

Understanding in the humanities: Gadamer's thought at the intersection of rationality, historicity, and linguisticity – with special reference to the dialectics of causality and history

Daniël F M Strauss

Faculty of the Humanities
UFS, P.O. Box 339
Bloemfontein 9300
South Africa
E-mail: <fgds@rs.uovs.ac.za>

Abstract

Because Gadamer is very sensitive to the role of history, tradition and authority within human life, the overall intention of this article will be to unveil major elements of modern philosophy which exerted an influence upon his thought. In this sense it can be seen as applying his notion of 'Wirkungsgeschichte' to an assessment of certain aspects of his own thought. Particularly in his view on causality and history Gadamer illustrates the intimate connection of his thought with the dialectics of *nature* and *freedom*.

Introduction

In the *Afterword* to his *Truth and Method* (Gadamer, 1998) Gadamer remarks that at the publication of this work he was not too late to reassess the value of “traditional and historical thought.” What he calls the “romantic *Geisteswissenschaften*” provides the basis for his investigations which are guided by the attempt to “mediate between philosophy and the sciences” (Gadamer, 1998:551-552).

Of course he is well aware of the dominant influence of the neo-Kantian schools of thought at the beginning of the 20th century. In a different context he mentions Heidegger's Thurneysen address and stresses the fact that “a central motif of his thinking” remained “the problem of language” (Gadamer, 1976:199). He states emphatically that no ground for this has been prepared in Marburg. This neo-Kantian school, which had been distinguished by its methodological rigor also focused its attention on the philosophical foundation of the sciences. Yet it

assumed without question that what can be known is really grasped by the sciences alone, and that the objectification of experience by science completely fulfills the meaning of knowledge. The purity of the concept, the exactness of the formula, the triumph of the infinitesimal method – these were the philosophical concerns of the Marburg School, not the intermediary realm of fluctuating linguistic configurations. Even when Cassirer brought the phenomena of language into the program of Marburg Neo-Kantian idealism, he did so under the methodological principle of objectification. To be sure, his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* had nothing to do with a methodology of the sciences. It saw myth and language as symbolic forms, as configurations of objective spirit, and

yet in such fashion that they should have their methodological basis in a fundamental dimension of transcendental consciousness (Gadamer, 1976:199).

Gadamer's negative assessment of the neo-Kantian Marburg school is tempered by his positive appreciation of the critique of this school against a sensualistic foundation of knowledge. The factuality of science is accompanied by what Natorp has called the *infinite task* of epistemology (Gadamer, 1972:x).

It is important to realize that Gadamer no longer views the "historical" in isolation in the manner in which historicists like Droysen and Dilthey ventured to do that. Gadamer transcends the stance of historicism and rather proceeds from the *universality* of hermeneutics and from the affirmation that "language is the form in which understanding is achieved" (Gadamer, 1998:xxxiv).

Yet his concerns reach further back into modernity – not to mention his ability to highlight the relevance of many insights from Greek antiquity for contemporary philosophy. In particular his constructive analyses of the discrediting of prejudice by Enlightenment, the indispensability of tradition (Gadamer, 1998:271 ff.) and the "prior agreement" of a lingual community (Gadamer, 1998:446) evince a keen awareness of the underlying philosophical problems accompanying the past few centuries of philosophical reflection.

Philosophical cornerstones

During the 17th century the development of the newly emerging natural sciences was in need of an epistemological foundation because, as Gadamer puts it, their "ideas had no claim to existence other than as *entia rationis*" (Gadamer, 1998:220). He points out that the old "representationalist theory was clearly no longer adequate" (Gadamer, 1998:220). The reason provided by Gadamer for this new formulation of the problem of knowledge is found in the "incommensurability of thought and being" (Gadamer, 1998:220).

One could argue that this incommensurability already surfaced in Newton's formulation of the law of gravitation. According to Kline, Newton emphasized quantitative mathematical laws as opposed to physical explanation. The central concept in his celestial mechanics was the force of gravitation. It was hard to understand how this gravitational force could attract two masses even when they are hundreds or millions of miles away from each other and separated by open space. This seemed to be just as incredible as many concepts advanced in Aristotelian or Scholastic philosophy to account for natural phenomena.

The concept was especially repugnant to Newton's contemporaries who insisted on mechanical explanations and had come to see force as the effect of contact between bodies wherein one body 'pushes' another. The abandonment of physical mechanism in favor of mathematical description shocked even the greatest scientists. Huygens regarded the idea of gravitation as 'absurd' because its action through empty space precluded any mechanism. He expressed surprise that Newton should have taken the trouble to make such a number of laborious calculations with no foundation but the mathematical principle of gravitation. Many others, including Leibniz, objected to the purely mathematical account of gravitation. . . . The attempts to explain 'action at a distance' persisted until 1900 (Kline, 1980:55).

