Gadamer's Hermeneutics and the Art of Conversation

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"Gadamer and Husserl on Horizon, Intersubjectivity and the Life-World"

pp. 73 - 94

MÜNSTER

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2011
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plea that "the future survival of humankind" may depend on our willingness to engage dialogically with others on both the personal level and the level of larger human communities and cultures.

GADAMER AND HUSSERL ON HORIZON, INTERSUBJECTIVITY, AND THE LIFE-WORLD
Dermot Moran

The Marburg Beginning and the Promise of Phenomenology

Hans-Georg Gadamer's manner of engaging with sedimented *historical meaning* and with the binding yet elusive character of *tradition* began during his early studies in Marburg, inspired primarily by Martin Heidegger, as well as by his encounter with the Marburg classicists, Paul Natorp and Paul Friedländer. In these formative years, as Gadamer himself has acknowledged, he also had a fruitful engagement with Edmund Husserl and the phenomenological movement. Indeed, he acknowledges the special importance *phenomenology* had for students at that time as the promise of a movement that would remain loyal to concrete lived experience and thereby challenge the prevailing Neo-Kantianism that prioritized somewhat arid and non-historical epistemological problems. Gadamer writes of having a certain expectation from Husserl's phenomenology during the early twenties: "We also lived in the expectation of a new philosophical orientation, which was particularly tied to the dark, magical word 'phenomenology'." Heidegger too has talked about that 'magic word' phenomenology; and in the twenties that term signified primarily the work of Husserl, Scheler, and their followers. What phenomenology promised to do was to go behind the accepted world of science and inquire into the foundations of the life-world. As Gadamer would later recall:

But the phenomenological school [in the 1920's] had an even stronger impact by no longer sharing the Marburg School's orientation to the facts of the sciences as self-evident. It went behind scientific experience and the categorial analysis of its methods, and brought the natural experience of life—that is, what the later Husserl named with the now famous expression, the "life-world"—into the foreground of its phenomenological investigation.

Understandably, given his career-long focus on hermeneutics and classical philosophy, Gadamer's engagement with Edmund Husserl has not been highlighted by commentators and certainly has not been given the same attention as Gadamer's lifelong relationship with Heidegger (until the latter's death in 1976). Indeed, Gadamer's

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embrace of hermeneutics of the Heideggerian kind (itself stemming from Dilthey) as the primary path to historical understanding has been interpreted as a rejection of eidetic phenomenology of the descriptive kind practiced by Husserl (who was widely seen as an opponent of Dilthey). Moreover, Gadamer was particularly influenced in his reading of the importance of hermeneutics by an important comparative study of the time by Dilthey’s student and son-in-law, Georg Misch (1878–1965), entitled Life-Philosophy and Phenomenology: A Dispute Concerning the Diltheyan Tendency in Heidegger and Husserl which appeared in 1930. Misch portrayed hermeneutics as more faithfully portraying life than Husserl’s eidetic phenomenology and regards Heidegger as having thought through to the end Dilthey’s problematic.

As a consequence, there is a standard view, articulated, for instance, in Jean Grondin’s otherwise excellent biography of Gadamer, that Gadamer repudiated Husserl as an ahistorical, Cartesian, rationalist idealist, who did not appreciate the historicity, finitude and facticity of human lived existence.

Indeed, it is certainly true—as Gadamer himself has repeatedly acknowledged—that Husserl’s austere approach could never have satisfied the post-First-World-War generation of students that were ‘looking for a worldview’ and some kind of answers to the meaning of existence given the relentless destruction of the war. It is also true that Gadamer understood Husserlian phenomenology as a kind of intellectual pursuit of the essence or eidos, which, accordingly, could never grasp the ‘uniqueness, finitude and historicity’ of human Dasein, as he puts it in his 1963 essay on the phenomenological movement. Gadamer was disappointed that Husserl’s phenomenology, after so promising a start, effectively collapsed back into a kind of Neo-Kantian idealism. It is certainly true that Husserl made his peace with the Neo-Kantians and especially Rickert and Cassirer during his Freiburg years. Nonetheless, Gadamer saw Husserl as an inspiring teacher attempting to communicate the importance of phenomenology with exactitude, honesty and even a missionary zeal. According to Gadamer’s anecdote, Husserl’s efforts to transcendently ground phenomenology left him no time even to go to the theater, or to enjoy poetry, as he confessed to Roman Ingarden! But Husserl did want to do philosophy genuinely and concretely and Gadamer was greatly drawn to this, admiring Husserl’s attention to detail and ‘craftsmanship,’ although he admits that, in 1923 when he sat in Husserl’s lectures, as a recently graduated doctor of philosophy, he was really not up to the task of grappling with the depth and intricacies of Husserl’s phenomenology.

In fact, Husserl left a deeper mark on Gadamer than has been generally acknowledged, and, in this essay, I want to show that Husserl’s influence on Gadamer is much greater than is commonly realized. Moreover, Husserl’s influence or Gadamer grew, especially after Gadamer had read the Husserl’s Crisis of the European Sciences 17 at some time during the nineteen fifties. It is noteworthy, therefore, that in Truth and Method (1960), Gadamer has a long discussion of Husserl’s Crisis which had been published in the Husserliana series edited by Walter Biemel just six years earlier in 1954. In fact, only the first two of the projected five parts of the Crisis appeared in print in the newly founded Philosophia journal edited by the exile...


