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Ramberg's hermeneutical reading of Davidson and Rorty and its implications for understanding Gadamer's hermeneutics

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Abstract

In several of his works Bjørn Torgrim Ramberg draws on Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in interpreting Donald Davidson's and Richard Rorty's philosophies. Turning the focus back on Gadamer, I elaborate and discuss how Ramberg's hermeneutical readings of Davidson and Rorty have implications for how we understand Gadamer's hermeneutics and appreciate its relevance. I first consider Ramberg's comparison of Gadamer's concept 'the fore-conception of completeness' in *Truth and Method* (TM) and central concepts in Davidson's philosophical semantics. This comparison puts emphasis on considerations of truth in Gadamer's hermeneutics and suggests the need to see Gadamer's concept in connection with his account of hermeneutic 'openness' in TM. I then turn to Ramberg's use of Gadamer's concept of play in interpreting Davidson and Rorty, and I consider how Ramberg's explorative definition of 'discursive play' sheds light on Gadamer's account of hermeneutic openness and thus confirms the hermeneutical centrality of the concept of play. Finally, I engage some ethical aspects and concepts in Gadamer's work. By taking Ramberg's hermeneutical reading of Rorty's concept of solidarity as my point of departure, I use Rorty's concept as a lens in elaborating on what a tradition is in Gadamer's hermeneutics. Following the interpretations

of Georgia Warnke and Theodore George, I further compare and contrast Rorty's concept with the concept of solidarity which Gadamer introduces and uses in his later works. Noting its basis in Aristotle's practical philosophy, I suggest how Gadamer's concept of solidarity can be used to elaborate on his hermeneutics as presented in TM.

Introduction

Through several of his works Bjørn Torgrim Ramberg (2003, 2011, 2015) draws on perspectives and resources in Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in interpreting the philosophical oeuvres of Donald Davidson and Richard Rorty. While Ramberg's hermeneutical approach to Davidson may be seen as a development of his earlier interpretation of Davidson (1989), it draws significantly on Rorty's interpretation of Davidson in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979). In the latter work, Rorty famously draws inspiration from Gadamer's hermeneutics in qualifying his own philosophical project as 'post-epistemological'. Since this project enlists Davidson's famous attack on 'the third dogma of empiricism', it serves as an important steppingstone for Ramberg's more ambitious hermeneutic reading of Davidson, as well as for his hermeneutic qualification of later phases of Rorty's philosophy. Supported also by a systematically oriented interpreter like John McDowell (1996), Ramberg (2003) carefully compares central concepts in Gadamer's hermeneutics and Davidson's semantics, while he later (2011; 2015) goes on to explore Davidson's and Rorty's philosophies in hermeneutical terms while discussing their philosophical perspectives on human linguistic agency. As I elaborate and discuss in this paper, Ramberg's comparisons and explorations have implications for how we understand Gadamer's hermeneutics and assess its relevance. Let me start, however, by briefly focusing on three facets of Ramberg's explorations.

   First, Ramberg stresses the centrality of human communication in Davidson's semantics in ways that resonate with Gadamer's conception of interpretation as dialogue (*Gespräch*). Through the idea of *triangulation* Davidson accounts for intelligibility and meaning as something which is becoming made and shared by communicative agents as "a creative social act in particular circumstances and surroundings" (2015, 224). Davidson, as well as Gadamer, reconstructs normative requirements in communication and interpretation, and Ramberg (2003; 2015) explores systematic affinities between Davidson's 'radical interpretation' and 'principle

of charity', on the one hand, and Gadamer's hermeneutical principle of 'the fore-conception of completeness', on the other. For both philosophers, Ramberg points out, considerations of *truth* have a certain priority over considerations of *meaning*, and both take "understanding, as the unique achievement of language-users, to be possible only in so far as there are agents interacting in a common world" (2003, 219). My second point of focus concerns Ramberg's efforts to qualify Davidson's semantics in historicists terms. More specifically, Ramberg (2015) elaborates Davidson's principle of charity in terms of a "semantic historicism" which is informed by Rorty's interpretation of Davidson, as well as by Rorty's concept of solidarity. This 'semantic historicism' would be congenial to Gadamer's hermeneutics, Ramberg suggests, in seeing language users as bound together through their historical situatedness and finiteness and through their charitable, open and future-directed acts of interpretation and self-interpretation. Thirdly, through elaborating on Gadamer's notion of play, Ramberg (2011) seeks to complement what he takes to be a one-sided intellectualist conceptualization of linguistic agency in Davidson's philosophy due to his construction of the mental as "coextensive with rationality-constituted webs of propositional attitudes" (2011, 57). Hence, through his systematically oriented comparisons, Ramberg's hermeneutical approach aspires to forge a more balanced synthesis of perspectives on human linguistic agency.

I now turn the focus back on Gadamer and consider the implications of Ramberg's comparisons and explorations for understanding Gadamer's work and appreciating its relevance. I start below by considering the comparison of Gadamer's principle of 'the fore-conception of completeness', presented in the second part of *Truth and Method* (tm), and Davidson's 'radical interpretation' and 'principle of charity'. This comparison brings to light how Gadamer's 'fore-conception' concerns expectations of truth in the interpretation of historical texts, and how these expectations guide the interpretation of meaning. While Ramberg's comparison may shed light on ways in which considerations of truth play a role across the three parts of tm, I point out the need for a contextualized reading (already suggested by Ramberg) of 'the fore-conception of completeness' in the second part. Gadamer's 'fore-conception' could be seen to be elaborated and integrated in his account of the hermeneutic stance of 'openness' toward the end of the second part. While the latter account is based on an analogy between understanding the historical works of tradition in the humanities and understanding others through interpersonal communication, it is mo-

tivated partly as a critique of the adoption of natural science methods in
the humanities and has as such lingering relevance in the philosophy of
the human sciences. Moreover, since this hermeneutic stance necessitates
intellectual displacement and critique of prejudices, Gadamer's account
has been relevant for feminist philosophy of science (Alcoff, 1996; 2003;
Freudenberger, 2003).