The shift away from the universal features of reality

The importance of mathematical description, which transcends the possibilities of perceivable representations, is closely connected to an important shift within modern philosophy – namely the shift away from substances and towards the description of functional relationships between whatever there may exist. This surfaces in the thought of Gadamer when he refers to the nominalist background of seventeenth century epistemology (Gadamer, 1998:220). He explicitly mentions the important historical research done by P. Duhem. Martin (1991) refers to Volume three of the *Études* of Duhem and adds the remark that volumes seven to nine extensively discuss the nominalists of the fourteenth-century Paris.

Although Gadamer does have a very good knowledge and understanding of the historical development of modern philosophy, his analyses of the various dominant trends which exerted a formative influence on the contemporary intellectual climate indeed could have benefited from a more penetrating investigation of the all-pervasive effect of modern nominalism, because the orientation of nominalism actually underlies the quest for construction which not only appears in Kant's rationalistic epistemology but also within various irrationalistic trends within the 20th century (such as the philosophy of life, existentialism, neo-Marxism and contemporary postmodern stances). The most important feature of modern nominalism is given in its denial of every form of *universality* outside the human mind. Of course this does not imply that there is no concept of universality within the human mind. It was in particular historicism that attempted to think through the radical conclusions flowing from the denial of universality with respect to the supposedly changeability and contingency of historical reality.

The rise of historicism was merged with romanticism which eventually also strongly influenced Dilthey. One of the prominent sociologists of the first half of the 20th century and the founder of the sociological sub-discipline known as sociology of knowledge, Karl Mannheim, had a solid understanding of the romantic roots of Dilthey's *irrationalistic historicism*:

Dilthey is borne by, and may be the most important exponent of, that irrationalistic undercurrent which first became self-aware in Romanticism, and which, in the neo-Romanticism of the present, is on the way, in altered form, to effecting its attack on bourgeois rationalism (Mannheim, 1982:162).

Historical uniqueness

Although Gadamer does not want to succumb to an anchorless historicism, his critical position may be enhanced by unveiling the historical underpinnings which generated the historicistic frame of mind – underpinnings not recognized as such by Gadamer.

What does the transition from the rationalistic Enlightenment to the irrationalistic stance of historicism entail?

Historicism claims that only what can be experienced in the context of a historical, world-encompassing coherence, could serve as the immediately certain basis of knowledge acquisition – and only by means of *empathy* one can attain a genuine understanding (*Verstehen*) of spiritual reality. The natural sciences *know* and the humanities *understand* (Dilthey, 1927:86). Dilthey no longer supports the *positivistic science ideal* which seeks what is distinctively human in some facet of nature. The historical

aspect, by contrast, now occupies this position: to be human means to be *historically conditioned* (Gesammelte Werke, Vol. V:275, cf. Diwald, 1963:38 note 11).

The actual shortcoming in the thought of Gadamer in this regard is given by the fact that he did not sufficiently investigate the complexities surrounding the relationship between *universality* and *individuality*. When Habermas discusses the implied *linguistic framework* present in Dilthey's hermeneutics he does not differ from Gadamer:

We don't understand a symbolic expression without an intuitive prior-understanding (Vorverständnis) of its context, because we are not capable of freely transforming the presence of an unquestioned background knowledge of our culture into an explicit awareness.¹

Yet Habermas does reveal a much more penetrating insight into the key issues that propelled the significant transition from thought to language in modern philosophy. He first of all discusses the inconsistencies within the neo-Kantian Baden school of philosophy in this regard. According to Rickert culture is the product of relating natural reality to general or universal values (Wertbeziehung). He asks the question how would it be possible to obtain individualization through *Wertbeziehung* if reality is understood in terms of universal laws? How is individualization supposed to emerge from relating these (universal) natural laws to (universal) value categories? (Cf. Habermas, 1970:201.)

The “inexpressibly individual” in Dilthey's thought

Habermas highlights the limitations of general categories in respect of knowledge of the *unique individuality* of reality. He mentions the unavoidability to present an individualized life context by the use of necessarily universal categories (Habermas, 1970:203).² He points out that Dilthey wrestled with the possibility present within language, namely to make understandable what is individual by the use of universal categories. From this Habermas concludes that the procedure of hermeneutics requires an account of the following state of affairs: it must be able to explain how the structure of everyday language allows precisely what the syntax of the pure language forbids – namely to “mediate through language what is inexpressibly individual” (Habermas, 1970:206).³

Here Gadamer evinces an intuition of reality which does allow for linguistically mediated *knowledge* transcending the universality of human concept formation. It is significant that some of the contemporaries of Immanuel Kant – namely Herder, Hamann

1 “Einen symbolischen Ausdruck verstehen wir nicht ohne das intuitive Vorverständnis seines Kontextes, weil wir das fraglos präsente Hintergrundwissen unserer Kultur nicht freihändig in explizites Wissen verwandeln können” (Habermas, 1983:17).

