur at all in understanding, so much is understanding conditioned at every moment by the historicity of existence. (PH 125/GW4 18–19)

Ultimately, all of Gadamer’s analyses are in one way or another an expression of the event character of understanding. Philosophically, the task of hermeneutics consists in asking the question about a form of understanding that stands within the historicity of existence.