I next turn to Ramberg's (2011; 2015) explorations of Gadamer's notion
of *play* in proposing hermeneutical interpretations of Davidson and Rorty.
While Ramberg considers how Gadamer develops his notion of play in
the first part of TM, which is devoted to an ontological investigation of art
and our experience of art, he finds support in the scholarly literature for
extending and exploring its applicability beyond our experience of art. As
part of this exploration, he suggests a qualification and definition of what
he chooses to call "discursive play" (2015, 227) and through which he
considers normatively constraining, as well as enabling aspects of human
linguistic agency. While observing that Ramberg's explorative definition
may find support in Gadamer's own remark on '*language games* [*sprach-
liche Spiele*]' in the third part of TM, I consider how this definition could
be applied in a further interpretation of Gadamer's account of the her-
meneutic stance of 'openness' in part two of TM. As I endeavor to show,
this application not only provides specifications and elaborations of Ram-
berg's explorative definition, but it may also suggest an interpretation of
Gadamer's account of openness that would confirm the hermeneutic cen-
trality of his notion of play and that can be supported by recent scholarly
literature (Vilhauer, 2010; George, 2020).

In the concluding section I engage some ethical aspects and concepts
in Gadamer's work by taking Ramberg's hermeneutically oriented use of
Rorty's concept of solidarity as a point of departure. I start by exploring
Gadamer's concept of tradition in TM through the lens of Rorty's concept
of solidarity and by discussing whether a tradition in Gadamer's sense
would be open to include cultural others. To complement and elaborate
this discussion, I turn to Gadamer's work after TM and, more specifically,
to Gadamer's own concept of solidarity. Through the interpretation of
Georgia Warnke (2012) I consider significant ways in which Gadamer's
concept of solidarity differs from that of Rorty. As Warnke shows, unlike
Rorty's concept, Gadamer's concept does not turn on a common identity
or on identification with others but does rather put emphasis on recog-
nizing the otherness of others. Finally, given the continuity in Gadamer's
work by his enduring engagement with Aristotle's practical philosophy, I

employ Theodore George's interpretation (2020) in suggesting how Gadamer's concept of solidarity could complement limitations ascribed to his earlier account of openness and how it bears on his account of the task of the humanities in TM.

The fore-conception of completeness and hermeneutic openness

While carefully noting differences in philosophical vocabularies and orientations, Ramberg's (2003) comparison of Gadamer's hermeneutic principle of 'the fore-conception of completeness' and Davidson's 'radical interpretation' has several merits for understanding Gadamer's hermeneutics. As Ramberg's comparison brings out, considerations of *truth* have a certain priority over considerations of *meaning* in Gadamer's hermeneutical principle. More specifically, Gadamer's 'fore-conception' concerns general expectations of truth in interpreting historical texts and ways in which these expectations guide the interpretation of meaning. Hence, for the interpreter of historical texts, "his understanding is [...] guided by the constant transcendent expectations of meaning that proceed from the relation to the truth of what is being said" (Gadamer, 2004, 294). The centrality of "the pre-conception of completeness", and hence, the concern for truth, in Gadamer's hermeneutics, is underscored by the fact that he presents the former as "a formal condition of all understanding" (2004, 294), and as an "implication" of the *hermeneutic circle* as an ontological structure in human understanding (2004, 294). Its hermeneutic centrality applies thus not only to part two of TM, which is devoted to the understanding of tradition and its historical works in the humanities. It also reflects on part one, where Gadamer inquires into the *truth* of art. It further resonates with his ontological considerations in part three of how language *discloses the world* for its users. Hence, Ramberg's comparison may help to distinguish Gadamer's hermeneutics more generally from hermeneutical philosophies or theories where considerations of *meaning(fulness)* or *subjectivity* are more dominating than considerations of *truth*.[1]

However, when read and considered in isolation from a wider textual context in part two of TM, 'the fore-conception of completeness' may inadvertently be rendered too abstract and disconnected from other topics that are developed in part two and that concern a complex set of related conditions for understanding the historical works of tradition. To achieve a

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[1] As for one influential hermeneutical approach which emphasizes considerations of meaning and subjectivity, see Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009).

more contextualized reading already hinted at by Ramberg (2003) (as I return to below), we could therefore start by noting that 'the fore-conception of completeness' is described as a "prejudice" (Gadamer, 2004, 294) and as a prejudice extracted from a "commonality of fundamental, enabling prejudices" which interpreters belonging to a tradition would share (2004, 295). Yet when situated in a process of text interpretation, the interpreter cannot readily distinguish 'the fore-conception of completeness' from other 'enabling prejudices', let alone distinguish the shared fund of enabling prejudices from less helpful prejudices. Hence, Gadamer says,

> [t]he prejudices and fore-meanings that occupy the interpreter's consciousness are not at his free disposal. He cannot separate in advance the productive prejudices that enable understanding from the prejudices that hinder it and lead to misunderstandings. Rather, this separation must take place in the process of understanding itself, and hence hermeneutics must ask how that happens   2004, 295, original emph.

A clue to the hermeneutic analysis of how prejudices may become either questionable or recognized as productive, or how they may rather remain unrecognized, is given through Gadamer's critique of Friedrich Schleiermacher's romanticist hermeneutics in part two of TM.[2] In fact, Schleiermacher's hermeneutical principle of transposing oneself into the mental life of the author, allegedly to enable understanding "an author better than he understood himself" (2004, 295), is presented as an adversary of the 'fore-conception of completeness'. More generally, Gadamer thinks that not only Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, but the historical-critical methodology of 19th century historicism can be qualified by a certain naivety in failing to require interpreters to recognize their prejudices, and in presupposing that historical understanding can be secured by objective methods alone (or, as in Schleiermacher's case, by 'divination'). Hermeneutics therefore needs to analyze how this naivety can be exposed and how understanding can in fact be achieved in the humanities through recognizing and putting prejudices at risk.