2 It is worth mentioning that one reviewer of this article pointed out that Nietzsche already addressed this question in *On truth and lie in an extra-moral sense*.

3 “Offensichtlich hat die Umgangssprache eine Struktur, die es tatsächlich erlaubt, im dialogischen Verhältnis Individuelles durch allgemeine Kategorien verständlich zu machen. Dieser gleichen Struktur muss sich auch das hermeneutische Verstehen bedienen, die ja die alltägliche kommunikative Erfahrung des Sich- und Andere-Verstehens nur methodisch in Zucht nimmt. Zu einer expliziten Verfahrensweise lässt sich freilich die Hermeneutik erst ausbilden, wenn es gelingt, die Struktur der Umgangssprache in der Hinsicht zu klären, in der sie erlaubt, was die Syntax einer reinen Sprache gerade verbietet: das unaussprechlich Individuelle wie immer auch indirekt mitteilbar zu machen.”

and Jacobi – criticized the appearance his *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR) by pointing out that it does not account for the important role of *language* in human life.

It therefore does seem as if *language* can mediate between *universality* and *individuality* in a way which transcends the limitations of concept formation. Already Mannheim had a clear understanding of these issues. In connection with the conceptual basis of asserting he writes:

Everything subject to assertion is to be identical for everyone in every assertion of it: and the concept thus [is] universally valid in two ways: referable to all objects of the same kind (the concept 'table' is thus applicable to all tables that have ever existed or ever will exist), and valid for all subjects who ever will utter it, and who accordingly always understand the same thing by 'table'. That this tendency inheres in every concept-formation cannot be doubted; and the creation of such a conceptual plane upon which one concept can be defined by others, with all concepts thereby forming an objective self-contained system, should not be denied. ... In contrast to this, there is also an altogether different tendency in concept-formation, long in existence and rooted in a different movement, and this alternative must not be neglected. It rests on the possibility of using every concept, including the most general, as a name; and what is to be understood by name in this case is the specific property of words whereby they designate a specific thing in a specific function in its unique relationship to us in our specific conjunctive community. ... That is precisely the miracle of living speech: *that it always places each word in a unique context and that it can bestow an individual meaning* (I am emphasizing – DFMS) to each word from the specific totality of the sentence, and even more, from the undercurrent of the communication flowing from its rhythm and the stream of association (Mannheim, 1982:196-197).

Transcending the apparent self-contradictory nature of historicism

Gadamer points out that already for von Humboldt the focus on individuality does not imply that the universality of concept formation ought to be denied: his “interest in individuality, like that of the age, is not to be regarded as a turning away from the universality of the concept” (Gadamer, 1998:439).

Although Grondin argues that historicism is self-contradictory, Gadamer distinguishes between two different levels of argumentation. Grondin says that

... neither the Gadamerian claim to universality which seems to pertain to language, historicity, and his own philosophy as well, nor its denial by Habermas and Derrida has achieved any final clarity. One might well suppose that universality refers to the universal validity of some proposition. If so, it would be easy to show that hermeneutics is stuck in a logical or pragmatic contradiction. Some have tried to construe the universal claim of hermeneutics as climaxing in the thesis that everything is historically conditioned, a thesis supposed to be universally valid. If this thesis is meant to apply universally, then it must apply to its own claim, which must itself be historically limited and therefore not universal. The universal claim of hermeneutics is thus considered self-contradictory (Grondin, 1994:10).

Gadamer anticipated this argument in *Supplement One of Truth and Method*. With reference to the argument that historicism has its own conditions of growth, Gadamer re-

marks that historicism itself is a historical phenomenon that “one day” can “come to an end.” Thus we cannot argue that historicism in maintaining the historical conditionedness of all knowledge is true “for all eternity” since it would be basically self-contradictory. Yet, so Gadamer proceeds, this

kind of self-contradiction is a special problem. Here also we must ask whether the two propositions ‘all knowledge is historically conditioned’ and ‘this piece of knowledge is true unconditionally’ are on the same level, so that they could contradict each other (Gadamer, 1998:535).

Gadamer indeed transcends the position of historicism by acknowledging the universality both of *historicity* and *linguisticity*. However, in spite of his immense historical awareness, Gadamer did not explore an understanding of the thorough nominalistic assumptions of the modern shift to language.