6 See Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey.”


Gadamer's Familiarity with Husserl

Of course, Gadamer was already familiar with Husserl from his Marburg studies in the early twenties. The Marburg professor of classics Paul Natorp was a friend of Edmund Husserl, on Gadamer's reading, an indication of the decline of the spirit of philosophy as a rigorous science. Gadamer correctly interprets the late Husserl's lament that the 'dream was over' as a regretting of the abandonment of the ideal of philosophy as a rigorous science. He also interprets Husserl correctly as never abandoning the doctrine of the transcendental ego even in his later work, when, according to Landgrebe and others Husserl was turning away from Cartesianism.

In Truth and Method Gadamer quite deliberately acknowledges the importance of Husserl's relation to hermeneutics and pays particular attention to the later Husserl's concepts of horizon, intersubjectivity and life-world (the latter concept Gadamer acknowledges has 'found an astounding resonance in the contemporary mind'). In the rest of this essay I hope to show that Gadamer came to appreciate that Edmund Husserl had a much fuller and more subtle appreciation of finitude, facticity and historicity, than the common view suggests.


But Gadamer's engagement with Husserl did not end in 1923. Indeed, I would suggest that his most fruitful Ausneinderrselzung with Husserl came in the nineteen fifties through to the nineteen seventies when Gadamer was able to read the newly edited texts of Husserl including the Crisis, Ideas II, which appeared in 1952,24 and the Intersubjectivity volumes (which appeared only in 1973).25 These texts alerted Gadamer to a very different Husserl, one engaged with history, community, personhood and the meaning of tradition.

On his own admission Gadamer was enamored of Heidegger (whom he first encountered as Husserl's assistant in Freiburg in 1923) and he was particularly by Heidegger's ability to disclose the history of the motivation behind philosophical questions,26 but he was also aware of certain conceptions in Husserl that were crucial to his project for developing hermeneutics. Primarily, he was interested in Husserl's conception of intentionality (surprisingly downplayed in Heidegger's Being and Time, 1927) as a way of overcoming the epistemological separation between subject and object that had bedeviled Neo-Kantianism. Gadamer writes:

When epistemological inquiry sought to answer the question of how the subject, filled with his own representations, knows the external world and can be certain of its reality, the phenomenological critique showed how pointless such a question is.27 Intentionality, for Gadamer, meant the correlation between 'the object of experience' and its 'modes of givenness.' (TM, 244) Phenomenology focused on these modes of givenness and thereby uncovered not just the objects presented in experience but also the horizons against which they are so presented. (see TM, 235) Gadamer continues to insist on the importance of intentionality which suggests a closer proximity to Husserl rather than to Heidegger who replaced the notion with the more opaque conception of the transcendence of Dasein.

Gadamer was also deeply taken with Husserl's analyses of time consciousness and writes in Truth and Method (summarizing the essential insight he found in phenomenology): "Every experience has implicit horizons of before and after, and finally fuses with the continuum of the experiences present in the before and after to form a unified flow of experience." (TM, 245)

Crucially, Gadamer was deeply influenced by Husserl's conception of "horizon" (Horizont) and, indeed, makes that concept more central to his hermeneutics than it might have been in Husserl (although the late Husserl moved more and more in the direction of articulating what he himself calls "horizon-intentionality"). Gadamer made the 'overlapping' of horizons central to mutual understanding, and develops a careful hermeneutic of how such overlapping should be understood.

In the Crisis in particular, as Gadamer recognizes, Husserl offers his most sustained effort to develop a phenomenological approach to the issues of temporality, historicity, finitude and cultural and generational development (the phenomenon Husserl calls 'generativity,' Generativität, Crisis, 188; Hua VI, 191, i.e., the manner in which meanings become sedimented in being passed from one generation to another). Moreover, in the latter parts of the Crisis, especially in the supplementary texts, one finds remarks about the nature of the philosophical tradition that could have been written by a Heidegger or a Gadamer but in fact emanated from Husserl's own private musings on the 'poeticization' (Dichtung) of philosophical history. Or the one hand, for Husserl—as for Heidegger—history (understood in terms of the chain of events and the unfolding of circumstances over time) is the sphere of the unique, the individual, the once-off temporally marked event. It is truly the domain of facticity, contingency and what Heidegger will call 'thrownness' (Geworfenheit). Indeed, in this context, Husserl regularly invokes the idea of the 'relativity of everything historical' (die Relativität alles Historischen, Crisis, 373; VI, 382). Husserl frequently remarks on the 'irrational fact' of history, something emphasized by Ludwig Landgrebe (Indeed, Landgrebe's article on Husserl's departure from Cartesianism was particularly influential on Gadamer also).28 On the other hand, as Husserl also recognizes, history also is the domain of the intersubjective, the social, the communal life lived according to norms and values. Human activities cohere together into tradition and the shaping of culture. Husserl is interested in discovering the underlying essential a priori structures that govern the constitution of historical, communal life. In this regard he refers to the 'essential structures of absolute historicity' (Crisis 259; VI, 262) and even invokes the idea of 'absolute historicity,' concepts Gadamer cites in his assessment of Husserl's later work.