An outline, at least, of the wanted analysis can be found as part of the more comprehensive inquiry entitled "Analysis of historically effected consciousness" in subsection 4.3 of part two, and in this outline Gadamer considers 'the hermeneutic experience' of the humanities researcher. More

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[2] See sub-section 3.1.(A) (ii) in the second part of TM (2004, 183–95).

specifically, in this outlined analysis he classifies the 19th century historicist approach as one of two inferior modes of understanding in the humanities, and as only more appropriate than a *scientistic*[3] approach which adopts the methods of the sciences that aim for knowledge of laws and regularities in the natural world. Here, and as part of an analysis of 'historically effected consciousness', the historicist mode is criticized by Gadamer for not recognizing its *own* historicity and how the historical effects of the works of tradition condition the researcher's understanding through her prejudices.[4] This failing recognition blocks the opportunity for being addressed by the historical works and for having one's historically effected prejudices evoked. On the other hand, the scientistic mode is criticized for failing to realize, both epistemically and morally, that humans, texts and other artifacts, cannot be adequately understood by adopting natural science methods. Both modes, however, are criticized for presupposing that understanding can be achieved only through following the appropriate methods. And both these modes of understanding are contrasted with a superior mode which Gadamer qualifies as "openness" (2004, 355). *Openness* consists in the hermeneutic stance of allowing "tradition's claim to validity" and of "letting itself experience tradition and by keeping itself open to the truth claim encountered in it" (2004, 355). To become open to the *truth claims* in historical works, however, requires that 'the prejudice' or 'fore-conception of completeness' has been recognized along with other enabling and historically effected prejudices, and that this recognition has enabled the researcher to interpret the historical work as coherent in meaning through expecting its truth. For our task of understanding the second part of TM this would confirm the appropriateness of the proposed contextual reading of Gadamer's 'fore-conception'. Yet we should further note that Gadamer makes use of a certain *analogy*. To make the 'hermeneutic experience' of the humanities researcher more intelligible he makes an analogy between understanding the historical works of tradition in the humanities and our everyday experience of understanding another person ("the Thou" [2004, 352]) through interpersonal communication. Through this analogy, the hermeneutic stance of being open to the truth of tradition in the humanities is compared to "the I's experience of the Thou" and

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[3] We note, however that in this context Gadamer does not use the German equivalent for the term "scientism" or "scientistic". Gadamer's concern is with the adoption of natural science methods within the humanities, as well as within the social sciences (see 2004, 352–53).

[4] See 2004, 354.

to the requirement "to experience the Thou truly as a Thou—i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us" (2004, 355). In this analogical sense, then, the understanding of the tradition in the humanities is 'dialogical'. One important point of the analogy is to compare the humanity researcher's *belonging* to the tradition with belonging to another person through one's relationship with her ("the Thou [...] is in relationship with us" [2004, 352]). In ways similar to how we understand ourselves as part of a personal relationship, the historically effected relationship of the humanities researcher to her tradition is crucial for her self-understanding and her openness to the truth of tradition.

The contextual reading outlined above of the 'fore-conception of completeness' is suggested already in Ramberg's interpretation (2003). Notably, he distinguishes Gadamer's approach to truth from that of Davidson by observing that the former concerns "the *experience* of truth" (2003, 226, my emph.) and by expounding the latter (yet without direct quote or reference): "the experience of truth here addressed is *communicative*; what is to be illuminated is the understanding of truth as *expressed* in a work or an utterance. The experience [Gadamer] seeks to capture is available in so far as we are *dialogically engaged*" (2003, 226, original emph.). Ramberg further notes that Gadamer's "phenomenological account of the communicative experience of truth [...] is directed against scientism" (2003, 226). Nevertheless, Ramberg's interpretation unfortunately misses the point of the *analogy* as such and of Gadamer's use of it in his critique of scientism. In his interpretation Ramberg assumes that Gadamer in TM criticizes scientism as a *global* doctrine or view.[5] Given this interpretation, he thinks that "what Gadamer has to say about scientism remains less than persuasive to many readers raised in the Anglo-American tradition" (2004, 233n14). Yet, as noted above, Gadamer's critique concerns more specifically research on humans, texts and other artifacts within the humanities. It is thus not a general criticism of applying methods designed to study laws and regularities in empirical domains in other sciences or fields of research, not even in parts of the social sciences.[6]

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[5] Ramberg assumes that *scientism* in this context concerns the general view which takes "science as the final arbiter" (2003, 233–34n14).

[6] In the second part of TM Gadamer only briefly refers to "the social sciences" (2004, 352). Yet in the foreword to the second edition of TM he stresses that despite his concern concern with adopting natural science methods in the humanities this "*does not in the slightest prevent the methods of modern natural science from being applicable to the social world. Possibly the growing rationalization of society and the scientific techniques of administering it are more characteristic of our age than the vast progress of modern science. The methodical spirit*

Gadamer's critique of the tendency to adopt natural science methods within the humanities explicitly mentions the historical sources of this tendency back in "the eighteenth century" (2004, 353). The point of his critique, however, is to show how this tendency endures through the 19th and 20th century. In so far as the enduring and pervasive spread of these methods tends to suppress or exclude human self-interpreters (to use Charles Taylor's phrase) as sources of knowledge in the humanities, and also exclude historical texts and other artifacts as sources of self-understanding for the humanities researcher themselves and their fellow members of society, his criticism can be seen to have lingering relevance within the philosophy of the humanities. Moreover, given his *ethical* concern as to adopting natural science methods, his critique would bear on research ethics. Yet, it is not clear on Gadamer's account how the domain of research ethics itself should be understood and delineated. By focusing on parallels between research in the humanities and our ordinary communicative experience of and engagement with others, the analogical account of openness appeals to moral intuitions we may have both outside and inside the humanities. Moreover, if certain ways of conducting humanities research are both epistemically and morally wrong, such as *objectifying* other persons through adopting natural science methods,[7] it becomes hard to tell exactly where ethical concerns end and those that are epistemic start. Or perhaps we could rather say that Gadamer's hermeneutics deliberatively blurs the distinction between *ethically* good research and good research simpliciter.

