'Language is Conversation': On Gadamer, Language and Philosophy

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I.

Gadamer was fond of telling of his last meeting with his old teacher Martin Heidegger: 'You are right', said Heidegger, 'language is conversation [Sprache ist Gespräch].'[1] We might argue as to what such a comment, assuming Gadamer remembered it aright, would really have meant for Heidegger – whether it would have constituted a significant revision of any view to which Heidegger was himself committed.[2] The fact that Gadamer felt it worth repeating, however, does indicate something of Gadamer's conception of the relation between his thought and that of Heidegger, as well as of the centrality of the idea at issue in his own thought. Indeed, elsewhere Gadamer has commented that:

What I tried to do, following Heidegger, was to see the linguisticality of understanding not just in terms of the subjectivity of consciousness and the capacity for language in that consciousness, as German idealism and Humboldt had done. Instead I moved the idea of conversation to the very center of hermeneutics'.[3]

Of course, it is not merely the idea of conversation that is important here, but also the connection between conversation and language. Understanding the nature and role of this connection in Gadamer's thinking is central to understanding Gadamerian hermeneutics, but it also sheds light on the continuities between Gadamer's thought and that of Heidegger himself. My aim in this paper is to explore the meaning of Gadamer's claim that language is conversation and what this claim might mean for understanding, for language

and for philosophy. My strategy here will be, first, to explore some of the foundations of Gadamer's thinking, second, to consider the way in which, for Gadamer, language and conversation are indeed tied together, and especially the conception of language that is involved here, and, then, finally, to consider what this means for philosophy and philosophical inquiry. Part of what I will be doing here is, as Gadamer says in <u>Truth and Method</u>, 'to approach the mystery of language' from the perspective of conversation [<u>Gespräch</u>],[4] but in making this approach, philosophy itself must also be seen to be at issue.

II.

Gadamer was, as he himself admits, something of a precocious student, completing his doctoral dissertation when he was 22 – in 1922. His first encounter with Heidegger was soon after, and it had the effect, Gadamer tells us, of an electric shock. Heidegger's influence on Gadamer, an influence that was enduring, but also problematic, does not derive primarily from Heidegger's magnum opus, <u>Being and Time</u>, but rather from Heidegger's early work on Aristotle and perhaps most importantly from the lectures on 'Ontology' subtitled 'The Hermeneutics of Facticity' given during the Summer Semester in Freiburg in 1923,[5] and, later, the lectures on the 'Origin of the Work of Art' of 1935-36.[6] I want briefly to discuss each of these influences in turn, since, if we are to understand the role of conversation in Gadamer's thought, and what it might mean, we need to understand the origins of that thinking.

Gadamer's own early training was in Greek philosophy and even before the electrifying encounter with Heidegger, Gadamer had developed a reading of Plato that laid special emphasis on the dialogical – what we might also think of as the 'conversational' – character of the Platonic text as the essential means by which those texts could be understood. It was not surprising, however, that it was in relation to Aristotle, rather than Plato, that Gadamer and Heidegger first

came into contact. Gadamer himself has emphasized the role of Aristotle in Heidegger's early thought in the period leading up to <u>Being and Time</u>, claiming, in fact, that it was the account of <u>phronesis</u>, of practical wisdom, that appears in Book IV of Aristotle's <u>Nichomachean Ethics</u>, that was one of the crucial ideas in the development of the philosophical position set out in the 1927 work. In <u>Being and Time</u>, the idea of <u>phronesis</u> is evident in two ways: first, in the emphasis given to our practical 'being-in-the world' over and against theoretical apprehension; second, in terms of the 'call of conscience' that constitutes a basic mode of insight into our own concrete situation – into both our practical situation and, more fundamentally, our existential situation, hence this mode of insight, and <u>phronesis</u> with it, can be seen as constituting a mode of <u>self</u>-knowledge. The way in which Gadamer conceives of understanding, and interpretation, is as just such a practically oriented mode of insight –- a mode of insight that has its own rationality irreducible to any simple rule or set of rules, that cannot be directly taught, but is always oriented to the particular case at hand, and that always involves our own knowledge of ourselves.

