The Inner Word and the Universality of Gadamer’s Hermeneutics

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Abstract

The inner word in Gadamer’s hermeneutics is frequently identified with the Word of God. I dispute this interpretation as put forward by John Arthos and use Gadamer’s method of philosophizing to justify an inter-cultural dialogue with the rudiments of classical Chinese philosophy as understood by Chung-ying Cheng. The distance he insists upon between the dao and Gadamer’s hermeneutics is narrowed on the grounds that Gadamer’s dialectical approach to hermeneutics has an ontological structure that depends on the unifying power of the living language. The consequence of this dialogue between Cheng and Gadamer is that the question of the universality of Gadamer’s hermeneutics shifts toward a phenomenological understanding of the inner word Augustine intimates in his experience of time while singing a psalm.

The Christ-logos

When asked by Jean Grondin in what does the universality of hermeneutics consist, Gadamer “answered, concisely and conclusively, thus: ‘In the verbum interius’.”¹ We cannot be sure what Gadamer meant, however, clues can be gleaned from Truth and Method. In the section titled “Language and Verbum” he investigates the verbum interius or inner word in the context of the Doctrine of the Incarnation for purposes of understanding how human thought comes to language. Fredrick Lawrence and Jens Zimmermann contend that this process of thought coming to language in such a way as to reveal the genuine nature of things depends on faith in the Christ-logos.² That is to say, they hold that for


². See Jens Zimmermann, Recovering Theological Hermeneutics: An Incarnational-Trinitarian Theory of Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004) and “Ignoramus: Gadamer’s ‘Religious Turn’,” in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics and the Art of
Gadamer when reason is informed by faith in the Word of God made flesh that the truth about objects of knowledge is understandable. In this case, the universality of hermeneutics depends on the catholicity of hermeneuts, which is self-referentially incoherent. The problem with Lawrence and Zimmermann’s position is that it relies on the false belief that “witness” or personal testimony is self-evidently reliable and valid. Nevertheless, there may yet be grounds for accepting the crux of Lawrence and Zimmermann’s argument provided those grounds are inter-subjectively verifiable and thus amenable to rational cross-examination.

In The Inner Word in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics, John Arthos puts forward non-religious arguments for holding that in “Language and Verbum” Gadamer means precisely what Augustine intended the inner word to mean in De Trinitate XV.10-15—the word of God revealed in the Gospel of John. Arthos states succinctly, Gadamer draws the Judeo-Christian achievement “back into the humanist tradition.”  

Arthos is not Christian. Nor does he count himself an anonymous Christian. Hence, his reasons for supporting the theological interpretation of the inner word are apt to consult for purposes of engaging a secular audience. And yet, upon closer examination, his reasons for aligning Gadamer with the Judeo-Christian achievement, i.e., the incarnation, are also dubious. Those reasons rely on the unstated assumption that Gadamer and Augustine have the same intentional will. There are two problems with this assumption. First, Gadamer is explicit about the “categorical significance” of the theme of the “verbum” in Augustine’s Trinitarian speculations. It is not Augustine or the Christian Doctrine of the Incarnation that interest him, but


rather the idea of the inner word. Second, he consistently distances his hermeneutics or art of interpreting a text, work of art or history from psychology, in particular, from the psychological methods of Friedrich Schleiermacher. In contrast to his pretense toward knowledge of authorial intentions and motives, which Gadamer deems insufficiently free of human subjectivity, Gadamer’s hermeneutics is phenomenological. Phenomenology is a method of acquiring knowledge that purports to save experience, or “the life-world,” from the reductions of causal explanations advanced by the natural sciences. For Gadamer, the key to a phenomenological description of reality is not a denial of the ways in which consciousness is historically effected (this being Gadamer’s criticism of Husserl’s epoché) but rather a recognition of that influence. The process of becoming aware of the genuine nature of things thus consists of calling into question how one’s prejudices have been formed by contingencies of history, for example, e.g., tradition, upbringing and location. In this way, Gadamer hoped that the art of interpretation would achieve a degree of objectivity unavailable to the sciences that continue to deny the role of human-making in the acquisition of knowledge and moreover, without involving psychology or subjectively laden inferences about someone’s motives and intentions.