The controversy of nominalism versus realism surfacing during the transitional period between medieval philosophy and modern philosophy provides decisive starting-points for the subsequent developments in philosophy. The nominalistic stance considered science to be concerned with universals (as the subjective universal image of the real individual entities). Over against the realistic conception of truth as the agreement between thought and essence (*adequatio intellectus et rei*), nominalism shifts the criterion to the inner activity of the human mind – truth concerns the compatibility of concepts.

Early modern philosophy explores this nominalistic attitude in many different ways. We only have to focus upon some crucial statements made by Thomas Hobbes, the British philosopher of early humanism, to realize how deeply historicism and the contemporary aversion of “universalities” and “essences” (particularly in the thought of Rorty) are indebted to nominalism.

Hobbes explores and continues the tendencies of early modern *rationalism* in his urge to construct reality through logical thinking. This motive of logical creation surfaces in the thought-experiment explained in his work on material things (*De Corpore*) where he proceeds from a theoretical demolition of reality in order to *reconstruct* it through logical thinking by using the concept of a “moving body”⁴ as elementary building block for this act of rational recreation. This motive of logical creation indeed characterizes the autonomy-ideal and the first manifestations of the early-modern natural science-ideal. Nominalism stripped factual reality both of a conditioning law-order and of its universal side – evinced in the *orderliness* (lawfulness) of concretely existing entities. It is peculiar to rationalism to claim that *universality* is the only source of knowledge. Therefore it is understandable why the motive of logical creation implicitly transforms subjective human understanding into the (formal) law-giver of nature – a tendency which was made explicit in Kant's philosophy.

Hobbes affirms the nominalistic conception of truth when he states that truth does not inhere in things, but that it is a feature of names and their comparison in statements.⁵ Add to this Hobbes's conviction that demonstrative science is only possible

4 Hobbes was already acquainted with Galileo's mechanics and therefore opted for a shift from space (Descartes: *res extensa*) to movement.

5 Ernst Cassirer formulates this as follows (1971:56): “Die Wahrheit haftet nicht an den Sachen, sondern an den Namen und an der Vergleichung der Namen, die wir im Satze vollziehen: *veritas in dicto, non in re consistit*” (cf. *De Corpore*, Part I, Chapter 3, Par.7 & 8). “Truth does not inhere in the things, but belongs to the names and their comparison, as it occurs in statements.”

with regard to those things which, in their generation, are dependent upon human discretion (*arbitrio*),⁶ then it becomes clear that already here we are confronted with a conception of the creative power of human thought and language, anticipating both Kant's extreme position and Richard Rorty's more recent point of view. Since, according to Kant, the material of experience (sense impressions) is chaotic, the natural order is (formally) made possible through the categories as *forms of thought*. Viewed in this perspective, the concepts of understanding in Kant's conception function as *formal law-giver* of nature (cf. Strauss, 1982). They are not derived from experience (a posteriori) but are (a priori) lying at the basis of experience: "Categories are concepts, which prescribe laws a priori to phenomena, and thus to nature as the totality of all phenomena" (Kant, 1787-B:163). In following Mary Hesse, Richard Rorty views "intellectual history" as "history viewed as the history of metaphor." "Old metaphors are constantly dying off into literalness, and then serving as a platform and foil for new metaphors" (Rorty, 1989:16).

In line with this tradition (of course prior to the writings of Rorty!) Gadamer still echoes an element of a statement already made by Herder, namely that the human being is a creation of language ("der Mensch ist ein Geschöpf der Sprache" – cf. Proß, 1978:73). Van Niekerk takes it a step further when he points out that according to Gadamer the 'world' should be recognized as a *creation of language* (Van Niekerk, 1993:39). During the "high-tide" of early 20th century historicism, Heidegger already realized that a new *universal* was needed. Gadamer points out that Heidegger did not again want to introduce something essential or divine with his notion of *Sein* (Being). Much rather his purpose was to introduce something like an event which opens the space in which hermeneutics could become (without any final foundation) a new universal ("zum neuen Universale wird"). This space is the *dimension of language* ("Dieser Raum ist die Dimension der Sprache") (Gadamer, 1989:172).

It therefore turns out that although Gadamer does want to acknowledge *historicity* as one of the universal conditions for being human,⁷ he is no longer willing to opt for the historicist (and nominalist) denial of (ontic) universality.

Of course, as soon as one reflects upon the nature of human understanding in relation to universality, another fundamental problems surfaces, namely that of the relationship between the supposed *uniqueness* of history and *generality* or *universality* as such, particularly in the way in which it is employed within the natural sciences. In order to demonstrate to what an extent the thought of Gadamer is still immersed in the classical motive power underlying the entire development of modern philosophical thought since the Renaissance, one only has to look at the way in which Gadamer discusses the issue of *causality* and *history*.