But if the idea of <u>phronesis</u> derived from Aristotle, it nevertheless connected directly with the idea of hermeneutics that Heidegger adapted from Schleiermacher, Droysen and Dilthey. In Heidegger's early thinking, particularly in the lectures from 1923, hermeneutics is presented as that by means of which the investigation of the basic structures of factical existence is to be pursued –- not as that which constitutes a 'theory' of textual interpretation nor a method of 'scientific' understanding, but rather as that which allows the self-disclosure of the structure of understanding as such. The 'hermeneutic circle' that had been a central idea in previous hermeneutic thinking, and that had been viewed in terms of the interpretative interdependence, within any meaningful structure, between the parts of that structure and the whole, was transformed by Heidegger so that it was now seen as expressing the way in which all understanding was 'always already' given over to that which is to be understood

(to 'the things themselves' – 'die Sachen selbst'). If we are to understand anything at all, we must already find ourselves 'in' the world 'along with' that which is to be understood. All understanding that is directed at the grasp of some particular subject matter is thus based in a prior 'ontological' understanding –- a prior hermeneutical situatedness. On this basis, hermeneutics can be understood as the attempt to 'make explicit' the structure of such situatedness. Yet since that situatedness is indeed prior to any specific event of understanding, so it must always be presupposed even in the attempt at its own explication. Consequently, the explication of this situatedness – of this basic ontological mode of understanding –- is essentially a matter of exhibiting or 'laying-bare' a structure with which we are already familiar (the structure that is present in every event of understanding), and, in this respect, hermeneutics becomes one with phenomenology, itself understood, in Heidegger's thinking, as just such a 'laying bare'.

In 1935-36 Heidegger gave three lectures on 'The Origin of the Work of Art.' In these lectures, not published until 1950, Heidegger connects art with truth, arguing that the essence of the artwork is not its 'representational' character, but rather its capacity to allow the disclosure of a world. Thus the Greek temple establishes the 'Greek' world and in so doing allows things to take on a particular appearance within that world. Heidegger refers to this event of disclosure as the event of 'truth'. The sense of truth at issue here, albeit it a quite unusual and controversial sense, is not the sense involved in talk of the 'correctness' of a statement, but rather of the disclosure or 'unconcealment' of things that comes prior to any such correctness –- an unconcealment that also conceals both in the sense that it closes off some aspects as it opens up others and in the sense that the play of concealment and unconcealment itself remains hidden and can never be completely elucidated. In the language Heidegger employs, the unconcealment of 'world' is thereby grounded in the concealment of 'earth'. On this basis, truth is understood in terms of the play of concealment

and unconcealment that first allows things to appear as that with respect to which statements can be true or false and it is this that is taken by Heidegger as the essence (or 'origin') of the work of art. Gadamer saw these ideas as having a particular affinity with his own work describing his philosophical hermeneutics as an attempt to take up and elaborate this line of thinking from the later Heidegger .[7]

There are two crucial elements to Gadamer's appropriation of Heidegger here: first, the focus on art, and the connection of art with truth; second, the focus on truth itself as the event of prior and partial disclosure (or more properly, of concealment/unconcealment) in which we are already involved and that can never be made completely transparent. Both of these elements are connected with Gadamer's response to the subjectivist and idealist elements in German thought that were present in the neo-Kantian tradition, and, more specifically, in romantic hermeneutics and aesthetic theory. As Gadamer saw it, aesthetic theory had, largely under the influence of Kant, become alienated from the actual experience of art – the response to art had become abstracted and 'aestheticised' – and, at the same time, aesthetic judgment had become purely a matter of taste and so of subjective response. Similarly, under the influence of the 'scientific' historiography of such as Ranke, and the romantic hermeneutics associated with Schleiermacher and others, the desire for objectivity had led to the understanding of a text becoming alienated from the contemporary situation that made that text relevant and significant, while, at the same time, such understanding had come to be seen as a matter of somehow reconstructing the subjective experiences of the author, and yet such reconstruction, as Hegel made clear, was surely impossible[8].

