Université de Montréal

Heidegger and Gadamer's Appropriation of Aristotelian *Phronesis*

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List of Abbreviations

BT: Being and Time. Translated by John Macquarrie, and Edward Robinson, Malden Blackwell. 2013.

GA 18 : Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie (1924), Translated as *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy* Translated by Robert D. Metcalf and Mark B. Tanzer. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2009.

GA 19: Platon: Sophistes. (1924) Translated as *Plato's Sophist* Translated by Richard Rojcevicz and André Schuwer. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2003.

GA 22: Grundbegriffe der antiken Philosophie. (1926) Translated as *Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy* Translated as *Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy.* Translated by *Richard Rojcewicz.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press*, 2008.*

NE: Nicomachean Ethics

TM: Truth and Method Truth and Method. Translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum. 2011.

Résumé

La présente étude se veut un examen de l'interprétation de la *phronesis* chez deux grands penseurs allemands du vingtième siècle, soit Martin Heidegger et Hans-Georg Gadamer. La motivation de ce projet découle d'un intérêt marqué pour l'étude de modèles alternatifs à la pensée technoscientifique de la connaissance. Considérant que Heidegger et Gadamer ont entrepris une importante réappropriation de la *phronesis*, nous avons jugé intéressant d'analyser leur pensée sous cet angle. Notre but est de mettre en relief les raisons qui ont poussé Heidegger et Gadamer à se tourner vers le concept de la *phronesis* et par la suite de tirer au clair les implications de cette réappropriation du concept aristotélicien au sein de leurs philosophies respectives. Cette étude est divisée en deux chapitres, traitant de la réappropriation de la *phronesis* chez Heidegger et Gadamer respectivement. Le premier chapitre porte sur l'interprétation heideggérienne de la *phronesis* en portant une attention particulière sur les cours maintenant publiés du plus jeune Heidegger. Dans le deuxième chapitre, nous traitons également de la réappropriation de la *phronesis*, mais cette fois, chez Gadamer afin de mettre en relief l'intérêt que présente la *phronesis* aristotélicienne pour l'herméneutique, mais aussi pour l'éthique de Gadamer. La dernière partie de ce chapitre propose une analyse comparative entre l'interprétation heideggérienne et gadamérienne de la *phronesis*. Notre étude veut montrer que Gadamer a suivi de près l'interprétation heideggérienne du concept aristotélicien de la *phronesis*, mais qu'il a aussi su s'en distinguer dans sa quête d'une conception plus authentique des sciences humaines, de l'herméneutique et de l'éthique.

Mots-clés : *Phronesis*, Aristote, Heidegger, Gadamer, herméneutique, ontologie, éthique

Abstract

The present study aims at examining the interpretation of *phronesis* conducted by two central figures in twentieth-century German philosophy, namely Martin Heidegger and his student Hans-Georg Gadamer. The impetus for the following project comes from a general interest in the study of the alternatives to the technoscientific model of knowledge. Seeing as both philosophers took up the concept of *phronesis*, we deemed it as an interesting point of departure for an analysis of both their philosophies. In effect, we want to put into relief the reasons that motivated both thinkers to turn to the concept of *phronesis* and thereafter clarify the ramifications of their reappropriation of this Aristotelean concept in the development of their thought. The present study is divided in two chapters, each of which addresses the reappropriation of *phronesis*. The first chapter is an in-depth examination of the use of *phronesis* by Martin Heidegger, specifically with respect to his earlier lectures. The second chapter is also an examination of Gadamer's reappropriation of *phronesis* in connection to both his conception of hermeneutics and ethics. The last section of this project is devoted to a comparative analysis between Heidegger and Gadamer's reappropriation of *phronesis*. Our study reveals that Gadamer followed closely the lead of his teacher, while at the same time making the concept of *phronesis* his own by integrating it in his quest for a more genuine conception of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, and in his substantial development of hermeneutics.