Causality and History

It is understandable that Gadamer has to refer back to the way in which Kant wrestled with this problem. He mentions that the relation between cause and effect is introduced by Kant as a necessary a priori concept of understanding which makes possible our experience, because nature is nothing but "matter subject to law" (Gadamer,

6 "Earum tantum rerum scientia per demonstrationem illam a priore hominibus est, quaram generatio dependet ab ipsorum huminum arbitrio" (De Homine, Chapter X, par.4 – quoted by Cassirer, 1971:57).

7 It is interesting to note that the 1998 edition of *Truth and Method* does not list "historicity" in its index. However, on page 533, for example, one does find an explicit reference to the notion of historicity.

1967a:192). Although Gadamer allows for the employment of the concept of causality within the domain of history he points out that within a historical coherence, events occur which cannot be *predicted*. As Von Ranke has formulated it, world history is constituted as “scenes of freedom” (Gadamer, 1967a:193). Gadamer is here quite ambiguous about the idea of causality. On the one hand he alludes to a twofold notion of causality and on the other he often puts the term cause within parenthesis (Gadamer, 1967a:194, 200). His remark that causality in a peculiar way hampers human freedom and responsibility (Gadamer, 1967a:193-194), demonstrates that the classical tension between nature (causality) and freedom is still part and parcel of these reflections. Within the context of this legacy he poses the question: “Does causality presuppose, freedom or does it rather exclude freedom?” (Gadamer, 1967a:196). His preference is not to use the concept of causality (in the sense of a determined relation between causes and effects) within the domain of history. Yet he still continues to speak about ‘causes’ within historical descriptions and explanations. But he does this with an explicit hesitation, because the ‘causes’ within the domain of human action are always found within a *teleological coherence* (Gadamer, 1967a:200).

The historical background of Gadamer's combination of 'cause' and 'teleology' – the dialectical tradition of necessity and freedom

With reference to the ideal of logical creation which became apparent in the thought of Hobbes we have already alluded to the new concurrent ideal of an autonomously free personality. Initially the first aim of this ideal merely was to master nature rationally with the aid of the newly developing natural sciences. An element of this initial motive of *rational control* of this natural science-ideal is still present in Gadamer's view of technical control within science. Gadamer holds that science is directed towards what the human being can *accomplish* – it therefore constitutes a *knowing control* of nature, which means that it is constituted as *technique* (Gadamer, 1972:xiii). As we shall argue below, the inherent dialectics between *natural causation* and *freedom* (teleology in Kant's third Critique) finds its one leg in the deterministic classical natural science-ideal. Let us briefly go back to Descartes in order to explain this claim in more detail.

Descartes's emphasis on the maxim that our ideas should be *clear* and *distinct* (considering clearness to be more fundamental than distinctness – *Principles*, XLVI), is orientated towards mathematics as model of thought. Even the certainty that God exists is only accomplished by clear and distinct understanding showing, in the final analysis, that he uses the idea of God to furnish his deified mathematical thought with the feature of *certainty*, thus stamping the *infallibility* of the new mathematical method of analysis. Having mentioned Galilei's mathematization of nature and modern physico-mathematical rationalism, Edmund Husserl characterizes this new phase in modern philosophy as having given birth to a rationalistic ideal of science (“*rationalistischen Wissenschaftsideal*” – 1954:119).

What should be kept in mind is that the liberation from the ecclesiastical unified medieval culture during the Renaissance was first of all in the grip of the ideal of autonomous freedom. Dooyeweerd aptly described this tendency as the *personality ideal* of modern philosophy (1997, pp.188-200; 207-215). In order to proclaim its autonomous freedom, the Renaissance person found in the rise of the modern mathematical natural science a *rational instrument* for dominating nature. Thus this modern *freedom motive*, almost with an inner necessity, gave birth to the *domination motive* (entailing the

eventual *technical* control of nature) – that is to the *science-ideal* (nature motive). The science-ideal soon turned into a real threat of the ideal of autonomous freedom from whence it originated.

If the whole of reality, by means of “reconstructing creative thought,” could be framed in terms of exact natural laws of cause and effect (universal determinism), it stands to reason that the *freedom* of the supposedly autonomous personality is reduced to, and determined by, invariable causal laws of nature without any freedom at all! The science-ideal turned out to be a real Frankenstein – demonstrating the inherent dialectic between the freedom-pole and the nature-pole in modern philosophy.