This experience of alienation is important for the thinking of both Heidegger and Gadamer. While Gadamer takes the alienation present in aesthetic theory as well as in historicism as his primary examples here, we might say that the same alienation is also a feature of scientific thinking and of much

modern philosophical thought. Philosophy, particularly in its modern epistemological forms, is then a more generalized for of the same alienation that Gadamer discerns in the aestheticization of artistic experience and in the historicisation of understanding. Such alienation is a large part of what Heidegger understands by the 'forgetfulness of being' that he takes as characteristic of the history of the West. We can discern the attempt to counter such alienation, not merely in Heidegegr's account of <u>aletheia</u>, but also in his deployment of the concept of <u>phronesis</u> – and in the 'call of conscience' that brings us back to ourselves – and in the idea of hermeneutics as a matter of the interpretation of the basis of understanding in our own factical existence.

That the problem of alienation, which is always ultimately self-alienation, is fundamentally at issue here is evident in <u>Being and Time</u> in the emphasis on the <u>Seinsfrage</u> – the question of being – as a question that necessarily involves the being of the questioner. The claim that the question of being can only be approached via the being of Dasein does not arise because of a concern about the means of access to the question at issue nor to that which is in question, but amounts, instead, to an assertion of the essential identity between the question of being and the being of questioning as such. The question of being is thus not one question among many, it is not a question that lies at our disposal, to be picked up or put down as the inclination takes us, the question of being is a question that already claims us and that always remains at issue even when it is rejected, ignored or seemingly forgotten. Moreover, the necessity and inevitability of the question does not depend on any idealist premise – such that the question of being is always ultimately a question about the being of the subject. It rests, instead, on the question of being understood as a question in which the questioner is always implicated simply in virtue of her own prior belonging to being and to the world –a prior belonging that, as Heidegger later puts it, 'calls us to thinking'.

III.

In phronesis, in the factical structure of understanding, in aletheia – the experience of truth at work in art – we find a similar structure in place: a structure in which we find ourselves 'always already' – 'immer shon' – given over to a dynamic interplay of possibilities in which our we are ourselves necessarily implicated. This is the structure that Gadamer takes to be exemplified in the idea of 'play' ('Spiel') ,[9] the explication of which is central to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Moreover it is this structure that is also at issue in the Gadamerian deployment of the idea of conversation or, as it can also be understood, dialogue.

Conversation always involves our participation in a movement of response and counter-response that is guided, not by something that belongs to any of the participants alone, but that occurs 'between' them in the to-and-fro movement that is the conversation itself. Moreover, just as in phronesis, in our factical existence, in the experience of art, there is always something to which we are already give over – some practical demand, some 'thing' that engrosses us, some particular in and around which truth 'happens' – so in conversation there is always some subject matter (eine Sache) around which the play of conversation takes place and to which the conversational partners are opened up. Thus, in conversation, 'Something is placed in the center, as the Greeks say, which the partners in dialogue both share, and concerning which they can exchange ideas with one another… To reach an understanding in a dialogue is thus not merely as matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were.'[10] In conversation, the participants are taken up by the conversation through their being already given over to the subject matter on which the conversation is focused. It is precisely in this way that our

'prejudgments', which first orient us towards the matter at issue, are also what open us to being affected in a way that goes beyond those initial pre-judgments.

Conversation – <u>Gespräch</u> – names for Gadamer the fundamental structure of understanding. As such it names the mode of our belonging to the world that Heidegger also aims to explicate. Gadamer will say that it names the structure of what he also calls '<u>Wirkungsgeschichtlichesbewusstsein</u>' – 'historically effected consciousness' – but this is not to say that it names something subjective. Gadamer insists that the 'Bewusstsein' to which he refers here 'ist mehr Sein als Bewusstsein'.[11] We might say, in fact, that the structure of 'consciousness' that Gadamer aims to explicate is not some merely psychological or subjective event or structure, but is rather the happening of understanding that always encompasses speakers as well as the world in which they find themselves. The happening of 'historically effected consciousness' is the happening of understanding, which is also the happening of world.