The hermeneutic stance of openness involves recognizing and questioning prejudices that may obstruct or distort understanding. This hermeneutic point has been appreciated by feminist philosophers of science, such as Linda Martín Alcoff (1996; 2003). In comparing Gadamer's herme-

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of science permeates everywhere. *Therefore I did not remotely intend to deny the necessity of methodical work within the human sciences (Geisteswissenschaften)*" (2004, xxvi, my emph.).

7 Note how Gadamer qualifies this way of conducting humanities research by starting to characterize it as *epistemically* naïve or as having a "naive faith in method and in the objectivity that can be attained through it." (2004, 352). This approach is further characterized as a way of making a certain part of the tradition to which one belongs into an object: "Someone who understands tradition in this way *makes it an object* ..." (2004, 352, my emph.). Gadamer discusses this act of making the tradition an object, however, trough the analogy with interpersonal communication and the *immoral* act of not recognizing the other as a person but rather using her as a means to one's own end (which "contradicts the moral definition of man" [2004, 352]) and not recognizing that one belongs to the other person through one's personal relationship with her ("the Thou is not an object but is in relationship with us" [2004, 352]).

neutic openness and Davidson's principle of charity Alcoff stresses the advantage of the former in requiring and enabling critique of our prejudices since "[Gadamer's] injunction to be open to the alterity of the Other can more effectively work to render our beliefs open to revision" (2003, 238). She even finds that Gadamer's approach "construes openness in a strikingly 'feminine' way, as a willing passivity and receptivity that will then allow the truth of alterity to appear" (2003, 239). Alcoff also suggests that the very category of understanding in Gadamer's hermeneutics invites appreciation of "[w]omen's traditional knowledge [. . .]: practical knowing or knowing how, non-propositional knowledge . . . " (2003, 243). Moreover, the feminist philosopher Silja Freudenberger (2003) explores similar and other points of convergence between Gadamer's hermeneutics and feminist epistemology. She thus takes hermeneutical and feminist orientations to converge "[i]n the demand for a nonpatronizing and true recognition of others and their views", as well as in the consideration that "[t]he potential for differing voices is a function of the different starting points of the interpreters" (2003, 231–32). In summing up her exploration, she qualifies Gadamer's relevance by using the central term from Donna Haraway's classical article (1988): " 'Situated knowledges' are necessarily not in unison" (2003, 232).

Discursive play (or *sprachliche Spiele*)

In several works Ramberg (2011; 2015) engages Gadamer's notion of *play* (*Spiel*) in his hermeneutical interpretations of Davidson's and Rorty's philosophies. In TM Gadamer presents and uses this notion mainly, but not exclusively, in part one, which is devoted to our experience of art. Yet, Ramberg takes Gadamer's notion to be applicable and hermeneutically relevant beyond the task of understanding art, and he finds support for this view in the interpretations of Kristin Gjesdal (2009) and David Vessey (2012). More specifically, while attentive to how Gadamer uses the notion of play in analyzing the experience of art, Ramberg endeavors to extend its use to qualify and characterize what he prefers to call "*discursive* play" or "playing together in conversation" (2015, 227, my emph.). In fact, recent Gadamer scholarship would provide exegetic support for this approach. As observed by Theodore George (2020, 100–101), Gadamer reintroduces the notion of play in part tree of TM where he undertakes an ontological investigation of language as the universal medium of understanding. In the concluding section in part tree, Gadamer uses the

notion in making a remark about "*Language Games*" (2004, 484) or "*sprach-liche Spiele*" (1990, 493 [GW1:463/464]) which suggests the centrality of the notion of play in his hermeneutics and for his very idea of what it is to achieve a joint understanding of something:

> The weight of the things we encounter in understanding plays itself out in a linguistic event, a play of words playing around and about what is meant. *Language games* exist where we, as learners—and when do we cease to be that?—rise to the understanding of the world.   2004, 483–84, original emph.

Returning to Ramberg's explorative efforts to qualify and define *discursive play*—which we may now interestingly compare to Gadamer's s*prachliche Spiele*—we note that he elaborates two general characterizations. On the one hand, in being engaged in discursive play one is subjected to normative constraints that are inherent in the play itself. Discursive play would thus involve "a kind of submission, a surrender of control of the individual subject to the norms inherent in a joint venture" (2015, 227). Here Ramberg refers to Gadamer's general remark in part one of TM that "all playing is a being-played" (2004, 106). On the other hand, discursive play would sustain and enable the development of individual agency and understanding through "a realization of the subject's freedom to be moved by reason, to be changed, to become more by understanding more" (2015, 227). In so far, Ramberg's characterization would accord with Gadamer's own brief description of *sprachliche Spiele* and of how "we, *as learners* [...] rise to the understanding of the world" (2004, 484, my emph.). Hence, Ramberg's explorative definition of *discursive play* as both normatively constraining, on the one hand, and as enabling and enhancing for individual participants, on the other, proves to be supported by Gadamer's own use of the notion of play in part one and three of TM.

Guided by the assumption that the notion of play is central to Gadamer's hermeneutics, I now venture to ask: could we use Ramberg's explorative definition of discursive play to suggest ways of interpreting parts or passages in TM where Gadamer does *not* explicitly use the notion of play? The prospect of a positive answer might seem promising in so far as recent scholarship (Vilhauer, 2010; George, 2020) has taken the applicability of the notion of play to extend to the main theme addressed in part two of TM, i.e., the understanding of tradition and its historical texts. Before I am prepared to offer an answer, however, I will in some detail

consider Ramberg's (2011) slightly earlier engagement with Gadamer's notion of play.