Remark: *The nature of the dialectics between 'nature' and 'freedom'* Through the development of modern philosophy it became clear that both the science-ideal and the personality-ideal inherently harbour a tendency to acquire the primacy at the cost of its counter pole. But because both presuppose and threaten each other, the only 'option' left is that either the science-ideal obtains the upper hand and 'subdues' the personality-ideal, or that the latter assumes the primacy at the cost of the science-ideal. *Dialectics* then acquires the meaning of two fundamental, all-permeating (basic) motives which both oppose and mutually determine the meaning of the counter motive. The initial development of modern philosophy proceeded under the primacy of the science-ideal (Descartes, Hobbes, Berkeley, Locke and Hume) until Rousseau called attention to the actual original motivation of the science-ideal by the personality-ideal. Immanuel Kant completed the transition in ascribing the *primacy* to the practical-ethical freedom of the human personality ('practical reason') as a 'Selbstzweck' ('aim-in-itself') while restricting the former science-ideal to the domain of sensory phenomena (to which 'pure reason' is limited). Post-Kantian freedom-idealism carried the claims of the personality-ideal to their ultimate (meta-physical) conclusions – soon opposed by the new power formation of the science-ideal in the positivism of Comte and Marx and the theory of evolution of Darwin. Instead of pursuing this track any further we have to return to the way in which 'causality' and 'freedom' indeed came to stand in a *dialectical* relation in the thought of Kant.

The subtle but basic distinction between 'Erscheinung' (appearance/phenomenon) and “Ding an sich” (thing in itself), which Kant uses, is completely in the service of his fundamental aim to safeguard a separate (and super-sensory) realm for the human person as an *autonomous ethical being* (*Zelbstzweck*). The category of cause and effect (together with all the other categories) is only applicable to appearances and *not* to *things in themselves* (such as the free will of the human soul).

Kant realizes that an unlimited employment of the category of causality (understood in the deterministic and mechanistic sense of classical physics) inevitably implies the *abolition* of all freedom. Kant explains his basic problem as follows:

Now let us suppose that the distinction, which our Critique has shown to be necessary, between things as objects of experience and those same things as things in themselves, had not been made. In that case all things in general, as far as they are efficient causes, would be determined by the principle of causality, and consequently by the mechanism of nature. I could not, therefore, without palpable contradiction, say of one and the same being, for instance the human soul, that its will is free and yet is subjected to natural necessity, that is,

not free. For I have taken the soul in both propositions in *one and the same sense*, namely as a thing in general, that is, as a thing in itself; and save by means of a preceding critique, could not have done otherwise. But if our Critique is not in error in teaching that the object is to be taken *in a twofold sense*, namely as appearance and as thing in itself; if the deduction of the concepts of understanding is valid, and the principle of causality therefore applies only to things taken in the former sense, namely, in so far as they are objects of experience – these same objects, taken in the other sense, not being subject to the principle – then there is no contradiction in supposing that one and the same will is, in the appearance, that is, in its visible acts, necessarily subject to the law of nature, and so far *not free*, while yet, as belonging to a thing in itself, it is not subject to that law, and is therefore *free* (1967-B:VII-VIII).

It is clear that Kant's ultimate concern to safeguard the (autonomous) *freedom* of human beings necessitated this distinction between *appearance* and *thing in itself*. This is most evident from the entire *Transcendental Dialectic*. In his discussion of the solution of the third cosmological idea he once more explains that we are not allowed to ascribe any absolute reality to appearances: "The common but fallacious presupposition of the *absolute reality* of appearances here manifests its injurious influence, to the confounding of reason. *For if appearances are things in themselves, freedom cannot be upheld*" (1967-B:564).

The final remark in this subsection reveals the basic motive of Kant's whole *Critique of Pure Reason* (1967-B:565):

My purpose has only been to point out that since the thorough-going connection of all appearances, in a context of nature, is an inexorable law, the inevitable consequence of obstinately insisting on the reality of appearances is to destroy all freedom. Those who thus follow the common view have never been able to reconcile *nature and freedom*" (my emphasis – DFMS).

At this point we encounter the teleological escape-route which also surfaced in the thought of Gadamer.

Bridging the abyss teleologically?

This inherent dialectics, enclosed in the basic motive of nature and freedom, already in his *Critique of Pure Reason* brought Kant to a *negative* interpretation of human freedom: freedom is seen as *being free* from *natural necessity* (Kant, 1967-B:651-652). In his *Critique of Judgement* Kant develops a most influential formulation of the way in which nature and freedom presuppose each other *dialectically* (i.e., both opposes and needs each other). Although the human understanding *a priori* applies the category of causality, as strict natural law, to nature, Kant approaches organic nature *teleologically*. It means that nature is thus portrayed *as if* the multiplicity of laws present in it is contained in the unifying basis of an understanding (Kant, 1968-B:VIII). The concept of a *natural teleology* is proposed by the capacity to judge, in order to function as a mediating concept between the concepts of nature and the concepts of freedom. However, the purposiveness of nature only functions as a *regulative principle* to the (reflecting) capacity to judge (Kant, 1968-B:LVI). As guiding principle, this natural purposiveness is never to be used in a *constitutive* way, since then our reflecting ability becomes a *determining faculty* of judgement, implying that once again we are intro-

ducing a *new causality* (a final cause; nexus finalis; cf. 1968-B:269) into natural science (Kant, 1968-B:270).⁸