Crucial to my purposes here, however, is that this happening, this <u>Ereignis</u>, is inextricably bound to language. This is not merely because ordinary conversation is itself a linguistic phenomenon, but rather because what takes place in conversation is the working out of a certain sort of relatedness between conversational partners that is also a relatedness to a particular subject matter. We might say, in fact, that every conversation involves the exploration and articulation of a certain 'topos', a 'topic', that includes both the focus of conversation as well as the conversational context – a context that always includes the conversational partners themselves. The relatedness that is worked out in conversation is a relatedness that never achieves any final completion – conversation is ongoing, as Gadamer emphasizes; moreover, it is not a relatedness that consists simply in the relatedness of physical proximity (since it may obtain in the absence of such proximity) nor in the relatedness merely of physical effect (although it may depend upon such effect, it cannot be reduced to it). The relatedness at issue is indeed a relatedness that can take place only in

language, not because, having first identified that relatedness, we can then see that it is possible only in language, but rather because language, or linguisticality, just is that relatedness. This is what it means for Gadamer to claim, and for Heidegger apparently to reaffirm, that language is conversation.

The claim that language is conversation does not, then, point merely to certain features of language that are picked out by the idea of conversation, but rather asserts the essential linguisticality of conversation or dialogue as such. Moreover, since the dialogue at issue here is the same dialogue that is the happening of understanding, so the assertion of the linguisticality of dialogue is an assertion of the linguisticality of understanding and so also an assertion of the intimate relation between language and world. It is characteristic of both Gadamer and Heidegger that they do not take language to be either some mere instrument at our disposal and so under our control, nor is it something that controls us in the sense of preventing our access to things and to the world. There is no inadequacy in language that could lead us to demand its reform or purification. It is, instead, only in relation to language that the world first comes to appearance. 'Language' says Heidegger 'is the house of being'[12] and 'Language is not just one of man's possessions in the world' says Gadamer, 'on it depends the fact that man has a <u>world</u> at all'.[13] The respect for language in the work of Gadamer and Heidegger is in sharp contrast to the suspicion of language that has haunted much of twentieth century philosophy – a suspicion that can be traced back at least to Nietzsche, but that is present also in the empiricist tradition that runs through Locke and into contemporary analytic thought. Such suspicion of language is only possible, however, if we already assume an alienated concept of language – a concept of language that takes language as something apart from the original and originary dialogue that is at issue in Gadamer; a concept of language that treats language as identical with the abstracted <u>form</u> of language – the form evident in lexicon and grammar, in semantic theory and semiotic system.

IV.

In his assertion of the conversational or dialogic character of language, Gadamer is not merely saying something about where or how language occurs – as if we already knew what language was and had only to determine where to place it. To say that language is conversation is to make an assertion about the very nature of language, as well as an assertion about its centrality, that runs counter to the standard approaches to language. For the most part, those approaches focus on the logico-linguistic or socio-linguistic structures that are evident through semantic, syntactic or even pragmatic analysis. Consequently, they take as their basic starting point, not language, but linguistic analysis, and thereby presuppose, but do not elucidate, the phenomenon of language – they may tell us something about the way in which particular aspects of that phenomenon can be elaborated and distinguished, but they do not address the phenomenon as such. And the same is also true, one might argue, of almost the whole of contemporary philosophy of language. For the focus of such philosophy is typically not the conversation to which Gadamer directs our attention, but rather a conception of language already abstracted from that conversation – a conception of language as, indeed, structure, system, or form. Thus Gadamer himself writes that 'there is no doubt that the science and philosophy of language operate on the premise that their only concern is the <u>form</u> of language'[14], and he associates this premise with the modern tendency towards the devaluation of language that takes language as a mere instrument.

One might view the tendency towards the devalued understanding of language (the tendency that takes language to be identical with an formal structure abstracted from the actuality of conversation) to be most clearly evident in the priority assigned, within modern linguistics, logic and philosophy of language, to what Heidegger designated the 'apophantic' as opposed to the hermeneutic, and so to the priority accorded to the statement and the

proposition. Indeed, in Gadamer's own work we find a clear emphasis on the dialogical, the conversational, over the propositional. Thus he writes that 'Language is most itself not in propositions but in dialogue'[15] while in <u>Truth and Method</u>, Gadamer's affirmation of the Platonic claim for the priority of the spoken over the written and his emphasis elsewhere on the priority of the 'inner word' can both be seen as aimed at a similar point, namely, that language in its reality is to be found in the originary dialogue out of which particular statements are merely an abstraction and which is never exhausted by any such statement. As Gadamer puts it: 'What is stated is not everything. The unsaid is what first makes what is stated into a word that can reach us'[16]

Somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, the tendency to conceive of language in terms of some abstracted, 'formal' system, whether that is taken to be merely instrumental or not, is common among many who, influenced by Heidegger's emphasis on the importance of <u>phronesis</u> and of factical existence, view language as always a secondary element in the happening of world, or, if they do accept the fundamental role of language, then they insist of a conception of language as expressive rather than assertoric, as grounded in experience rather than in the statement or judgment. Here it seems as if something of the suspicion of language that I noted above can itself be encouraged by the Heideggerian and Gadamerian prioritization of the dialogic and the conversational. Thus Hubert Dreyfus can argue, on the basis of premises he takes from Heidegger among others, that our fundamental mode of engagement with the world is neither linguistic nor conceptual, but rather a matter of the non-conceptual and the embodied, while Charles Taylor takes language, on the basis of Heideggerian and Gadamerian premises, as indeed expressive rather than assertoric, and as only accessible from the 'inside' of the experiential world that it articulates.

Now clearly it would be a mistake to suppose that language could be separated from the hermeneutic experience that occurs in conversation, or, indeed, from the experience that is involved in our being already given over to a

world or from the embodied mode of our being in the world. Yet to separate language from assertion, concept and judgment is equally problematic, for it makes it impossible to understand how assertion can itself be possible, how concepts can function as concepts, how judgment can indeed be about that which is judged. It is not enough to say that these are merely 'secondary' or derivative', for even this presupposes a relation of some sort, and once we separate off the assertoric, the conceptual or the linguistic, from the dialogue in which experience and world take place, then it becomes questionable how any such relation can hold at all. This is just the problem that Wilfrid Sellars took up under the heading of the 'Myth of the Given' and that was given a new form in Donald Davidson's attack on the 'third dogma' that is the separation of conceptual scheme and empirical content.

If the claim that language is conversation requires that we rethink the very idea of language, then it also requires that we rethink the ideas with which language is connected, amongst which we must include the ideas of assertion, statement, concept and judgment. Although we may well use such ideas as a way of articulating a contrast between the dialogical understanding of language according to which the meaning that occurs in language is intrinsically multiple or indeterminate, always constituted in an ongoing play of possibilities, and the idea of language as a fixed system of static and determinate 'contents' expressed in the form of statements, concatenations of concepts, judgments or propositions, we also need to be able to preserve the possibility of retrieving a sense of what such assertion, conceptuality or propositionality might themselves amount to in the light of the dynamic, dialogic understanding of language.

That this is, indeed, essential is not merely indicated by the difficulty in making any sense of the derivative or secondary status of assertion and concept when such ideas are taken in isolation from true linguistic dialogue, but also by the role that these ideas play in the very possibility of dialogue. Central to the character of language is that it always extends beyond that which it itself is – this

is taken up by Gadamer in terms of the notions of <u>mimesis</u> (as developed in relation to art) and symbol;[17] in Heidegger it is developed through the idea of language as always a form of showing.[18] There are two senses in which language goes beyond itself in this way. The first is just the sense in which language becomes indistinguishable from world. Even though the world is not language, nor is language the world, still world and language are not experienced in a way that enables the one to be separated from the other. And this is so even though we can certainly distinguish between particular linguistic elements and particular aspects of the world – between sentences, for instance, and the 'facts' to which they refer. The second sense is the sense suggested in just this idea of the sentence as capable of referring' to something other than itself. Indeed, language, which goes beyond any particular instance of language, just as the dialogue goes beyond any particular question or answer that arises within it, nevertheless occurs in and through the particular sayings, the particular responses and counter responses, that can be identified using sentences and propositions and to which we may refer in terms of concept and judgment.