Husserl and Heidegger on Historicity

Although, Husserl is often presented as having no interest in history, in fact, he has been engaging with the meaning of the human sciences from around 1911. His concern with making sense of both history as a science and the manner of human historical living goes back much earlier and at least can be dated to his reading o
Wilhelm Dilthey (the issue of historicism is discussed critically in Husserl’s ‘Philosophy as a Rigorous Science’ essay of 1910/1911). Already in writing Ideas I (especially in Ideas II) Husserl had been struggling to articulate the relations between nature and culture and this is already evident in the draft manuscript of Ideas II. It is most probable that the analysis of history in the Crisis and Origin of Geometry is simply a continuation of this meditation (relating primarily to Dilthey and Rickert) carried out in Husserl’s Nature and Spirit lectures given repeatedly between 1917 and 1927. The recent publication of these Nature and Spirit lectures, as well as Husserliana volume XXXIX on the life-world, show that in fact Husserl had a great deal to say about the problematic of history in general. Husserl acknowledges that Dilthey’s concept of the ‘interconnectedness of life’ (Lebenszusammen­hang) is a powerful conception, which, however, needs more adequate theoretical grounding and clarification. This too is Gadamer’s focus—he too begins from the Diltheyan intuition of the immediate, seamless flow and unity of life and acknowledges that he was reading Dilthey in 1923 at the very time that Heidegger too was reading him.

Gadamer notes that, already by 1918, Husserl (as expressed in a letter written to Natorp) sought to overcome the static approaches of his earlier phenomenology and had tried to make the issue of transcendental genesis the core of his phenomenology. For Heidegger, as for Gadamer, all efforts to solve the problem of history, the quite personal responsibility of mankind (Funktionare der Menschheit). In his ‘Foreword to the Continuation of the Crisis’ (Supplement 13 in Biemel, unfortunately not included in David Carr’s English translation) Husserl himself asserts that the historical mode of exposition of the Crisis is ‘not chosen by chance’ but rather is central to his task (Crisis, Hua VI, 441) since he wants to exhibit the whole history of philosophy as possessing a ‘unitary teleological structure’ (eine einheitliche teleologische Struktur, Crisis Hua VI, 442). Philosophy, Husserl acknowledges, cannot escape its history; philosophers are ‘heirs to the past’ in respect of the very goal set for philosophy (Crisis, § 7, 17; Hua VI, 16), indeed philosophers have a duty to carry through a historical self-reflection in order to articulate the needs of the time.

In our philosophizing then—how can we avoid it?—we are functionaries of mankind (Funktionare der Menschheit). The quite personal responsibility of our own true being as philosophers, our inner personal vocation, bears within itself at the same time, the responsibility for the true being of mankind; the latter is, necessarily, being toward a telos and can only come to realization, if at all, through philosophy—through us. if we are philosophers in all seriousness. (Crisis, § 7, 17, VI, 15)

Indeed, Husserl has a very subtle appreciation, as we shall see, of the peculiar manner in which philosophy approaches its own history. He speaks of a kind of ‘poeticizing’ of the history of philosophy. By that he means that philosophers identify their historical predecessors not by some factual documenting of the external history of philosophy, but through a kind of inner alignment, rather in the manner in which poets choose those whom they have decided have influenced them. Poetry and philosophy makes its own tradition as it were.

Historicity (Historizität, Geschichtlichkeit—he uses both terms) for Husserl, does not have quite the same technical sense it has in Heidegger’s work. For Husserl, it means primarily the way in which human groupings constitute and live out, across the interchanges and transmissions of the generations (Husserl’s ‘generativity’), a common history. Each group has a ‘unity of becoming’; every social grouping has its own ‘historicity.’ As Husserl writes in the Crisis:

Each kind of cultural formation has its historicity, has its character of having become and its relation to the future and, indeed, in reference to its historical, living, productive and utilizing humanity. (Crisis, VI 504, my translation)31

Moreover different historicities can be grouped into various stages of development; there are different ‘levels’ (Stufen) of historicity, for Husserl, although these should not be understood simply as temporal stages, rather they indicate different levels of sophistication in the overall organization and outlook of a society. He writes in a supplementary textual entry “Levels of Historicism: First Historicism,” again not translated in Carr:

Historicity (Geschichtlichkeit) in the most general sense has always already been in progress (in Gang) and in this progress, it is rightly a universal, which belongs to human existence. It is a unified becoming (ein einheitliches Werden) according to persons, in persons, and, as an environment, according to the plurality of forms of the environment, which can be seen as the unity of an organism. (Crisis, VI, 502, my translation)

Husserl also speaks in this text of ‘original generative historicity.’ (Crisis, Hua VI, 501) Elsewhere he speaks of ‘transcendental historicity,’ (Hua XXIX, 80) and speaks of the historicity of the natural world and of the cultural, intersubjective...

31 The German text of Crisis VI, 504 reads: "Jede Art von Kulturgegenstand hat ihre Geschichtlichkeit, hat ihren Charakter der Gewordenheit und ihre Beziehung auf Zukunft, und zwar in Bezug auf ihre geschichtlich lebende, erzeugende und benützende Menschheit."
domain. For Husserl, nature itself (as a cultural product) has a history in the very same way that the cultural world, which is more usually considered to be historical, does. Indeed Husserl prefers to speak of the 'culture-things-surrounding-world' (Die Kultur-Sachen-Umwelt, VI, 501), emphasizing that the human world encounters both cultural and natural objects in an interwoven unity.