Neither the religiously inspired nor non-religious and instead psychological explanation for the inner word being the Word of God is acceptable to Gadamer. The argument based on faith in the Christ-logos is idiosyncratic and the argument based on psychological inferences about Gadamer and Augustine’s mind is inconsistent with Gadamer’s critique of Schleiermacher. Perhaps then another approach to understanding the inner word is required that is more in keeping with the gist of Gadamer’s philosophy. In this regard, Gadamer is the celebrated philosopher of the dialogue form. For him, the exemplary dialogical philosopher is Socrates because he did not shrink from engaging points of view that were contrary to his own. He embraced them in order to discern somewhere in the give and take of a conversation the truth of the matter at hand. In keeping with this Socratic approach to dialogue upon which Gadamer builds, the research of Chung-ying Cheng is apt to consult.

The Dao

Cheng argues that while Gadamer’s notion of historically effaced consciousness rightly challenges the pretense of the propositional attitude in which a separation between subject and object is asserted, i.e., objectivity, Cheng also holds that Gadamer’s emphasis on history functions to conceal the underlying reality of things (ontology). This follows from a preoccupation with method. According to Cheng, not only Gadamer, but the history of Western philosophy is defined by a revolution in method Cheng traces to Plato and Aristotle. By distinguishing the subject or knower from the thing or object known, the Greeks initiated a tradition of devising method after method to bridge the distance between them and thereby restore the experience of unity and oneness. For this reason, Cheng places Husserl’s ἐποχή, Heidegger’s existential analysis of Dasein and Gadamer’s hermeneutics within the same tradition as natural science. Just as science attempts to access the real with methodical doubt so too does Gadamer by calling prejudices into question. His is yet another variation on the same theme and stands as evidence for Plato and Aristotle’s influence on Western thinking, the result of which is that particular aspects of reality are confused with the whole.

In contradistinction to the Western tendency to separate the knower from the known, classical Chinese philosophy preserves what Cheng, drawing upon the Yi-Jing, calls a “comprehensive observation” (guan) experience of unity of whole and part in change that leads to understanding of the dao. Accordingly, in contrast to the West that divides a holistic vision into its parts and treats the parts as if they were the whole, Chinese philosophy preserves the unity of those parts in a vision of the dao that encompasses appearance and reality and the constancy of change. In support of the claim that the dao does not separate the metaphysical from the non-metaphysical except as a condition of their intertwining, Cheng discerns that the poles of Chinese philosophy have a share in the dao. He finds evidence in both the Analects by Confucius and the Daodejing by Lao Tzu for the underlying reality of dao as understood in the Yi-Jing. Cheng concludes of the

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divergent Confucian and Laotzu traditions, “they have not for a single moment doubted that the human and the world or the *tao* are in constant process of interaction, in an intimate relationship of interchange and that this is a common experience.” The *dao* constitutes the underling reality that generates from out of itself differences in a self-unfolding harmony. This very process of generating harmony from out of difference, organic unity of parts orders or structures reality, i.e., refers to the cosmological order of reality/ontology. There is then no reality or ontology without order or cosmology, i.e., onto-cosmology of the *dao* which humans might represent by giving creative expression (*sheng*) to the natural forms in works of art, history, literature, science and so on.

The import of Cheng’s position for Gadamer no less than for any other Western philosopher is that Gadamer presupposes an underlying sense of the *dao*. Cheng thus acknowledges that hermeneutics produces different interpretations according to circumstances and perspectives and adds, “But we can also see that different interpretations are founded on some underlying paradigm or model of understanding of reality and truth.” It follows from this that the universality of Gadamer’s hermeneutics depends on disclosing the underlying reality of the *dao* in all of its diverse manifestations. The inner word in Gadamer’s hermeneutics is by this account a power to bind opposing sides together into one harmonious unity. Thought comes to language and reveals the genuine nature of things when through “comprehensive observation” thinking builds toward the natural formation of things in language.