The teleological principle merely functions as a subjective maxim in judging nature. Therefore, it cannot be applied to the objective reality of things in nature. Consequently, the reconciliation between the causally determining and the teleologically reflecting view of nature is sought in the unity of a supra-sensory principle which is supposed to be valid for the totality of nature as a system (Kant, 1968-B:304). This 'solution' did not really reconcile the opposing poles of *nature* and *freedom*, since it simply reinforces the basic dualism between *natural necessity* and super-sensory *freedom* – each with its own law-giver (cf. Kant, 1968-B:LIII-LIV).

Fr. Schelling made an attempt to 'synthesize' nature and freedom. Yet, according to him, in the absence of the antinomy (Widerspruch) between necessity and freedom, not only philosophy, but also every higher will of the spirit will shrink into insignificance (Schelling, 1968:282). As a result of this commitment he believes that in nature itself a principle of freedom is concealed, while history is founded on a hidden principle of necessity. Clearly, the result is not a real 'synthesis' or 'reconciliation,' since it amounts to nothing but a *duplication* of the original dialectic: necessity is present within the domain of freedom, and freedom is present within the domain of necessity!

Gadamer believes that the only option we have is to assume a *dialectical coherence* between the two ways in which one can apply the idea of causality (within nature and within history) (Gadamer, 1967a:198). He remarks that the peculiar dialectic between freedom and natural necessity is given in the fact that the freedom through which the human being can manipulate natural events, is itself made possible by the idea of natural necessity (Gadamer, 1967a:199).

The legacy of teleological thinking is also connected to the (neo-)vitalist tradition in modern biology – our next focus of attention.

Entelechie negatively described: the influence of Hans Driesch

Without rejecting the classical mechanistic analysis of matter, Driesch, in his neo-vitalistic biology, extends the application of the deterministic concept of law to *biotic* phenomena. The traditional mechanistic approach is limited by him to the material basis of living things. Driesch interprets the regenerative phenomena discernible in living things in terms of his theory of living entities as “equi-potential harmonious systems” and in terms of his notion of an *entelechie* operating as a “totality-causal factor” (*Ganzheitskausalität*). The important contribution which Driesch made to the problem of *freedom*, is given in his notion of the 'entelechie' as something that cannot be determined in any *positive* sense. As such he considers it to be a “system of negations” (1920:513; 459 ff.), i.e., it cannot be *positively determined*: 'entelechie' is something non-mechanical; it is not energy, not force, not a constant (1920:460) and non-spatial (1920:513). The difference between the atomistic '*Einselkausalität*' and the holistic '*Ganzheitskausalität*' is also framed in terms of the opposition 'Ganzheit' and 'Zufall' (totality and chance). Driesch places genuine *freedom* over against *determination* and declares that the question about freedom is to be considered as a *metaphysical question of faith* which cannot be answered by the science of philosophy (cf. 1931:93-122).

⁸ Exactly this was done in the neo-vitalistic biology of Hans Driesch. Cf. his notion of 'Ganzheitskausalität' (1920:416 ff., 542 ff.).

Although Kant and Driesch differ in their view on the nature of philosophy, they agree that *freedom* is not a question of scientific proof, but one of (practical) faith.

In his theory of the freedom of the will, Arnold Gehlen continues Driesch's negative description of the 'entelechie'. However, with an explicit appeal to the freedom idealism of Schelling, he immediately transforms it in order to provide a point of entry for *freedom*. At the same time he was of the opinion that Driesch actually brought biotic phenomena under the reign of the deterministic classical ideal of science. Therefore, once again he wants to restrict causality to *mechanical* causality: "Since causality is only thinkable as mechanical causality, the entelechie is negatively free, i.e. spontaneous and primary in a sense which cannot be subjected to a closer determination" (1965:60).

The tension between nature and freedom brought Max Scheler to his well-known characterization in terms of what he calls the 'Weltoffenheit' of human beings (1962:38, 40).⁹ Against this background Plessner developed his own perspective on the human being as an *eccentric creature*, while biologists and anthropologists such as Portmann, Overhage and Gehlen gave the notion of 'Weltoffenheit' a prominent place in their writings. Ultimately this term 'Weltoffenheit' is used to embody the reaction against the claims of the science ideal, namely that the human being is determined in all respects. In the final analysis, the intention of these authors is to show that the human being is free from being determined by *natural causality*.