Key words: *Phronesis*, Aristotle, Heidegger, Gadamer, hermeneutics, ontology, ethics

INTRODUCTION

πολλῷ τὸ φρονεῖν εὐδαιμονίας
πρῶτον ὑπάρχει· χρὴ δὲ τά γ᾽ ἐς θεοὺς
μηδὲν ἀσεπτεῖν· μεγάλοι δὲ λόγοι
μεγάλας πληγὰς τῶν ὑπεραύχων
ἀποτείσαντες
γήρᾳ τὸ φρονεῖν ἐδίδαξαν.

There is no happiness where there is no wisdom;
No wisdom but in submission to the gods.
Big words are always punished,
And proud men in old age learn to be wise.

(Sophocles, *Antigone*, 1040)

With the impressive advancements of science and technology in the last century, and even more so in the last few decades, it is legitimate to ask anew whether there still is a place left for the humanities and art in our modern life, and if so, what is their proper role. This question is exacerbated by the renunciation to grant any intellectual superiority to a higher authority or Providence since the time of the Enlightenment. The present project is to be located within the broader quest of reassessing the value and even the primordiality of the humanities and of art in leading an authentically human life. In order to reaffirm the legitimacy of the humanities, we must reflect more thoroughly on the kind of truth that they reveal to us. For instance, just as the natural sciences have and continue to reveal to us a certain form of truth which can improve our way of life, an equivalent role can be attributed to the humanities, albeit in a radically different manner. For the humanities to regain a central role in our lives, we must reflect more deeply on their essence in order to better assess the value of the truth they present to us. Thus, we must find a model which

corresponds to their true nature and not merely imitate the positivist model put forth by the natural sciences.

One of the most important figures who pursued the rethinking of the humanities in the twentieth century was the German philosopher, Hans-Georg Gadamer. In his *magnum opus*, *Truth and Method*, Gadamer's principal goal is to reinstate the value of the humanities, the *Geisteswissenschaften*. In order to achieve this, he critically addresses the way in which the human sciences have understood themselves, while going back in history and retrieving notions and concepts, which he deems to be instructive for the humanities to redefine themselves in a truer fashion. *Truth and Method* can be viewed as a survey of the concepts throughout history that can serve as a fertile ground for a more appropriate epistemological model for the human sciences. For instance, in order to retrieve the true notion of artistic truth, Gadamer proceeds to a critique of the model of aesthetic consciousness as the preferred model for understanding the nature of art, and instead offers the concept of play as a way of rethinking the revealing truth of art, and takes Aristotle's model of the tragic as a fertile ground for the development of his idea of art. In the second part of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer resorts to Aristotle once again and to his teacher Heidegger with the aim of challenging the classical conception of nineteenth century hermeneutics, and arrive at an alternative model for understanding and interpretation, which is more adequate to the humanities.

The concept which Gadamer elects as a model for hermeneutics is the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis.* Gadamer sees in *phronesis* a way out of the techno-scientific rationality that governs the modern age. Aristotle deals with the concept of *phronesis* extensively in *Book VI* of his *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle recognized that there are three types of

activities, *poiesi*s, *praxis and theoria*. The former activity is associated with human intervention in the material world and the production of tangible outcomes, whether it be the production of a glass, or the restoration of someone's health. In order to produce this kind of outcome, Aristotle posits that *techne* is the type of knowledge that is necessary. *Techne* is the knowledge of the expert, which allows him to ensure complete mastery over his object with regards to the means he must employ to achieve a particular *telos*. In addition to *poiesis*, Aristotle identified another type of activity, namely *praxis*, which consists in the behaviour one adopts in the public space, with others and whose aim is the ethical good, the *eu zen*. The critical difference between *poiesis* and *praxis* is that in *praxis*, one cannot wholly detach oneself from the situation in which one is acting. Rather, *praxis* is a more intimate kind of knowledge, which relates to the kind of life one wants to lead, as one deems it to be the most worthwhile. In order to regulate this type of activity, one needs to possess *phronesis*, in the eyes of Aristotle. As opposed to *techne*, *phronesis* is a kind of knowledge which is less formulable and more flexible and depends more on experience than technical knowledge. It is doubtless that this distinction initially posited by Aristotle is extremely valuable in the face of the problem we have brought up in the preceding pages, namely the hegemony of the positivist science which are modelled after the paradigm and requirements of *techne*.