That Husserl is interested in the existential meaning of human culture is evident at the beginning of the Crisis, § 2 where he speaks of human beings ‘in their spiritual existence’ and of the ‘shapes of the spiritual world.’ (Crisis, 7; VI, 4) In another text associated with the investigations that became the Crisis, albeit written prior to 1930, Husserl raises the question on the methodology of the natural sciences and asks whether there can be such a methodology also for the human sciences and for history: “Is there a method for encompassing the realm of the ‘spirit,’ of history, in all its essential possibilities, so that one can arrive at ‘exact’ truths through exact concepts for this realm?” (Crisis, Curr. 322n.; VI, 301n.)

In his writings on culture, Husserl explicitly employs the German term ‘Geist,’ which can broadly be translated as ‘culture.’ Spirit signifies the collective efforts and achievements of human conscious endeavor, and can be extended to mean all conscious life including that of animals. Thus, for instance, in the Vienna Lecture Husserl speaks of the ‘spirituality’ (Geistigkeit) of animals as well as humans, meaning thereby something like the cultural world and behavior of animals thought as a complex unified whole (see Crisis, 271; Hua VI, 316). Thus, in a 1934 fragment entitled ‘human life in historicity’ associated with the Crisis, Husserl had written:

The original animism. Man lives his spiritual life not in a spiritless world, in a world [understood as matter, but rather as a spirit among spirits, among human and super-human, and this world-totality (Weltal!) is, for him, the all of existing living, in the way of spirit, of the I-being, of the I-living among others as I subjects, life in the form of a universal I-community (Ich-Gemeinschaft). (Hua XXIX, 3, my translation)

According to Husserl, this personal attitude is supported by the sense of a common social world: “We could not be persons for others if there were not over against us a common surrounding world. The one is constituted together with the other.” (Ideas II, 387; IV, 377)

For Husserl, being a person is a relational concept. He singles out the way humans use personal pronouns: “saying ‘I’ and ‘We.’” To be an ‘I’ is always to be an ‘I’ over against a ‘you,’ a ‘he,’ a ‘she.’ In the background of Husserl’s

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Another of the key insights that Gadamer takes from Heidegger is that of the finitude of human understanding. As Gadamer proclaims: ‘To be historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete.’ (TM, 302) The voyage of self-understanding is always under way. Not only can understanding never grasp the whole, but human beings are essentially limited by being confined to particular times, places and points in history. In this regard Gadamer sees all understanding as taking place within certain horizons. But he strongly rejects historicism (the claim that historical consciousness cannot rise above its own relativity). Gadamer opposes the view that horizons are mutually exclusive or that world views are hermetically sealed and non-porous. In fact, Gadamer wants to emphasize that the very idea of a horizon includes not just the idea of circumscription but also the idea of openness. Horizons are not just limits but are essentially open to other horizons; they are moving boundaries. Horizons also can overlap and indeed are essentially overlapping and interpenetrating. Every meaningful subject or object belongs within many horizons at once. There is an ongoing never finished process of the interpenetration of horizons, which Gadamer calls ‘fusion of horizons’ (Horizontverschmelzung, TM, 306) and which he carefully emphasizes is not a single horizon but rather a coalescence of horizons (plural). There is a dynamic interaction between the horizon of the interpreter and that of the text from the past: “Historical consciousness is aware of its own otherness and hence foregrounds the horizon of the past from its own.” (TM, 306)

Every attempt to understand the other must begin from the recognition that we are separated by different horizons of understanding, and that mutual understanding comes through overlapping consensus, merging of horizons, rather than through the abandonment by one of the interlocutors of his or her initial horizon. This mutual fusion of horizons has to respect the difference and the distance between the temporal horizons. Consciousness of distance is essential to understanding.

Husserl and Gadamer on the Meaning of Horizon

To articulate his sense of common understanding across temporal and cultural distance, Gadamer invokes Husserl’s notion of ‘horizon’ (Horizont). In Truth and Method, Gadamer acknowledges the centrality of the concept of horizon for Husserl and also its vitality as a concept on which he himself will draw. He sees Husserl as using horizon to ‘capture the way all limited intentionality of meaning merges into the fundamental continuity of the whole.’ (TM, 245) In other words, Husserl overcomes a certain earlier atomism in his treatment of the intentionality of Erlebnisse by showing that all experiences belong within larger and never fully actualized wholes. Time-consciousness itself is perhaps a paradigm case of horizon-consciousness.

Gadamer goes on to explain horizon as ‘not a rigid boundary, but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further.’ (TM, 245) Later in Truth and Method he writes:

Every finite present has its limitations. We define the concept of “situation” by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular standpoint. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons and so forth. (TM, 302)

Horizons offer limits but also beckon to move closer to the limit and indeed the horizon then moves further back. In this sense, the horizon is something that constantly changes and this is an essential feature. Furthermore, horizons are also different from one another, and although they can “fuse,” they never become identified into a single horizon.