In his Ph.D-thesis, dealing with philosophical aspects in the biology of Portmann, R. Kugler states that Portmann essentially understands the human being in terms of *freedom* (1967:75). At the same time, Portmann is well aware of the fact that, as a "philosophical idea", freedom withdraws itself from a *scientific grasp*. Kugler places this approach within the "large tradition" of a "philosophical determination of the human being," dating back to Immanuel Kant: "The innermost essence of the human being is freedom, it is the possibility of the human being to transform itself into that what it is" (Kugler, 1967:81). Compare this announcement with the following words of Plessner: "As eccentrically organized creature the human being must make itself into that what it already is" (Plessner, 1965:309).

Gehlen points out that this mode of expression manifests the logical scheme present in a normal teleology. This tradition is influenced by Fichte: "I want to be free ... means: I want to make myself into that what I shall be before I am it, in order to be able to perform it" (cf. Gehlen, 1965:103-104). Fichte in this respect is dependent on Kant who introduced, as we have seen, teleology as a *bridge* to human freedom. The philosophical tradition in which "mechanical causality" and "teleology" (nature and freedom) is always dialectically related, inspires Ed. von Hartmann to remind natural scientists of it. He does it in a way which explains why it is so easy for Gadamer (1967a:200) to take refuge in the dialectics of causality and teleology (nature and freedom):

If our natural scientists were philosophically better trained, they would have been aware of the fact that the whole German speculation, from Leibniz to Kant and up to the present, equally decisively rejects a teleology separated from me-

⁹ In this work, Scheler sketches absolute being as an endless, reciprocal interpenetration of spirit (Geist) and drive (Drang) – the former has to guide and direct the latter, but only receives its power from this equal original life-drive.

chanical causality, as it does with a mechanical causality divorced from teleology (quoted by Haas, 1959:456).

Concluding remarks

What certainly form a part of the positive contribution of Gadamer is that he restored an insight into the inevitability of prejudices and in doing that he also restored the rightful place of authority. The fact that he acknowledges the ontic universality of historicity and linguisticity (the essential elements in understanding as far as concept formation is concerned) testifies to the fact that he was keenly aware of the dominant philosophical trends of his own time and seriously tried to integrate their positive elements within his own thought. His philosophical thinking, however, still took place within the broader legacy of modern philosophy, with its inherent dialectical tension between *causality* and *teleology* (nature and freedom). Notwithstanding the fact that various philosophical trends of the 20th century departed from the *rationalistic* philosophy of Kant, the underlying motivating power present in the “leitmotif” of *nature* and *freedom* remained in force.

This is amply clear from some of the earlier contemporaries of Gadamer. The existential phenomenological thinker, Merleau-Ponty, for example, for a great part relying on the results of psychological and psycho-pathological studies, also understands the human being *dialectically* in terms of two basic denominators: *being a body* (taken in a biotic sense as an *organism*) and *existence* (interpreted as being *historical* in nature). On the one hand, together with Sartre, he accepts the thesis: “I am my body”. On the other hand, however, he also holds the opinion that one's historical existence must repress the bodily organism down to the pre-personal level of an anonymous complex. Inspired by the nature-pole of the basic motive of nature and freedom, Merleau-Ponty writes:

I cannot understand the function of the living body except by enacting it myself, and except in so far as I am a body which rises towards the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1970:75).

From the opposite motivation he states:

... so it can be said that my organism, as a pre-personal cleaving to the general form of the world, as an anonymous and general existence, plays, beneath my personal life, the part of an *inborn complex* (1970:84).

On the one hand I *am* my body, and on the other hand my body is seen as a pre-reflexive, pre-personal, anonymous complex by virtue of its being-in-the-world (1970:79, 80, 82, 83, 86). Nature and freedom reciprocally endanger and presuppose each other – the hall-mark of *dialectics* as we have defined it:

... for most of the time personal existence represses the organism without being able either to go beyond it or to renounce itself; without, in other words, being able either to reduce the organism to its existential self, or itself to the organism (1970:84).

The dialectical movement, to and fro, between these poles is best illustrated in his following words: “Man taken as a concrete being is not a psyche joined to an organism, but the *movement to and fro* of existence which at one time allows itself to take corpo-

real form and at others moves towards personal acts” (my emphasis – DS) (Merleau-Ponty, 1970:88).

And perhaps it manifested itself in its most *negative* way in the thought of Karl Jaspers who clearly saw the impasse of this whole dialectical legacy. His confession reads:

Since freedom is only through and against nature, as freedom it must fail. Freedom is only when nature is (1948:871).

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