Indeed, this critical distinction has caught the attention of several philosophers who have reappropriated it within their own thought to challenge the rule of the techno-scientific approach. Among these philosophers, in the modern era, we can identify Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Hannah Arendt, and Jürgen Habermas. Our interest within the confines of the present project lies in Gadamer's reappropriation of *phronesis*, which by the

same token inevitably extends our interest to Gadamer's teacher and prominent German philosopher of the twentieth century, that is, Heidegger's reappropriation of *phronesis.* Gadamer appropriates the notion of *phronesis* principally within his investigation into the hermeneutics of texts, which, according to him, cannot be achieved alone through a fixed method, as there is no infallible procedure that could ensure the validity and truth of our interpretation. Gadamer resorts to *phronesis* as an alternative to the way hermeneutics have understood themselves in the nineteenth century when they were seduced by the neutral and objectivist model of the natural sciences.

In order to better understand Gadamer's reappropriation of *phronesis*, we must turn to his immediate predecessor, Martin Heidegger. In effect, Gadamer attended many of Heidegger's classes in the years 1923-25, when Heidegger worked extensively on Aristotle and taught classes on the Stagirite. Heidegger taught Aristotle in a radically different way than was taught at the time in Germany, and Gadamer who already had a profound interest in Aristotle, was immediately conquered by Heidegger's phenomenological interpretation of the Greek philosopher. That is why we deemed it essential to devote the first part of our investigation to the Heideggerian interpretation of Aristotle in the early years of his teaching career. Heidegger introduces *phronesis* as one of the five modes that *Dasein* has of attaining truth (*aletheuein*) and *phronesis* would be the original attitude of *Dasein* towards oneself and others. Heidegger's main examination of *phronesis* occurs within Heidegger's project of a *Destruktion* of the history of philosophy, which consisted in a re-evaluation of the main tenets of philosophy in order to uncover of a more authentic interpretation of the philosophical truths that have been hitherto buried.

Although Heidegger and Gadamer do not reappropriate *phronesis* for the same reasons within their philosophy, and we will focus on these differences, they do take up the concept of *phronesis* with the aim of challenging a strong Cartesian doctrine that had dominated the philosophical tradition in the preceding few centuries. Joseph Dunne, in his prominent work, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* makes a brief survey of Cartesianism and how twentieth century hermeneutics developed in reaction to the strict rationalist approach of Descartes. Among these hitherto uncontested assumptions of Cartesianism, the subject-object dichotomy figures at the top of the list. Ever since Descartes, philosophy has understood the world in terms of this fundamental relationship. Furthermore, Descartes sought an Archimedean point as the foundation of knowledge, which could be reached only through the bracketing of any judgments that one may have. This foundation consists in an essentially monological activity, which is in no need of others. From this Archimedean point, knowledge could be derived by means of strict method, which would eventually lead to the construction of a systematic knowledge. Nothing could be considered as knowledge if it does not meet the strict conditions of the first and unshakable certainty. Knowledge cannot rely merely on the senses, on judgments, on opinions, or on tradition. According to Cartesianism, what can be deemed as true knowledge must be so solely on the basis of reason. Thus, we can see why Descartes was unsympathetic to the study of history, classical languages, and literature. In addition, it is apparent that the seeds of the classical dichotomies of Enlightenment thinking are also derived from Cartesianism, that is, reason and authority, reason and tradition and reason and superstition.

In reaction to these claims, both Heidegger and Gadamer do not merely attempt to reform Cartesianism, but believe that at the root of such claims lies a misunderstanding of

our being. For Heidegger and Gadamer, we are finite beings who are "thrown" into a world already loaded with significations and meaning resulting from tradition and we are born into a particular historical vantage point. It is impossible for one to be able to extricate oneself from this world of significations and reach an Archimedean point which is supposedly devoid of any judgments. There seems to be a discordance with what we *are* and what Descartes considers is the right way of attaining true knowledge. That is why *phronesis* appears so appealing to both Heidegger and Gadamer, precisely because it is the kind of knowledge which cannot be reduced to mere method.