This is why we cannot neglect the sentence, the statement, and the proposition. What we must not do is to treat these as mere abstracted entities that operate independently of the conversation or dialogue in which they belong. Word and thing come together in that saying whereby the thing is itself brought to salience – whereby it is enables to show itself. The idea of the proposition, of linguistic 'content', is misunderstood when viewed as a determinable linguistic 'quantity' on which the system of language can operate; it is well-understood when it is viewed as the means by which we are able to map the complex interplay that occurs in dialogue, when we are able to re-present the relatedness that is articulated in conversation in such a way that it can itself become a factor in that relatedness.

We may be inclined, if we take the significance of the assertion and the concept seriously, to argue that Heidegger and Gadamer themselves err in their

own apparent emphasis on the conversational or dialogic over the propositional. But two things need to be borne in mind here: first, the polemical context out of which the work of both Heidegger and Gadamer arises – a context in which each is concerned to argue against an excessive prioritization of the conceptual, the propositional and the theoretical; second, we need to hold open the possibility that their critique of the assertoric, the 'apophantic', the conceptual and the propositional, is not directed at a particular understanding of these notions, rather than the notions as such. Thus, rather than take the account of language as dialogue or conversation as implying a rejection of the assertoric and conceptual as having a significant role in language, we should view it as indicating the inadequacy of any account, whether of language, or of the assertion, the concept or the proposition, that does not recognize the essentially indeterminate and dynamic character of these phenomena. It is only then that we can begin to see how assertion itself can be possible and how it may also play an indispensable role in the dialogue that is language.

Yet does not Gadamer's own assertion of the priority of the question over the assertion cast doubt on such a claim for the indispensability of assertion here? The primacy of the question is based in the way in which the question opens up the possibility of a response and it is in such response and counter-response that the dialogue consists. Yet while the question may be seen to provoke the statement as response, rather than vice versa (indeed, the statement presupposes no response at all), it is nevertheless the case that every question already stands in relation to something said, something stated, something asserted – not merely to the statement or assertion as answer, but to the statement as that which is put in question. The priority of the question consists in this: that it is indeed the question that brings the significance of the statement into view. The prioritization of the question is intended to indicate the dynamic and indeterminate character of conversation – there is no proposition nor propositional content at which the conversation can be halted or on which it can

be pinned down – but this does not mean that conversation is nothing but questioning or that the statement can be dispensed with. Although the assertoric and the propositional are not identical with the essence of language, they are nevertheless part of the necessary structure that makes language – and so also conversation or dialogue – possible. Moreover, we should not be misled by the fact that no statement or proposition is adequate to capture the movement of dialogue in its entirety (for such dialogue always involves more than is given in any presentation of it) just as no such statement or proposition is adequate to capture the entirety of any thing. To speak is not to 'capture the world or any part of it, but is instead to participate in the opening of the world, in the play of dialogue. And that opening, that play, is always, as Heidegger emphasizes, a revealing and a concealing, a clearing and an obscuring.

V.

The claim that language is conversation concerns, not merely language, but the entire structure of the linguistic as well as of the conceptual. Indeed, it concerns the very possibility of understanding, of world and of our own being. Moreover, in the assertion of the 'conversationality', the 'dialogicality', of language and the linguisticality of dialogue, the very conception of language itself is reconfigured. The so-called 'linguistic turn' here takes on a new meaning. It is not a turn merely to language as a semantic or syntactic system, nor even to language as representational structure, but rather a return, a 'Kehre', back to the original Ereignis in which we are always already implicated, in which the world itself emerges as world. Thus Gadamer writes that:

The question I would pose is: What is truly the language of philosophy? What language is the language of philosophy? Is there a 'language of philosophy' at all? In the end, as we ask these questions, we recognize that language is the task of philosophy itself, whatever it may be in its own living reality [Lebendigkeit] behind all the stages of its

historical development…What I am thinking of is not some kind of Indo-Germanic language such as that reconstructed by linguistic research as the basis for most languages in the various European cultures, nor is it anything like a primordial language [Ursprache]. Rather I have in mind the linguisticality, as such, through which and out of which languages are first able to form themselves at all and out of which have been formed the multiplicity of languages, even including those that are not within our own circle of culture. And one point cannot be left out: the indissoluble connection between thinking and speaking which compels hermeneutics to become philosophy. One must always think in a language, even if one does not always have to think in the same language.[19]