**Chung-ying Cheng and Gadamer: Harmony**

Insofar as classical Chinese philosophy is used as a lens through which to interpret Gadamer’s hermeneutics, the inner word is that which imparts reality in the sense of harmonious order (intertwining of opposites) to human understanding and making. However, it is not clear that the organic structure of the *dao* is as foreign to Gadamer’s thinking as Cheng would lead the reader to believe. Indeed, his criticism challenges me to unearth the ontological dimensions of Gadamer’s

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phenomenology of the living language. This possibility is opened up by Gadamer’s relation to Hegel and Plato.

Gadamer believes that Hegel understands the dialectical structure of Plato’s dialogue form. Beings announce themselves in language when thought thinks a contradiction. This corresponds to the dao in the sense that the contradiction between opposites, e.g., ying male and yang female, is removed at a higher level of intelligibility. There is thus a progression from one stage of understanding to another that by degrees reaches toward the unifying and holistic vision of reality prefigured in “the comprehensive observation” of the dao. And yet, this cannot entirely be the case. As Elliot Allinson points out, in contrast to the notion of harmony in Chinese thought, Hegel presupposed conflict. This is a consequence of extrapolating parts from their inner relation and treating them independently of one another. According to Allinson, Hegel foregrounds antagonism and conflict rather than collaboration and cooperation.12 What about Gadamer? While Hegel’s logic informs the formal structural side of the dialogue form, and attests to the role of method in the formation of ideas, Gadamer is also in touch with the phenomenological grounds of understanding in the living language (which Cheng claims is particular to the Chinese language in contrast to Indo-European languages).13 For example, Gadamer acknowledges a formal dialectic by which ideas of the mind develop (e.g., Hegel’s dialectic) yet also acknowledges that the life of language does justice to the particularity of perception;14 that alongside the scientific ideal of language “the life of language itself continues unchanged;”15 that one side of language is propositional and the other has its true being in dialogue, which cannot be changed.16 There is a sense in which the non-methodological and instead experiential side of language preserves the power to unify opposites. This is evident in Gadamer’s assessment of Hegel and Socrates. While Hegel’s dialectic grasps the rules for generating ideas from one another, the power of generation belongs to the spoken language. Gadamer

12. Elliot Allinson, “Hegelian, Yi-Jing and Buddhist Transformational Models for Comparative Philosophy” in Mou, Comparative Approaches to Chinese Philosophy, 63-70.

13. Cheng holds that the dualistic ontology between Being and becoming in Western philosophy is part and parcel of the phonetic alphabet in European languages, which he contrasts with Chinese logograms which retains an affinity with the concrete particular.


15. Ibid., 450.

16. Ibid., 459.
explains, “Socrates’ art of conversing, i.e., the exercise of thinking in opposites, on the one hand, and the differentiation of concepts, on the other, are related to each other.”

Hence, rather than being completely agonistic on account of mistaking a part for the whole, the dialectic of the dialogue for Gadamer incorporates the living language and thus friendship, what Gadamer calls the potentiality-to-be-one-another, human solidary and good will.

The Hegelian prong of Gadamer’s thought, i.e., the formal logic of removing a contradiction at higher levels of intelligibility, is therefore not the entire picture, but instead represents the methodological-propositional side of reason that is coordinate with the ontology of human existence; specifically, being-with (mitsein) that Gadamer takes over from Heidegger’s phenomenological analysis of Dasein in Being and Time. Part of that analysis includes a study of perception including the mode that accounts for shared understanding between speakers. Heidegger calls it attunement (Stimmung). Attunement is distinct from hearing (hören). Whereas hearing is a passive reception of sounds by the ears, attunement includes a disposition or way of relating toward beings. It is a mode of understanding that corrects the excesses of a visual orientation with relationality or what Gadamer and Heidegger call “openness.” This mode of understanding is comparable to what Cheng calls a “doctrine of harmony” because it accounts for the unity of understanding between speakers; a unity Gadamer preserves in the living language. Stated differently, the Analects relates that dao, hidden in the hearts and minds of people, is a “doctrine of harmony” which forms, Cheng points out, relationships of mutual support and complementation, i.e., an organic unity.