The impetus for the following project comes from a general interest in the study of the alternatives to the mathematical model of knowledge. In addition to that, what prompted this inquiry is a more particular interest in the radically novel manner of conducting philosophy of Heidegger and how it influenced his student Gadamer. We believe that the comparison of their respective interpretation of *phronesis* will not only yield interesting conclusions with respect to academic research in the fields of ontology, hermeneutics and ethics, but will also demonstrate the power of the Aristotelean concept of *phronesis* in the face of the hegemony of the technical. Both find in *phronesis* a more genuine mode of being, which corresponds better both to our human finitude and to the subject matters which relate to the human sciences, such as ethics. In an era where genuine dialogue and genuine listening to the other has become scarce, the study of the crossroads between ontology, hermeneutics and ethics and more generally a review of what it *is* to be a human being are all the more pressing.

The present study is divided in two chapters. The first chapter is an in-depth examination of the use of *phronesis* by Martin Heidegger, specifically with respect to his

earlier lectures. In the first part of the chapter, we examine the main texts in which Heidegger discusses the Aristotelean notion of *phronesis*, namely the 1923 *Natorp Bericht*, in *GA 18[1]: Basic Concepts of Aristotelean Philosophy*, and *GA 19: Plato's Sophist.* In the second section of this chapter, we highlight the main themes that can be extracted from a close reading of Heidegger's texts, namely the ramifications of the predominantly ontological scope of Heidegger's project on the interpretation of *phronesis*, and the analysis of Heidegger's interpretation of *phronesis* within the reappropriation of the famous distinction between *sophia* and *phronesis*.

The second chapter provides an examination of Gadamer's reappropriation of *phronesis* with respect to hermeneutics and with respect to ethics. In the first section of this chapter, we discuss how Gadamer developed his own conception of hermeneutics in reaction to the classical conception of the nineteenth century and under the influence of Heidegger's own conception of the hermeneutical circle. We examine the centrality of application within Gadamerian hermeneutics, which is the impetus that drives him to the notion of *phronesis*. In the second section of this chapter, we turn once more to the notion of *phronesis* but within the context of ethics. We will seek to clarify the connection between hermeneutics and ethics. The last section of this chapter is devoted to a comparative analysis between Heidegger and Gadamer's reappropriation of *phronesis*. We attempt to highlight the idea that Gadamer followed closely the lead of his teacher, while at the same time making the concept of *phronesis* his own by integrating it in his quest for a more genuine conception of the *Geisteswissenschaften* and human rationality.

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[1] **GA** refers to **Gesamtausgabe**, the collected works of German philosopher Martin Heidegger, edited by Vittorio Klostermann.

Chapter I: Heidegger and *Phronesis*

In this section, we will shed light on Heidegger's reappropriation of Aristotle, and more particularly his interpretation of the Aristotelean notion of *phronesis*. This analysis will eventually allow us to assess in what respect Gadamer is indebted to his immediate teacher and master, Martin Heidegger, who had worked considerably on Aristotle. Primarily, this chapter will allow us to gain a deeper understanding of Heidegger's attempt to take up the concept of *phronesis* and to situate within Heidegger's broader philosophy at the time. In the first part of the chapter, we will examine several early texts, in which Heidegger expounds on the notion of *phronesis*. These texts include the 1923 Natorp Bericht, *GA 18*: *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie (Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy)*, a lecture taught in 1924, and *GA19: Platon: Sophistes*, another lecture taught in the winter semester of 1924-25.