Although Ramberg does not here yet define discursive play, this earlier approach could still be seen to capture the two general (constraining/enabling) elements in Ramberg's later explorative definition. Yet, as we shall see, these elements are now formulated not as features of play itself but rather cast in terms of *abilities* that the *normative constraints* of play would require (or necessitate) and *abilities* or *capacities* that would be *enabled* and *developed* through participating in play. It is important to observe that this engagement with Gadamer's notion of play occurs in a context where Ramberg finds that the notion suggests more balanced or less rationalist perspectives on linguistic agency than those that can be derived from Davison's philosophy of language. The latter, he points out, treats "mind as coextensive with rationality-constituted webs of propositional attitudes" while "it buys irreducibility of the mental at the price of disconnecting mindedness from essentially embodied aspects of subjectivity" (2011, 57). To counteract and ameliorate this rationalist tendency, Ramberg mobilizes Gadamer's notion of play since it allows us to consider a certain basic sensitivity or responsiveness to norms and claims that are not propositional in form, as suggested also by "the experience of the work of art" (2011, 52). Extending the application of Gadamer's notion to cover linguistic activity, he argues that it is due to our linguistic nature and capacities that we can respond to claims not propositional in form, as well as to norms and claims that are propositionally structured. Hence, "it is [. . .] as linguistic beings we are capable also of accessing and being oriented by sources of normativity that are not propositionally presented" (2011, 52).

Moreover, Ramberg further suggests that this responsiveness in turn conditions and enables our reflective linguistic capacities to respond to claims that *are* propositionally structured.[8] He may thus be seen to sketch a simple map or topology of two interdependent levels of our linguistic agency: first, a kind of basic responsiveness to claims and norms in the (social) world that in turn forms a conditioning and enabling basis for our capacity to respond to claims with propositional form—and thus to partic-

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[8] Note Ramberg's comment that "[i]t would also be wrong to think of this aspect of our subjectivity as in any sense cut off from reflective deliberation and propositional judgement. It is rather that as we bring to articulation and to reflective judgement possible standpoints with regard to some matter, we always find ourselves already having taken a basic stand" (2011, 52).

ipate in 'the game of giving and asking for reasons', to use Wilfrid Sellars' celebrated idiom. Notably, this simple two-level map or topology of our linguistic abilities reflects his two later defined (constraining/enabling) elements of discursive play in so far as the basic responsiveness would be required or necessitated by normative constraints of the discursive play, while the reflective linguistic capacities would be enabled or developed on the basis of this basic responsiveness.

Yet this map has little to say about *how* reflective capacities are enabled or developed within the discursive play itself. In addition, the two-level map fails to reflect the richer dimensions of enabled agency that are envisaged by Ramberg's definition: "a realization of the subject's freedom to be moved by reason, to be changed, to become more by understanding more" (2015, 227). On the other hand, as Ramberg rightly points out, Gadamer's use of the notion of play could suggest a certain evolutionary account of the basic responsiveness in the topology. The basic responsiveness and human play generally could thus be distinguished on the basis of more generic capacities for play among a range of animal species. Play, Ramberg suggests with Gadamer, could be seen to provide evidence for the "inter-species nature" of these capacities and for modes of "animal subjectivity" (2011, 55). Nevertheless, like the two-level map, this evolutionary account fails to tell us how abilities are enabled and required *within* discursive play itself as characterized by Ramberg's explorative definition.

Ramberg does, however, provide us with an interesting clue as to how we could elaborate his two-level map, as well as his later definition, and apply it to part two of TM even if this part contains no explicit mention of play. After having introduced Gadamer's use of the notion of play in part one of TM (and against the background of discussing Gadamer's concept of tradition in part two) Ramberg starts by qualifying the *responsiveness* required or necessitated by play. Notably, this qualification mentions the assumed enabling basis of responsiveness within play: "[t]he subjective ability at stake in play is 'responsiveness', and responsiveness must be based on 'recognition'" (2011, 51–52). Despite the fact that the term "recognition" is not used in a direct quote (and with no reference given for its use) Ramberg's use of this term may draw our attention to one particular sub-section in part two of TM which is directly inspired by the *locus classicus* for using of this term in the philosophical literature important to Gadamer: Hegel's account of 'the struggle for recognition' in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. The sub-section in mind is, again, the sub-section (4.3.B) we have

discussed above and in which Gadamer uses the analogy between inter-personal communication ("the experience of the Thou" [2004, 352]) and the understanding of tradition in the humanities. As Gadamer makes clear, the three forms of interpersonal communication that correspond to the three modes of understanding in the humanities can be further qual-ified as three distinct forms of *recognition*.[9] Gadamer's Hegel-inspired qualification and analysis of these three forms may thus allow us to qual-ify the basic *responsiveness* required by discursive play as a responsiveness needed and enabled through responding to and raising claims of *recog-nition* in interpersonal communication. More generally, the normative constraints imposed on individual agents by discursive play could now be specified in terms of the "constant struggle for mutual recognition" that would qualify "all the relations in the lives of men" (2004, 353). The different forms of recognition analyzed by Gadamer provide means for distinguishing the various capacities for responsiveness that are enabled and required by discursive play. The third form of recognition, which is qualified as "openness" (2004, 355), and which consists in being open to the truth claim of the other person, would correspond to reflective lin-guistic capacities to respond to and assess claims with a propositional form. By contrast, the second form of recognition would correspond to the more basic form of responsiveness and would as such not typically require reflective linguistic capacities. This form, however, would be pre-supposed by the third form, and the responsiveness typical of the latter would require that of the former. The responsiveness of the second form would consist in sensitivity toward implicit as well as more explicit claims of the other, 'the Thou', to be recognized as a moral subject and person, and it would also consist in an ability to recognize "the otherness of the other" (2004, 354) and her unique individual ways of expressing her mind and emotions. This form of recognition could in turn be contrasted with Gadamer's first form which is defined by a failing recognition of the other as a moral subject and person, and which involves an *objectification* and *instrumentalization* of the other as means to one's own end. In the first