The notions of mutual support and complementation are surely what transpire in a dialogue, and in the fusion of horizons for Gadamer, where good will and the capacity to make another’s argument cogent in order to clarify the subject-matter being questioned, are required. Yet perhaps the most significant point of contact between Cheng and Gadamer is in the organic structure of this process. I am referring to the music of


the living language that comes into focus in Gadamer’s thought by way of Augustine’s account of time while singing a psalm.

Music and the Temporal Unfolding of the Dao in Augustine

The organic unity of the dao is conveyed by the self-generating process arising from the intertwining of ying (male creativity) and yang (female receptivity). Cheng believes that understanding the organic (creative) structure of reality is unique to classical Chinese philosophy. This is not entirely the case when the Hegelian dialectical structure of thought in Gadamer is re-interpreted from the side of the living language. When thus considered, the process by which thought comes to language is audible in song. While there are intimations of Gadamer having grasped this idea in such notions as a “melody of meaning,” it is Augustine who is most clear about it. His experience of time while singing at the Church in Milan and as recounted in The Confessions (further elaborated upon in On Music VI) exemplifies the unfolding of the inner reality of the real. The connection between him and Gadamer on time has first however to be established.

Richard Kearney speaks on behalf of Paul Ricoeur:

By linking our experience of the threefold present to that of psychic distention, has he not [Augustine], in Book XI, sketched out the basics of a phenomenological psychology, prefiguring the Husserlian analysis of retention/pretension and the Heideggerian description of retrieval (Wiederholung) and foreunderstanding (Vor-Verstandnis)? Is this not “the stroke of genius of Book XI of Augustine’s Confessions,” asks Ricoeur, “in whose wake will follow Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty?”20

Augustine’s pursuit of fulfillment in God is expressed in a restless life of striving. He always felt that God called out to him, but also felt that call slip away the more he yearned for it. His existence was fraught with tension between what could be and what had been expressed in his concept of time (discussed below). As pointed out by Kearney above, the threefold present of “psychic distention” in Augustine became the basis for time in Husserl’s phenomenology and, later, for Heidegger’s

existential analysis of *Dasein*. Yet Gadamer is not mentioned by Kearney. Of course, the hermeneutical circle carries over to Gadamer from Heidegger. The prior understanding we project forward is articulated time and again originally, and in so doing expands and broadens. In “The Rehabilitation of Authority to Tradition” Gadamer writes of the hermeneutical event: “The anticipation of completion that guides all our understanding is, then, always specific in content. Not only is an immanent unity of meaning guiding the reader assumed, but this understanding is likewise guided by the constant transcendent expectations of meaning which proceed from the relation to the truth of what is being said.”\(^{21}\) In other words, concern for the immanent meaning of a matter at hand that moves forward, deepens and broadens on account of a transcendent expectation of meaning. Might this anticipation of completion that proceeds from what is being spoken about be the “*vouloir-dire,*” the wanting to say?\(^{22}\) The desire to speak points beyond itself to the meaning in excess of anything said by us finite beings, i.e., the inner word. Yet there is something else to which Gadamer is pointing in the passage quoted. He refers to the art of reading and states “the truth of what is being said.” For Gadamer, reading is a conversation and such conversations are modeled on the spoken word. The grounds of Gadamer’s hermeneutics including the three-fold present mentioned by Kearney lie in the spoken language.