Gadamer recognizes that Husserl connects the notion of horizon with the notion of world (die Welt). In Truth and Method he quotes Husserl as saying that he had made a mistake in neglecting to thematize explicitly the concept of work when he was discussing the notion of the natural world in Ideas I (TM, 245n. 148). Everything belongs to a world which provides a horizon, i.e. the context for all meaningful encounters, for it. Gadamer goes on to link the notion of horizon with Husserl’s rich concept of the life-world (Lebenswelt). The life-world, for Gadamer is “the whole in which we live as historical creatures” (TM, 247), and is what is pre-given in all our experience but never becomes an object for us in the natural attitude. For Gadamer, this concept of the life-world is the exact opposite of objectivism and is an “essentially historical concept.” (TM, 247) It has to be contrasted with the infinite idea of a true world (the scientific conception of the world). Gadamer sees Husserl as recognizing the unity of the flow of life as prior to discrete experiences. Gadamer, however, criticizes Husserl (similar to the criticism of Lebensphilosophie in Heidegger’s Being and Time) for importing the speculative and unclarified concept of life and attempting to fit it into an essentially epistemological framework. Furthermore, according to Gadamer, Husserl had an idea of the prior philosophical tradition (including Simmel and others) which had previously made life into a theme. Gadamer here shows his dependence on the comparative analysis of Mises.

In general terms, the term ‘horizon’ is used by Husserl metaphorically by exploiting the common sense meaning of the limit of one’s visual sight. He extends the meaning to every context of experience that acts as a limit or boundary (the Greek horos means ‘boundary’). The first discussion of horizon in print is in Husserl’s Ideas I (1913) where, in the Introduction he speaks of traditional prejudices which set a horizon on our thoughts. (Ideas I, xix; Hua III/1, 3) In Section One he talk
about the world as the 'collective horizon of possible investigations.' Ideas I, Section 82 speaks of a three-fold horizon. In Ideas I, Section 27 Husserl writes:

But not even with the domain of this intuitionally clear or obscure, distinct or indistinct, co-present—which makes up a constant halo around the field of actual perception—is the world exhausted which is "on hand" for me in the manner peculiar to consciousness at every waking moment. On the contrary, in the fixed order of its being, it reaches into the unlimited. What is now perceived and what is more or less clearly co-present and determinate (or at least somewhat determinate), are penetrated and surrounded by an obsciously intended to horizon of indeterminate actuality. I can send rays of the illuminative regard of attention into this horizon with varying results. Determining presentations, obscure at first and then becoming alive, haul something out for me; a chain of such quasi-memories is linked together; the sphere of determinateness becomes wider and wider, perhaps so wide that connection is made with the field of actual perception as my central surroundings. (Ideas I, § 27, 52; Hua I/1, 49)

For Husserl material, spatial objects are not perceived in isolation but are apprehended through a 'profile' or 'adumbration' (Ausschattung) against a 'background' (Hintergrund) of other objects and in the midst of a 'surrounding world' (Umwelt) of other living bodies which are also other persons, animals, and so on (Ideas II § 51). Thus, Husserl says: 'Every perception has ... its background of perception.' (Ideas I, § 113, p. 267; Hua I/1, 231)

According to Husserl, not just every perception but every 'lived experience' (Erlebnis) of whatever kind bears with a set of unique essential possibilities that go to make up what he calls the 'horizon' of the experience. These horizons are not just empty possibilities, but rather are 'intentionally predelineated in respect of content' (CM, § 19, 44; Hua I, 82), that is, they are 'predelineated potentialities.' (CM, I, 82) There is a 'horizon of references' built in to the experience itself:

"everything that genuinely appears is an appearing thing only by virtue of being intertwined and permeated with an intentional empty horizon, that is, by virtue of being surrounded by a halo of emptiness with respect to appearance. It is an emptiness that is not a nothingness, but an emptiness to be filled out; it is a determinable indeterminacy." (APS, 42; Hua XI, 5-6)

To stay with the example of perception, perceived things are given within a 'perceptual field' whereby the entity is experienced with internal and external horizons. (Crisis, § 47) A perceived thing has a context of immediately present things, but also a context of possible things. A word or sentence has meaning against the background context of all the other meanings in the languages. A horizon is a system of references—something like a language. The character of a horizon is of a limit that can never be reached and which seems to recede as one approaches it. A horizon is therefore non-objectifiable and non-determinate. 26

Husserl distinguishes between inner and outer horizons in his Cartesian Meditations and elsewhere. A chair has an inner horizon—it can be sat on, knelt against, stood on, lifted and moved, stacked with other chairs, used to prop open door, hurled through a window, broken up for firewood, and so on. Interacting with a chair involves apprehending it according to one of more of these basic possibilities. The side of the object that appears in a series of adumbration always promises more, there are pointers to other sides, an inside. But the horizons do not stop there. There are not just the other sides of the object, but also the possibility that the perception itself could have been conducted in a different way (from different angle, distance, etc.). Thus, for example, I know if I approach the wooden chair more closely, certain features of the grain will stand out more clearly. This leads to a certain indeterminacy within the experience of the object and yet also certain determinateness and a certain set of further determinables. The object is 'pole of identity' (ein Identitätspol, CM, § 19) for a set of experiences, 'a constant substrate.' (Hua XI, 5) Inner horizons consist of the set of anticipations and prefigurations that I have already in mind as I approach the object. (Hua XI, 7) Husserl sees the process of perceiving an object as a dynamic procedure involving progressive fillings and emptyings. Certain prefigurations get filled intuitively while new expectations are opened up. Every perception invokes whole series or system of perceptions. There is no final perception that can exhaust the thing completely. Indeed, to be a physical thing is precisely to be essential inexhaustible, and this is even more true of the kind of entities discovered cultural life.