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[9] Gadamer gives a Hegelian qualification of the dynamics of interpersonal relationships involved as "the dialectic of reciprocity that governs all I–Thou relationships" (2004, 353). More concretely, he elaborates this qualification in terms of the historicity of all relation-ships: "[t]he inner historicity of all the relations in the lives of men consists in the fact that there is a constant struggle for mutual recognition" (2004, 353). See also Theodore George's qualification of Gadamer's "three moral gradations of our hermeneutical recognition of an-other person" (2020, 107) and Axel Honneth's interpretation which considers Gadamer's three "forms of the experience of reciprocal recognition" (2003, 6).

form, the other is understood and responded to in ways similar to how we would respond to experiential objects in the natural world, and her future claims and actions are anticipated on the basis of generalizations from former experience of people's behavior.

Returning to Ramberg's explorative definition of discursive play, we observe that the third form of recognition, openness, would not only capture more developed reflexive linguistic capacities but also the richer dimensions of enabled agency characterized by Ramberg as "a realization of the subject's freedom to be moved by reason, to be changed, to become more by understanding more" (2015, 227). Being open to the claim of the other, Gadamer points out, "involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so" (2004, 355). It thus involves the self-reflective and potentially self-transformative process of putting one's prejudices at risk and making them questionable. Openness to the claim of the other enables an enduring or lifelong *learning process* hinted at in Gadamer's brief comment that *sprachliche Spiele* "exist where we, as learners—and when do we cease to be that?—rise to the understanding of the world" (2004, 483–84).

Hopefully, my interpretation so far may suggest how Ramberg's explorative definition of discursive play, as well as his remarks on responsive abilities required and enabled by play, could be specified in the light of Gadamer's Hegel-inspired analogy in the second part of TM. However, how does this extended application of Gadamer's notion of play help to give us a fresh look at the Hegel-inspired analogy as such, and thus add textual support for the hypothesis of the hermeneutic centrality of the notion of play in TM? Here I will only offer a brief reply by drawing on the interpretations of Monika Vilhauer (2010) and Theodore George (2020).

By reading Gadamer's analogy through the lens of *discursive play*, as well as through the Hegelian dialectical scheme underlying the analogy, we may become more attentive to the interconnectedness of the three forms of recognition distinguished through the analogy. Rather than seeing these forms as an outlined typology where the various types could be applied to social life relatively independently (like Weberian *ideal types*), we would stress their complementarity in mapping out trajectories of human understanding, learning and development. We have seen how Ramberg's explorative definition stresses processes of understanding and self-transformation enabled by discursive play, and how Gadamer's remark on *sprachliche Spiele* concerns an enduring or lifelong process of learning and understanding. Taking note of this, we read the Hegel-inspired analogy

as showing how different processes of mutual recognition that are carried by interpersonal communication and relationships may either stimulate or obstruct processes of learning and development. In distinguishing and exemplifying the second form of recognition, where the personhood and otherness of the other is recognized, but her claim to truth is overlooked, Gadamer refers to relationships embedded in care work, upbringing or education and how the more dominating party in these relationships would tend to "claim to understand the other person in advance" (2004, 354). Here the potential to learn and develop for the more dependent and vulnerable party would be limited or suppressed as long as the dominating party fails to realize *her own* dependence and belonging, and to understand that her possibilities to understand herself, the other and the world become limited, too, by overlooking the other's claim to truth. More generally, we may take the Hegel-inspired analogy to highlight conditions enabling or obstructing *mutual* learning and growth in various social contexts. Guided by Gadamer's notion of play, Monica Vilhauer has thus taken the analogy to show how "I–Thou relations [of *mutual respect* and *shared commitment*] ultimately provide for a process in which mutual human growth can occur" (2010, 76–7).

Theodore George has appealed to Gadamer's notion of play in suggesting another and more intriguing interpretation of Gadamer's forms of recognition. Like Ramberg (2011), George notes how Gadamer developed his notion of play by being "cognizant of research in animal behaviour that blurs received distinctions between human and animal" (2020, 101). To Gadamer, George points out, play has a significant place in the lives of both humans and non-human animals. Yet play in human lives is different due to "the definitively human hermeneutical experience of language" while "for animals [. . .] play takes shape without language as a form of free self-movement" (2020, 102). Nevertheless, George argues for extending the application of Gadamer's forms of recognition to the effect that we should "recognise our difference-in-continuity with animals" (2020, 89). George takes the major obstacle for this recognition of non-human animals to be our received prejudices about animals and ontological dichotomies that allegedly separate them from us. Yet through our experience of and engagement with animals, we could question and achieve a "hermeneutic displacement" of these prejudices (2020, 105). Through this kind of hermeneutic experience, George proposes, "we make ourselves available for an interaction with animals that respects difference and recognises our common belonging together with animals within a world, or, if not a

world, then at least the shared space opened by our respective participation in play" (2020, 89). Thus, at least, he thinks, "Gadamer's approach [. . .] allows the initial outlines of our hermeneutical responsibility toward animals to come into view" (2020, 104).