The language of philosophy is not some particular linguistic form in which philosophy must speak, but rather constitutes the conversation in which not only philosophy, but all speaking and thinking has its origin and proper place. Indeed, the place at issue here is a topos – the same topos that is invoked in the idea of the topic on which conversation is always focused. But such a tops is not merely an abstract 'idea' or 'subject'. For conversation to occur is for a space to be opened up between conversational or dialogical partners in relation to some thing about which each can speak and in relation to which each can understand the other. It is language that enables such a space to be held open, since it is language that enables each conversational partner to re-present her own position in a way that is accessible to the other and in a way that can also be related back to that which is spoken about. The very structure of the topos within which conversation and dialogue occurs is thus established and maintained only in and through language, through the ongoing event of speaking and listening (and sometimes also takes, therefore, of silence).

Inasmuch as philosophy both expresses and articulates a certain alienation, then it is an alienation from this original and original topos. Inasmuch as philosophy is essentially an attempt at 'return', at 'turning back', then such turning is always

back to this <u>topos</u>. Yet since the <u>topos</u> is itself constituted only in the dialogue that is language, that is understanding, that is world, then so the tuning back is a turning that is accomplished only inasmuch as it is never completed. In turning back, we find that the <u>topos</u> to which we are turned is itself the turning of the dialogue, the conversation that, as Hölderlin says, we ourselves are.

Notes and references

[1] For the sake of simplicity, I have generally chosen to translate '<u>Gespräch</u>' as 'conversation', but of course it can also, and often is, translated as 'dialogue'.

[2] As Gadamer saw it, Heidegger remained always a 'monological' thinker (at least after the publication of his 'big book', as Gadamer once put it in conversation) – the charitable reading of this characterization is that Heidegger could only be engaged <u>with</u> – in the sense of an engagement from within his own thought. Independently of this point, however, there is clearly a sense in which, while understanding is, for Gadamer, always an enterprise undertaken with others, Heidegger seems to maintain a sense of the solitariness of thinking. This contrast arises explicitly in Heinrich Ott, 'Hermeneutic and Personal Structure of Language, in Joseph J. Kockelmans (ed.), <u>On Heidegegr and Language</u> (Evanston: Northwestern University press, 1972), pp169-93, see especially the comment from Theodore Kisiel contained in n.18, pp.185-6.

[3] Gadamer in Conversation, trans. Richard E. Palmer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p.39.

[4] Truth and Method, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989), p.378.

[5] Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity, trans. John Van Buren (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). See Jean Grondin, Inrtroduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), esp. p. 2 & pp.98-100, for a brief discussion of the importance of these early lectures for Gadamerian hermeneutics.

[6] 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in Off the Beaten Track, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-56.

[7] Gadamer, 'Reflections on My Philosophical Journey', p.47

[8] See Gadamer, Truth and Method, pp.164-9

[9] See Truth and Method, pp.101-110; also 'Man and Language', in Philosophical Hermeneutics, trans. David E. Linge (ed.), (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p.66.

[10] Truth and Method, pp.378-9

[11] Kleine Schriften (Tübingen: 1967), 1, p.127, 158. Or to emphasize the contrast even more strongly: 'mehr Sein als Wissen'

[12] And also, Heidegger adds, ' the home of human beings' — 'See 'Letter on Humanism' in Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1993 – rev. edn.), p.262.

[13] Truth and Method, p.443; see also the famous claim on p.474: 'Being that can be understood is language'.

[14] Truth and Method, p.404.

[15] 'Grenzen der Spache' in W. Böhme (ed.), Evolution und Sprache: Über Entstehen und Wesen der Sprache (Karlsruhe: privately published, 1985), p.98.

[16] Gesammelte Werke 2, p.504.

[17] See 'The relevance of the beautiful', in The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays, trans. Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp.31-39.

[18] 'To speak to one another means: to say something, show something to one another, and to entrust one another mutually to what is shown', 'The Way to Language', <u>On the Way to Language</u>, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p.122. Here Heidegger points towards a more primordial Saying and Showing that is also an Owning and in which the ordinary saying and showing of everyday interaction is grounded.

[19] 'Reflections on my Philosophical Journey', p.25.