Gadamer’s connection to the *dao* pivots on a breakthrough Augustine instigates on time overlooked by Kearney. Augustine writes in *The Confessions*:

> Suppose I have to recite a poem I know by heart. Before I begin, my expectation is directed to the whole poem, but once I have begun, whatever I have plucked away from the domain of expectation and tossed behind me to the past becomes the business of my memory, and the vital energy of what I am doing is in tension between the two of them: it strains toward my memory because of the past I have already recited, and to my expectation on account of the part I still have to speak. But my attention is present all the while, for the future is being channeled through it to become the past.\(^{23}\)

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When Augustine says that he is reciting a poem by heart he is not likely repeating it in his head to himself by himself. Silent speaking to oneself was unusual in the fifth century ACE. He was surprised to find Ambrose reading quietly to himself at the Church in Milan. Hence, Augustine refers to “the past I have already recited” and the “part I still have to speak.” In other words, Augustine grasps time in the verbal language which in his oral culture was always also communal. Hence, the recitation of poems was not repeated from rote memory by a single person, but instead, was a collective undertaking, i.e., a collective participation in the “recitation” in which everyone participated correcting and revising the poem as the case might be. This is important because it relocates an understanding of time, from the chamber of consciousness (impressions of internal time consciousness in Husserl) and the structures of human existence (Heidegger) to the phenomenon of musical-language. The very notion of time that Kearney indicates prefigures phenomenological psychology and the hermeneutic circle might therefore have an affinity with Gadamer’s turn to language.

The verbal nature of time or the thinking of time in terms of language depends not upon what is said, but rather on how it is spoken. Friedrich Schleiermacher is concise about this. He explains, “The qualitative always develops out of the quantitative, which is usually given less attention.”

By the qualitative he means the language area and what is said; by the quantitative, how it is said. How we speak shapes what is said and therefore imparts meaning to it. He thus explains that when all else is the same between two works (the same didactic tendency, object, way of conceiving it, attitude and way of writing and the details), the two works might still have a different meaning that is decided, he says, by a question of feeling. Feeling, however, is not capricious fancy. It refers, for Schleiermacher, to the author’s tone of voice and mood (Stimmung). It is these


25. “Here there is now a point which is often very easy, often very difficult to find, but which is always important, namely the tone, the mood of the writer. Recognizing this is essential to understanding a sequence of thoughts as a fact in their mind. Two writers can have the same didactic tendency, the object in question can be the same, the manner of conceiving it, the attitude, the manner of writing can be the same, but one writes in a calm, the other a more agitated tone. In consequence the details appear different, have a different meaning. That difference reveals itself the most in the treatment of language. But determinate rules cannot be established concerning this, precisely because it is so much a question of feeling” Ibid., 146-147.

26. See ibid., 146-147, where he speaks to the musical language and its harmony.
that distinguish the meaning of the parts in two works that are exactly the same.
As he puts it, whether a work is written from out of the author’s own “state” (as he
calls it), or form out of an image they have of someone else’s state, is decided by
“the more or less emphatic tone.”

But of course, Gadamer is not interested in the tone of voice as a channel
to the author’s intentional will or seminal reason for writing. He is critical of Schleiermacher on just this score; turning hermeneutics into psychology detracts
from clarifying the subject-matter under discussion, and beyond that, the
existential grounds that make it possible for the subject-matter to announce itself
in language. In the course of explaining what it means to put our prejudices at risk
Gadamer writes, “there is something else in this experience; namely, a potentiality
for being other [Andersseins] that lies beyond every coming to agreement about
what is common.” A potentiality for being other refers to something beyond
agreement because agreement presupposes it. Surely Gadamer is alluding to
Heidegger’s Being-with. In Being and Time, Heidegger refers to it as Being-open,
Gadamer’s very coinage. But if so, the two philosophers disagree about it as well.
Whereas Heidegger argues that empathy is not a structure of human existence,
Gadamer must regard it as such or at least treat the phenomenon of empathy
ontologically. After all, he mentions “potentiality for being other.” But he leaves
the thought undeveloped. Despite a return to the living language in which to think
about how thought comes to language, which in turn pivots on attunement to
“withing,” Gadamer is somewhat disinterested in the affects, e.g., emotional
contagion. His concern for creating distance between phenomenological-
hermeneutics and hermeneutics as psychology inclined him to focus not on the
particular individual, but instead on the topic (die Sache). This is the point at
which another voice without the same concerns might join his to form a medley.