"Horizons can be temporal, spatial, linguistic, cultural, historical, and so on. The ultimate 'horizon of all horizons' is the world (Ideas I, § 27) which has the sense of being infinite and unbounded in every direction. Husserl speaks in his late writings of a 'world-horizon.' (Welthorizont, e.g., Crisis, § 36) He writes on the theme of givenness which Gadamer will substantially expand and develop:

The natural life, whether it is prescientifically or scientifically, theoretically or practically interested, is life within a universal unthematic horizon. This horizon is, in the natural attitude, precisely the world always pregiven as th which exists. Simply living on in this manner, one does not need the wo "pregiven"; there is no need to point out that the world is constantly actuali
for us. All natural questions, all theoretical and practical goals taken as themes—as existing, as perhaps existing, as probable, as questionable, as valuable, as project, as action and result of action—have to do with something or other within the world-horizon (Welthorizont). (Crisis, § 38, 145; Hua VI, 148)

For Husserl, the constitutional problem of how the same perceptual object is experienced as the same by multiple co-subjects is precisely the problematic of how a ‘world’ comes into being. (See, for instance, Ideas II, § 18, 84; Hua IV, 80). When we apprehend an object, its very objectivity is constituted by its being apprehensible by others. Husserl finds this initially very puzzling because in perceiving an object, normally the sense that others do or can perceive it also is not fore-grounded in our perceptual experience. Nevertheless, it precisely belongs to the perception of an object that the object is inserted in a world-horizon of such possible perceptions by others (or oneself at another time). This leads naturally to the recognition that perceptual experience is embedded not just in the temporally flow of an individual consciousness, but in the intersecting and coinciding intentionalities of others. Every lived experience has a past that fades into an indeterminate horizon of the past and similarly it has a horizon relating to the future.

Husserl speaks of humans living within the horizons of their historicity. (Crisis, § 2) He is clearly aware that human artefacts in particular have a temporal situatedness that may constrain how they are to be understood at a particular time. In Formal and Transcendental Logic, for instance, Husserl acknowledges that in his Logical Investigations (1900/1901) he still lacked the concept of ‘horizon intentionality’ needed to grasp life in history. Furthermore, horizons cannot be understood in the terms associated with thinghood. Horizons are not things and resist objectification or reification. It is this very non-objective, shared and elusive notion of horizon that Gadamer finds so attractive and so appropriate for his own needs in articulating the hermeneutic situation.

**Husserl and Gadamer on Intersubjectivity and the Life-world**

Gadamer notes the way that **Alfred Schutz and other students** of Husserl sought to de-transcendentalize Husserl’s conception of the life-world. Surprisingly, Gadamer wants to retain the transcendental register. Gadamer believes Husserl saw that the transcendental turn as initiated by Descartes missed two vital insights—concerning intersubjectivity and the constitution of what is not explicitly intended. He writes

But this ultimate ego [the transcendental ego] was basically something empty, with which one really did not know what to do. Husserl saw, in particular, that at least two unnoticed presuppositions were contained in this radical beginning. First of all, the transcendental ego contained the “ill of

us” of human community, and the transcendental view of phenomenology in no way poses the question explicitly as to how the being of the thou and the we, beyond the ego’s own world, is really constituted. (This is the problem of intersubjectivity). Second, he saw that the general suspension of the thesis regarding reality did not suffice, since suspension of the positing only touched the explicit object of the act of intentional meaning, but not what is co-intended and the anonymous implications given along with every such act of meaning...Thus Husserl arrived at the elaboration of his doctrine of the horizons that in the end are all integrated into the one universal world-horizon that embraces our entire intentional life.36

Gadamer is here pointing to matters with which his own hermeneutics will fruitfully engage. Basically, Gadamer acknowledges the importance of Husserl’s rediscovery of intentionality and also his identification of the problems of intersubjectivity and the regions of co-intended but not consciously intended meanings. This is the very ground of Gadamer’s own investigations. In an essay entitled “Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity: Subject and Person,” Gadamer writes:

There are, however, also good reasons to want to recognize the Husserlian program of transcendental phenomenology for its consistency and radicality. Yet one must be critical of the use that Husserl himself made of the approach to the problem of intersubjectivity for the phenomenology of the life-world.3

Gadamer is deeply interested in Husserl’s concept of intersubjectivity but criticizes Husserl’s conception of the experience of the other as it is laid out in the Cartesian Meditations and in the three Husserlian volumes on intersubjectivity; which Gadamer read during the nineteen seventies. He writes:

With Husserl we can understand how he arrives as a concept like “intersubjectivity” because he is determined to remain in the Cartesian sphere of subjectivity. That leads to Husserl’s tireless phenomenological investigation which now fill three thick volumes. It also leads to the utterly absurd conclusion that we first intend the “other” as an object of perception constituted by aspects, etc., and then in a higher-level act, confer on this “other” the character of a “subject” through transcendental empathy. We can admit the consistency with which Husserl holds fast to the primacy of his approach; however, we notice that the narrowness and one-sidedness of the ontology of presence cannot be avoided by such an approach.

Gadamer quotes approvingly of Husserl’s invocation of the notion of the nos cogitans to compensate for the methodological solipsism of the ego cogito. Gadamer is never convinced that Husserl has been able to truly grasp the manner in which the other presents himself or herself in our experience.