Hermeneutics and solidarity

In this concluding section I consider some ethical aspects and concepts in Gadamer's work by taking as my point of departure Ramberg's (2015) efforts to bring together Rorty's concept of solidarity and Gadamer's hermeneutic core concepts of dialogue and tradition. Ramberg (2015, 228) sees Rorty's concept of solidarity and his book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989) as a development of his earlier and hermeneutically inspired concept of conversation in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), even though the former book (1989) makes no mention of hermeneutics. Through qualifying Rorty's concept of solidarity in more explicit hermeneutic terms, Ramberg may in effect be seen to expose Gadamer's hermeneutic core concepts to Rorty's more ethically potent concept. On the one hand, he qualifies and elaborates Rorty's concept as a concept of "discursive" or "conversational solidarity" (2015, 227, 228), while stressing that the latter "is available only if one accepts the hermeneutic view of intelligibility as coming into being through dialogue" (2015, 229). In addition, he harmonizes Rorty's concept with Gadamer's concept of tradition by seeing tradition in Gadamer's sense as something its members are "dialogically working up" (2015, 228). On the other hand, and by taking the history of Rorty's concepts of conversation and solidarity into account, he suggests that the hermeneutic key term "dialogical" could in turn be re-qualified through Rorty's concept: "dialogical understanding is an achievement of solidarity" (2015, 228). We could take this as an invitation to consider the relevance of Rorty's concept of solidary for Gadamer's hermeneutics and for elaborating what a *tradition* is or could be seen to be. Let me first briefly present Rorty's concept.

The normative content and force of Rorty's concept of solidarity consists in the moral urge to incessantly see and include cultural others as 'one of us'. Hence, the important thing, according to Rorty, is "to keep trying to expand our sense of 'us' as far as we can, by noticing our similarities with people we up till now have tended to think of as 'they' rather than 'us'" (Rorty 1989, 196). He offers an historical example of how solidarity works by noting how people in Denmark and Italy during World War II

saved and hid Jewish neighbors away from the Nazi occupants through seeing their Jewish neighbor as 'one of us' (1989, 189–91). More generally, and most importantly, Rorty takes solidarity to be due to contingent historical circumstances and not based on recognition of an ahistorical common humanity.

If we apply Rorty's concept to a *tradition* in Gadamer's sense, it would mean that those belonging to the tradition, whether humanities researchers or lay members, have a responsibility to incessantly include cultural others through various sorts of communicative or interpretative encounters. When described in Gadamer's more phenomenological terms, we could perhaps see this as an ongoing process of a "fusion of horizons" (2004, 305). Yet does Gadamer's hermeneutics, whether in TM or later, have relevant *normative* conceptual resources to address this responsibility and thus accommodate Rorty's concept—or to even provide a counterpart to it?

In TM a relevant starting point would again be Gadamer's Hegel-inspired analogical account of *openness*, which, when spelled out normatively, consists in the imperative that we *should* be open to recognize the truth claim of the other, as well as her otherness. Yet, whereas the analogy is focused on the hermeneutic task of understanding *historical* others within *the same* tradition, we are now interested in the understanding of *contemporary* and *cultural* others belonging to *other* traditions than our own. On the face of it, this hermeneutic task seems to pose serious ethical challenges, as well as epistemic challenges, to Gadamer's hermeneutics, as interpreters have commented for a long time and as succinctly summed up by Georgia Warnke (2012, 7). Although Gadamer is emphatically aware that the 'mere' recognition of the otherness of the (contemporary) other is easily caught up in the dialectics of paternalism and domination, as his examples from care work, upbringing and education suggest (2004, 353–54), his imperative of openness to the claim of the (contemporary) other would seem to be best exemplified by what could be achieved only through close personal relationships, as Axel Honneth has argued (2003). However, to search for other resources in Gadamer's oeuvre that could possibly address this and related challenges we may consider some of his works after TM.

For our inquiry it is pertinent to note that in some of his later essays Gadamer himself introduces and uses a concept of solidarity while the concept of tradition fades away from his writings.[10] Like Rorty, Gadamer takes solidarity to be a genuinely historical phenomenon and not

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[10] See Lawn, 2006, 106; Warnke, 2012, 7–8.

based on some ahistorical essence.[11] However, and as has been pointed
out and discussed by Warnke (2012) and George (2020), Gadamer's con-
cept of solidarity differs in several significantly ways from that of Rorty.
First, Gadamer does not see solidarities as emerging in terms of a com-
mon identity or perceived similarities between people. On the contrary,
his historical examples describe people with different identities as com-
ing together when facing a threat or crisis that affects them all. From his
own experience he thus speaks of how strangers living in big German
cities sensed a new togetherness and was brought together under bomb
attacks during World War II.[12] He further refers to how people facing
and responding to the environmental crisis have come together in the
environmental movement.[13] Particularly the latter example shows how
solidarity on Gadamer's account does not depend on common ethnic, na-
tional or religious identities. The second contrast to Rorty's concept is
that Gadamer takes bonds of solidarity to be *discovered*, rather than *cre-
ated*. What is discovered is what Gadamer qualifies as 'a life together',[14]
and yet this is a discovery which also discerns and allows for otherness.
As Warnke (2012) observes, Gadamer develops his concept of solidarity
from the concept of friendship in Aristotle's practical philosophy where
friendship is qualified in ethical terms as a *virtue*. Gadamer takes from
Aristotle's concept the idea that while friends have 'a life together' "they
acknowledge and appreciate one another's distinctiveness", and "because
of their difference they can help one another to come to new understand-
ings of themselves" (Warnke, 2012, 9). Returning to modern times, Ga-
damer sees solidarities as emerging when 'a common life' is discovered
under conditions of threat, even on a global scale, like in war, in facing the
environmental crisis, or the threat of nuclear annihilation.[15] At the same
time, Gadamer points out, solidarities may lead to discovery and recogni-
tion of the otherness of others which have been obscured under conditions
of a modern anonymous mass society.[16] Warnke thus sums up how Gada-
mer's concept of solidarity differs from that of Rorty: "[t]he triple stress
that Gadamer's account of solidarity puts on discovering a common life,
allowing for difference, and overcoming anonymity departs in significant