27. Ibid., 123.
Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (Albany: State University of New York
31. Ibid., 124-125.
32. See Gadamer, Truth and Method, 403, 406.
Cheng explains that comprehensive observation leads to an awakening to ren. He explains ren as follows: “a humanistic love that relates peoples to one another;” the ability to put myself in the role and position of others.” He states conclusively of ren, “What I mean by this is that it takes a person of profound self-knowledge and humanity to see that there is a deep similarity among oneself and others and that this similarity is also a matter of mutual bonding so that what I regard as harmful must be experienced as harmful by others and what I experience as joyous must be joyous.” The deep similarity we have with one another, expressed by Schleiermacher as being-in-one-another, is a possibility for Gadamer’s “potentiality for being other”—namely, a sharing in each other’s modes of existence, being of humanity (ren).

To recapitulate, Gadamer’s turn to language for an understanding of Being is prefigured in Augustine’s endeavor to understand time on the basis of reciting, i.e., singing, a poem in unison with others. Just as the fullness of song depends on attunement to the voice of the other, so too does the event of understanding depend on listening to the voice of a friend carried within, which is to say Being-with or social being audible in the quantitative dimension of language that is coordinate with the classical Chinese notion of ren. Humanistic love (ren) is the ability to place oneself in the position of another, and this, Heidegger teaches, requires an auditory disposition (receptivity). That which is heard in the voice of the Other is a mode of existence in which both speakers participate through attunement (to each other’s mood)—friendships of virtue. Beneath the surface of...


chatter, idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity is the always already present possibility of hearing beyond the given to our potentiality-for-Being other which we yearn to fulfill in a community of language. Hence, in *The Confessions*, Augustine does not treat the inner word as a mental event, but instead in a phenomenological way. While recalling the time when he was a Manichean, he says that the materialistic images had "set up a din in the ears of my heart, ears which were straining to catch your inner melody." Relating to the inner word as an "inner melody" dovetails with the theme of this paper, but more importantly for the argument at this point is the fact that Augustine strains to hear it. He not infrequently refers to the inner word calling out to him from his bones. This embodied experience of the inner word is a far cry from the voice of the intellect. It has a visceral quality missing from Augustine's hermeneutics in *On Christian Doctrine* and *On the Trinity*.

Onto-Cosmology in Gadamer’s Pythagorean-Plato

According to Cheng, Western thought is alienated from the order or existence or onto-cosmology modeled in the *Yi-Jing*. This seems to be the case for Gadamer. His turn to language as the locus in which to understand beings has been appropriated by scholars who disavow ontology or any credible grounds for a science of beings. For them, Gadamer advocates for openness and toleration yet without any sense of measure or of what ought to be. This is the reading of Gadamer that Cheng for the most part also adopts except that he holds out the possibility of Gadamer alluding to and indeed presupposing *dao*. The evidence supports this interpretation of Gadamer. He speaks approvingly of "the true order of things." However, he is somewhat cryptic about it. Order in reality or the cosmology that runs through his thinking is embedded within his interpretations of Plato. According to Gadamer, Plato was a Pythagorean in that he removed the contradiction the religious sect established between the mathematically ordered heaven and earth by showing how music combines opposites together in order to


41. Ibid., 90; V.iv.7. He writes at the outset of Book VIII, "May I be flooded with love for you until my very bones cry out" (Augustine, 145; VIII.1.1) and in Book IX, "May my heart and tongue give praise to you, and all my bones cry out their question, . . .” (170; IX.1.1).

generate new ideas in a self-unfolding harmony. Transferring this to a conversation, it means that insofar as thinking participates in the rhythmically attuned diction between voices conversation takes on a life of its own that speakers want to follow because in no other way can they reach understanding of what something means independently of their predilections. Gadamer enters into this idea by way of Plato’s view of the soul—it is said to participate in true being such that knowledge is an element of being itself. This is a reversal of propositional thought into its opposite via the living language (attunement or auditory disposition). Many voices thus find unison when they tune into the one that binds the conversation together. This Pythagorean mathematical order of the cosmos surfaces in five areas of Gadamer’s thought that attest to Cheng’s expectations that Gadamer presupposes dao: (1) the dialogue form (2) the order of existence (3) truthfulness (4) life and (5) soul.