There is no doubting then, for Gadamer, that Husserl did acknowledge the importance of inter-subjectivity, co-subjectivity and life in community. Gadamer does acknowledge the continuity between Husserl’s discussions of intentional horizon and Heidegger’s account of being in the world. In *Crisis*, for instance, Husserl constantly stresses the ‘communalization’ (Vergemeinschaftung) of our experience, paralleling Heidegger’s discussion of ‘being-with-others’ (Mitseins) in *Being and Time*. He speaks of the essential human characteristic of ‘living-with-one-another’ (Mitmenschlichkeit). Husserl declares in a note written around 1921/1922: "Life-world is emphasized over and above the natural world (and especially the subjektivität, the priority of the personal, cultural world is for Gadamer, a ‘counter-concept’ to the idea of the ‘world’)."

Husserl goes further and writes about subjects not just having a shared sense of a common world, but also of grasping this world as constituted by an 'inter-subjective' community. In another essay, Gadamer writes: "For we live in what has been handed down to us, and this is not just a specific region of our experience of the world, specifically what we call the ‘cultural tradition’ which only consists of texts and monuments and which are able to pass on to us a linguistically constituted and historically documented sense. No it is the world itself which is communicatively experienced and continuously entrusted (traditur) to us as an infinitely open task."  

Gadamer is never convinced that Husserl has been able to truly grasp the manner and the manner in which personal worlds are shaped by tradition already gets significant treatment in the late Husserl and here Gadamer completely agrees with Husserl’s approach. Gadamer writes:

For we live in what has been handed down to us, and this is not just a specific region of our experience of the world, specifically what we call the “cultural tradition” which only consists of texts and monuments and which are able to pass on to us a linguistically constituted and historically documented sense. No it is the world itself which is communicatively experienced and continuously entrusted (traditur) to us as an infinitely open task.  

Gadamer is especially impressed by Husserl’s conception of the ‘life-world’ a concept that he returns to again and again, and which he constantly singles out for praise. He sees Husserl as introducing the word as an answer to a question. The life world is for Gadamer, a ‘counter-concept’ to the idea of the ‘world of science.’  

In another essay, Gadamer writes:

In Husserl’s later work the magic word Lebenswelt (life-world) appears—of those rare and wonderful artificial words (it does not appear before Husserl) that have found their way into the general linguistic consciousness thus attesting to the fact that they bring an unrecognized or forgotten truth to language. So the word "Lebenswelt" has reminded us of all the presuppositions that underline all scientific knowledge.  

Gadamer sees the introduction of this concept as a decisive correction of the Neo-Kantian and Positivist fascination with the scientific world as the true account of the natural world. It is also Husserl’s own effort at ‘self-criticism’.

‘Life-world’ is, for Husserl, a term with many significations, depending on the context. The term is used to encompass—or indeed sometimes replace—other terms he uses, including the ‘natural world’ (die natürliche Welt), ‘the intuitive/ given surrounding world’ (die anschauliche Umwelt, *Crisis*, § 33), the ‘straightforwardly intuited world’ (*Crisis*, § 33), the ‘taken-for-granted, pregiven world of experience, the world of natural life’ (*Crisis*, 204; VI, 208), the ‘environment  

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The life-world is always the intentional correlate or counterpart of human experiencing, acting and valuing, of life in the natural and personal attitudes. Husserl speaks, therefore, of the "interwining" (Verflechtung) or interpenetration between nature (as the object of the sciences and natural experience) and spirit (as culture) in the life-world (see *Phen. Psych.* § 16). In this sense, the life-world encompasses both the world of what has traditionally been designated as "nature" (as it presents itself to us *in our everyday dealings* with it, including rocks, mountains, sky, plants, animals, planets, stars, and so on) as well as what is usually known as the world of "culture," including ourselves, other persons, animals in their social behavior, institutions, art facts, symbolic systems such as languages, religions—in other words, our overall natural and cultural environing world. The life-world has to be understood as including the overlapping sets of objects which surround us in life as perceptual objects, instruments and tools, food, clothing, shelter, art objects, religious objects, and so on.

In his earliest discussion of the concept in *Crisis*, § 9, Husserl contrasts the prescientific (vorwissenschaftlich) life-world with the world of science. He goes on to characterize the life-world as "intuitive" (anschaulich), "real" (real), "concrete" (konkret), and "merely subjective relative (blos sub jektiv rel ativ), in contrast to the world of science which is "objective," "ideal" and "abstract." Indeed, the most prominent characteristic that Husserl attributes to the life-world—and indeed the earliest characterization of it that he offers (inspired by Richard Avenarius's notion of the 'pre-found', das Vorgefundene)—is that the life-world is always "pregiven" (vorgegeben), always "on hand" (vorhend). Husserl speaks repeatedly of the phenomenon of the "pregiveness" (Vorgegebenheit) of the world, prior to all theorizing. In this sense, the life-world is unsurmountable. It cannot be shaken off or transcended. No matter what experience we have, it is based on a sense that things are already there before us. The life-world is so intimately present that we cannot even exist without it. No matter what experience we have, it is the "world of experience" (Erfahrungswelt, Erlebniswelt), the world of culture (Kulturwelt, Hua IX, 113), "world-life" (Weltleben), the "human world," and so on. The life-world is, first and foremost, the "world of everyday experience," (Alltagswelt) the "intuited" world (die anschauliche Welt), the "pregiven" surrounding world. (Crisis, 47; VI, 47) It is, furthermore, the world as "a realm of subjective phenomena" (Crisis, § 29) that previously has not been explored by any science. As Husserl writes: "Consciously we always live in the life-world, normally there is no reason to make it explicitly thematic for ourselves universally as world." (Crisis, Appendix VII, 379; VI, 459)

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The world of experience is immediately given and intuited as something already there and taken-for-granted, obvious. As Husserl insists, "to live is always to live-in-certainty-of-the-world" (inneweltgewissheit leben, Crisis, § 37); natural living is "living in belief" (Glaubensleben). There is naive 'acceptance character" to living in the natural attitude in the world. It is so immediate that it is not even thematized. This concept of living in naive belief is of course very close to Gadamer's idea that all understanding takes place on the basis of unquestioned presupposition and prejudgment. Gadamer's conception of communities living within the horizon of traditions that provide the very pregiven context for all understanding is already richly documented in Husserl.