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[11] See Warnke, 2012, 10–12.
[12] Gadamer, 2000, 63.
[13] Gadamer, 2001, 80.
[14] Gadamer, 1999, 134. In another writing Gadamer uses the German expression "das
Miteinander des Ganzen Lebens" (2000b, 62).
[15] See Gadamer, 1981, 85.
[16] Gadamer, 2000b, 57, 63.

ways from accounts such as Richard Rorty's that rely on possibilities for
identification as their grounds" (2012, 10).[17] Yet could we interpret Ga-
damer's concept of solidarity as a continuation or a development of his
hermeneutics in TM and can it at all be seen to address the limitations
noted above concerning his account of hermeneutic openness? Turning
now to George's interpretation, we could interpret Gadamer's emphasis
on the *discovery* of solidarities to "suggest[] that solidarity concerns our
mutual interpretive openness that first allows a shared world to become
visible" (2020, 131). At the same time, the examples of solidarity above
might also suggest that capacities for understanding and interpretation
needed to establish bonds of solidarity would be *reactive* and exerted only
under conditions of life-threatening events or crises. In so far, these capac-
ities could be contrasted to those that would be enduringly conditioned
and enabled by a *tradition* in the sense elaborated in TM. Nevertheless, as
George points out, Gadamer does not only take account of solidarities that
emerge in response to external threat or necessity. He also considers how
the latter may in turn prepare and give occasion for "the free pursuit of
what may [. . .] be called 'elective' solidarities" (2020, 138), as already the
transnational environmental movement evolving in Gadamer's lifetime
may suggest.[18]

   Moreover, it is Gadamer's engagement with Aristotle's practical phi-
losophy, both in and after TM, which gives us the best clue as to capacities
for understanding that would be needed for discovering and engaging
in 'elective solidarities'. In part two of *TM,* Gadamer elaborates how our
historically mediated understanding of authoritative texts, norms or stan-
dards always needs to be applied in practical situations in our contem-
porary society. He further considers how an appropriate and responsible
application of our understanding can be qualified through Aristotle's con-
cept of practical wisdom or *phronesis*.[19] In this context of highlighting
Aristotle's hermeneutical relevance, Gadamer considers how the moral
self-knowledge which distinguishes *phronesis* requires friendship.[20] It is
against this background in TM, George suggests, that we must interpret
Gadamer's later development of the concept of solidarity through Aristo-

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[17] See also George's critical comparison (2020, 130–31).
[18] See also Warnke's comment that "we can always discover additional circumstances, sim-
ilar to environmental danger, in which we find that we are already at home with others in
seeing the need for collective efforts" (2012, 12)
[19] Gadamer, 2004, 309–21.
[20] 2004, 319–20.

tle's concept of friendship.[21] For Gadamer after TM, the self-understanding and recognition of the other's otherness that is fostered through friendship enables the development of capacities for discovering and engaging in solidarities in the larger social world. Emphasizing the ethical significance of friendships, Gadamer "maintains that our responsibility to the other person is itself our *entreé* to the larger world of others in which both we ourselves and the other person participate" (George, 2020, 106). The capacities which need to be developed for engaging in 'elective solidarities' would include *phronesis* as a capacity for deliberating and deciding the right thing to do. And therefore

"the promotion and expansion of close, personal friendships within society is decisive because friends supplement our *phronesis*. Here, friendships help us not only to realise our private ends, but also and crucially to augment our ability to deliberate and decide about what to do in the larger world we share with others" (2020, 120).

Gadamer's later engagement with Aristotle's concept of friendship may give us pause to reconsider Axel Honneth's (2003) critical assessment of the limitations of Gadamer's Hegel-inspired account in TM of the "I–Thou-relationship", and hence his account of openness. Honneth finds Gadamer's account of recognition valid "only with respect to close personal relationships" (2003, 19). Yet, as George has pointed out, to Gadamer after TM our close friendship with and "responsibility to the other person is itself our *entreé* to the larger world of others in which both we ourselves and the other person participate." (2020, 106). So at least from the vantage point of Gadamer's later work, his earlier account of openness to the claim of the other may not have those limitations that are ascribed to it by Honneth.

Finally, we may note how Gadamer's concept of solidarity bears on the overarching topic of part two in TM: understanding and interpretation in the humanities. In an essay originally written in 1983 Gadamer (2000a) suggests that the humanities, and particularly, the *European* humanities, have a key role in discovering new solidarities and in recognizing the otherness of non-European traditions. Due to the global spread of an industrial civilization since the industrial revolution, the worldwide plurality of different traditions and cultures has been obscured.[22] Given the range of global tasks for future human co-existence on earth, he thinks that the

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[21] See George's comment on the significance of Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* for Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics: 2020, 121.

[22] Gadamer, 2000a, 120–22, 126–27.

specific task of the humanities would be to disclose and study this plurality.[23] Yet in facing this plurality of traditions and cultural standards, the European humanities researcher should not, and could not, simply give up the validity standards she has inherited from her European scholarly and scientific tradition. Only through asserting and applying these standards, Gadamer claims, can she *know* and *recognize* the non-European other.[24] When read through the terminology developed in TM, this could be slightly elaborated: openness to the truth claim of the non-European other, as well as recognition of her otherness, is conditioned and enabled by asserting, and thereby putting at risk, one's own prejudices, prejudices that may prove enabling, as well as prejudices that may turn out to hinder understanding.

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[23] 2000a, 127.

[24] The larger textual context for this claim reads in German: "Wie es mit der Toleranz ist, daß sie auf einer inneren Stärke beruhen muß, so ist es auch mit der wissenschaftlichen Objektivität, die in den Geisteswissenschaften vorausgesetzt ist. Auch hier handelt es sich nicht um Selbstaufgabe und Selbstauslöschung zugunsten eines allgemeinen Geltenlassens, sondern *die Einsetzung des Eigenen für die Erkenntnis des Anderen und für die Anerkennung des Anderen*" (2000a, 126–27, my emph.).

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