First, in “Plato’s Unwritten Dialectic” Gadamer argues that the problem of the one and the many that Plato took over from the Pythagoreans (and solved by thinking the poles of a contradiction together) constitutes the structure of a dialogue; an interplay of opposites. But the play is not merely a process. Rather, it generates something beyond itself. The one, as Gadamer says, generates all other numbers and thus is taken by him to refer to the creation of the cosmos in Plato’s philosophy. This is how he makes sense of ideal numbers in Plato’s *Timeaus*. It might well be mere coincidence, or it might have something to do with the universality of Gadamer’s hermeneutics, but Cheng explains the underlying order of the dao, “Thus the *Daodejing* says: ‘The *dao* gives rise to the one, one gives rise to the two, and the two gives rise to three, and the three gives rise to all things in the world’.” The *dao* is the order of all beings under heaven. Does the structure

43. Ibid., 474.
44. Ibid., 483.
45. See Gadamer, “Plato’s Unwritten Doctrine” in *Dialectic and Dialogue: Eight Hermeneutical Studies of Plato*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 136. Insofar as thinking is constrained by what is visible and has extension, opposites cannot be thought together. For this reason, the Pythagoreans tried to identify the point at which a circle becomes a square. For Gadamer, Plato’s revolution in philosophy was to show how a contradiction between objects perceived forces thinking to distinguish the latter from a concept or form where unity of understanding is possible insofar as that unity thought can be expressed in the living language.
of the dialogue, expressed by Gadamer in ideal numbers, similarly image the order of existence in the Yi-Jing?

Second, Gadamer explains that the metaphysics of the beautiful is based on an analogy of measure and a teleological order of being.\textsuperscript{48} Referring to the ascent passage in Plato’s \textit{Symposium}, i.e., the ladder of love (210a-212c), he argues that for Plato the teleological order of being is also an order of beauty that arises from the many sensible things to the intelligible unity.\textsuperscript{49} The unity or principle of order for all beings (under heaven) to which his own ontological turn in hermeneutical inquiry has led him, is, as he says, a principle of harmony.\textsuperscript{50} A teleological principle orders beings in relation to one another for one another because all are one, but not the One of Plotinus from which everything else emanates; rather the one is a centre that runs through all things. Gadamer names it “The sensitive mean,” which he explains is “the exactness of the harmonious relationships, [that] are part of the oldest essence of the beautiful.”\textsuperscript{51} To clarify what he means by the “sensitive mean” that runs through and orders all beings in relation to one another, he asks us to “think of the sensitivity of the harmonies of sound from which music is constructed.”\textsuperscript{52} Like the notes in fifths, thirds and octaves, beings in proper relation to one another form an “organic whole” or song (“Song is existence”) that Gadamer suggests is the radiance of the beautiful.

Third, at the outset of \textit{Truth and Method}, Gadamer contrasts the social scientific method with the eighteenth century humanist notions of \textit{Bildung, sensus communis}, judgment and taste, all of which I associate with being truthful. Yet his descriptions of them recapitulate a variation on the same theme—a non epistemological notion of truth to which he intends to give voice amidst the irrational rage of method. Gadamer quotes Wilhelm von Humboldt in a passage replete with a musical motif, “but when in our language we say \textit{Bildung}, we mean something both higher and more inward, namely the disposition of mind which, from the knowledge and the feeling of the total intellectual and moral endeavor,

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49. Ibid., 435.

50. He writes, “The basis of the close connection between the idea of the beautiful and that of the teleological order of being is the Pythagorean and Platonic concept of measure” Ibid., 436.