Interestingly, Gadamer thinks Husserl's late explorations of the life-world pointed him in the way of concrete historical explorations for which he was ill-equipped. Gadamer is here moving in the direction of Merleau-Ponty's criticisms of Husserl. Merleau-Ponty, commenting on Husserl's famous letter to Lucien Levy-Bruhl, thought that Husserl came to acknowledge the limitations of a purely a priori practice of eidetic variation and recognized the need for empirical explorations of the different factual life-worlds. Gadamer thinks similarly that Husserl in the end traded finitude for metaphysics and that there is a need to constantly place finitude at the center of the philosophical inquiry. For Gadamer, to recognize finitude is also to recognize the hold that language (as encapsulating this finitude) has on our thought. Husserlian phenomenology failed to address properly the phenomenon of language.

**Conclusion**

Much more work needs to be done on Gadamer's appropriation of Husserl to do justice to the influence that the founder of phenomenology continued to wield over the hermeneutic practitioner. It is clear that not only in *Truth and Method*, but also in his later essays, Gadamer owes a deep debt to Husserl's explorations of the nature of historical, communal life lived over generations—life lived in tradition. Indeed, one could say that Gadamer very early on appreciated this side of Husserl.
which had been relatively unnoticed until the publication of the Husserliana volumes that showed the breadth of Husserl's investigations on intersubjectivity, empathy, personal and interpersonal life.19 In this regard, Gadamer stands with Merleau-Ponty as an extraordinary creative reader and interpreter of Husserl's oeuvre.

4. DERIVING GADAMER'S ACCOUNT OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY FROM HIS ACCOUNT OF DIALOGUE

David Vessey

Throughout the twentieth century few philosophical topics have been so central as intersubjectivity. Understanding how we are aware of, and relate to, others not only has obvious implications for ethics and political theory, but also for epistemology—as we seek to know whether individuals have privileged access to their mental states, how objectivity is established, and the role that confirmation across subjects plays in legitimating judgment—and metaphysics—as we try to understand the nature of the subject and the subject’s relation to the world. Virtually every major twentieth century philosopher has contributed to the topic, certainly every major phenomenologist, and some, such as Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas, have made it the central feature of their philosophical reflections. Hans-Georg Gadamer on the other hand has no explicit, articulated theory of intersubjectivity. This should be surprising. Gadamer certainly associates himself with the phenomenological tradition and the issues that arise within it; he has scattered comments criticizing I-Thou accounts of intersubjectivity and Heidegger’s theory of Mit-sein; and he is well known for placing dialogue, an essentially intersubjective process, at the center of his philosophical hermeneutics. Still, he has no explicit theory and, in the one essay where he discusses intersubjective issues “Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity; Subject and Person”2 he suggests an account of intersubjectivity make no sense once we, following Heidegger, abandon an account of subjectivity. So perhaps the lack of a theory of intersubjectivity is less of an omission than itself a statement about intersubjectivity. Nonetheless, if we are going to bring Gadamer into dialogue with other thinkers in twentieth century philosophy, and especially with the phenomenological tradition, it make sense to ask whether his philosophical hermeneutics presupposes or entails an account of intersubjectivity. For certainly his extensive comments on dialogue and understanding would have implications for a theory of intersubjectivity, were he to articulate one. That is the project of this paper: to spell out to what extent Gadamer’s theory of dialogue can be used to explicate an account of intersubjectivity. We will look both at what is unique about Gadamer’s account of dialogue, and at the few comments he does make about theories of intersubjectivity to help articulate what we will call a Gadamerian theory of intersubjectivity. As it turns out, the key claim that implies an account of intersubjectivity is his claim that language is only perfected in dialogue. First, though, we must get clear about what an account of intersubjectivity includes, and what we should look for when investigating Gadamer’s hermeneutics. As a wide variety of philosophical issues have been collected under the name “intersubjectivity,” it is worth our time to take a minute to distinguish them.

2 See my “Gadamer’s Account of Friendship as an Alternative to an Account of Intersubjectivity” in Philosophy Today 49, no. 5 (2005): 61-67, for how Gadamer uses Aristotle’s theory of friendship as a substitute for an account of intersubjectivity.

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19 This side of Husserl is now the focus of considerable attention from scholars, see inter alia, Dino Welton, The Other Husserl (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2001); Anthony Steinbock, Home and Beyond: Generative Phenomenology after Husserl (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1995); Dan Zahavi, Husserl and Transcendental Intersubjectivity, trans. Elizabeth A. Behnke (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2001) and Dan Zahavi and Natalie Depraz, ed., Alterity and Facticity: New Perspectives on Husserl (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998).