51. Ibid., 438-439.

52. Ibid.
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flows harmoniously into sensibility and character.’” Humboldt/Gadamer is thinking in terms of uniting contraries (higher and lower, mind and feeling) that flow “harmoniously.” A lack of Bildung is thus said to be a “giving way to blind anger without measure or sense of proportion.” Soon after, Gadamer thinks of sensus communis as a virtue of the heart that integrates the universal and particular (a familiar refrain in Gadamer’s ethics of phronesis), and to “judgment,” which he says exhibits agreement of many and one, where internal coherence is what matters. These allusions to harmony in eighteenth century humanism by Gadamer indicate that it is an organizing principle of his thinking about an age, before the rise of “aesthetic consciousness” in the wake of Kant, in which being truthful was considered beautiful.

What Gadamer says about the dialectic of dialogue, beings of the beautiful and truthfulness is extended to life and soul. In “Dilthey’s Entanglement in Historicism” he uses music to explain the idea of a particular life being the locus for the unfolding of its coherence. He writes of particular experiences, “Around them, as around an organizing centre, the unity of a life is created, in the same way that a melody acquires its meaningful form—not from the mere succession of notes, but from the musical motifs that determine its unity of form.” Like life, a melody acquires form from the repetition of motifs or themes. It is by doing the same thing everyday in oddly an original way that living becomes a coherent life. Further to the point and with respect to the soul, he quotes Henri Bergson in support of this insight over and against the capacity of epistemology to grasp the phenomenon. He writes of Bergson’s notion of durée, the “absolute” continuity in psychic life, “Bergson understands this as ‘organization’, i.e., he defines it from the mode of being of life (etre vivant), in which every element is representative of the whole (representatif du tout). He compares the inner penetration of all elements in

54. Ibid., 11.
55. Ibid., 16.
56. Ibid., 29.
the consciousness with the way in which in listening to the melody all the notes inter-mingle.”

Conclusion

It is not in any off-hand way that Gadamer, unlike Heidegger and Husserl, indirectly builds upon the structure of time they handed down to him by thinking in terms of music. It fits with his shift toward dialogue as the medium for understanding (rather than theoria for Heidegger via Aristotle). Yet that which is hearkened in an auditory disposition is not solely a pitched tone, but in addition the possibility for harmony or a bond of humanity (“social solidarity”) imaged in the order of numbers that Gadamer extends to the dialogue form, beings of the beautiful, truthfulness, human life and the soul. This resonates with the Daodejing and Yi-Jing. It resonates with Augustine when we read past the dogma of the Church to his experience of time. After recalling that he anticipates the present while reciting a poem (quoted earlier in this paper), he states that it is the same as what “happens in the entirety of a person’s life, of which all his actions are a part,” and is the same “in the entire sweep of human history, the parts of which are individual lives.” Augustine was no more familiar with the Confucian “doctrine of harmony” than Gadamer. But it does not matter. When Augustine is read with an ear for human experience in general (phenomenology), the nature of the inner word is discerned in the spoken language whose structure removes the contradiction between elements in a way that resonates with the principle underlying the universe in classical Chinese philosophy.


59. This is an observation made by Francisco Gonzalez in Plato and Heidegger: A Question of Dialogue (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009) with reference to Heidegger’s criticism of dialectic in Being and Time. But there are exceptions; for instance, citing Rainer Maria Rilke’s poem “Sonnets to Orpheus” Heidegger explains that what Rilke “says in poetic speech by what means poetic thinking and saying is determined. ‘Gesang ist Dasein’—‘Song is existence’ (Holzwege, pp. 292ff)” in Heidegger, Pathmarks, ed. William McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 61.

60. The full passage reads, “What is true of the poem as a whole is true equally of its individual stanzas and syllables. The same is true of the whole long performance, in which this poem may be a single item. The same thing happens in the entirely of a person’s life, of which all his actions are part; and the same in the entire sweep of human history, the parts of which are individual human lives.” Augustine, The Confessions, 270; XI.28.27.
Works Consulted