Thereafter, we will attempt to elucidate the implications that his interpretation of *phronesis* has with regards to ontology, ethics and *sophia* in his early thought. In this chapter, we come to realize that Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle is very rich, in that Heidegger views *phronesis* as an alternative to the way philosophy has been conducted from the Greeks until his time. Heidegger find *phronesis* appealing, as it represents an acknowledgment of the importance of factical life, as well as a return to it. In this sense, we also attempt to show that Heidegger does not extricate *phronesis* from its ethical meaning. In fact, we contend that Heidegger was still very much concerned with the ethical in his interpretation of *phronesis* and more broadly in the unfolding of his thought, in spite of a robust scholarly debate on this matter. However, what we do concede is that although Heidegger called for a return to the factical life, it seems that the theoretical attitude of *sophia* seems more in line with his conception of authenticity. This does not take away from the value he sees in *phronesis*, but

still indicates Heidegger's insistence on the primacy of *sophia*. In addition to examining the Heideggerian notion of *phronesis* for its own sake, it will help us gain a better insight into the context within which Gadamer's philosophy developed, especially from a hermeneutical standpoint, as one's hermeneutic situation cannot be neglected in this kind of inquiry.

The Natorp Bericht of 1923

The *Phenomenological Interpretations with regards to Aristotle: Indication of the Hermeneutical Situation*, also referred to as the *Aristotle-Introduction* is a text written by Martin Heidegger in 1923. This text can be regarded as an introduction to Heidegger's phenomenological treatment of Aristotle. In effect, it is an investigation on the history of ontology and logic. In this manuscript, Heidegger points to the necessity of conducting a destruction of the history of ontology, which entails a treatment of Aristotle, in order to bring into effect a fundamental ontology, which would be more fundamental that what has been accomplished hitherto. The first part of this manuscript is dedicated to the justification of the necessity of conducting a phenomenological destruction of the history of ontology and in the latter part of the text deals with Aristotle. According to Heidegger, Aristotle had posed the problem of the facticity of life in an originary way, but which was eventually covered up by scholasticism. The question guiding his interpretation of Aristotle relates to the being of human beings and how being can be conceptually explicated. One of the main arguments which can be singled out from this manuscript is that philosophy is life itself, that is, the self-interpretation from life itself, not from any external point of view. It is a critical text in studying the genesis of *Being and Time*, as Heidegger outlines several concepts that will be taken up and made central in *BT*. For the purposes of our investigation, we examine this

work, as there are significant passages dealing with the notion of *phronesis* and its relation to *Augenblick*.

Heidegger develops on the notion of *phronesis*, while he discusses Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* with respect to the dianoetic virtues, namely *sophia* and *phronesis*, as possibilities of "actualizing the genuine truthful safekeeping of Being". He translates *phronesis* as: "solicitous circumspection, circumspection which is concerned with one's own as well as others' well-being". Here, it is safe to state that Heidegger underscores the ethical dimension of *phronesis*, as *phronesis* is not merely interpreted ontologically, it is also characterized as a genuine caring for oneself and for others. He also adds: "Φρόνησις brings the that-with-respect-to-which of the dealings of human life (and dealings with human life itself) and the "how" of these dealings in their own Being into truthful safe-keeping. These dealings are πρᾶξις: the conducting [Behandeln] of one's own self in the How of dealings which are not productive, but are rather simply actional [handelnd]. Φρόνησις is the illumination-of-dealings which co-temporalizes life in its Being"[11] In this excerpt, Heidegger highlights the action-oriented scope of *phronesis*, action which is *praxis* and not *poiesis*, thus confirming the distinction between *phronesis* and *techne*. *Poiesis*, as a craft, can be taught through *techne* and acquired as a skill, and can also be forgotten, whereas p*hronesis* can be neither taught nor forgotten, as its object is constantly changing. Also, *phronesis* does not merely bring to the forefront the telos of this praxis, but it is also an elucidation of the means or the "how" of these dealings. *Phronesis* is an *aletheia praktike*; it unconceals a practical truth, from *Dasein*'s fallenness into the "they'. The last sentence of the passage highlights the temporalizing dimension of *phronesis*. That is, *phronesis* is the human capacity of

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[11] M. Heidegger, *PIA*, 381.

understanding the appropriate goals that one should undertake in light of one's temporal life, but it is also the understanding of the temporality of life, in and of itself. [12]

This leads Heidegger to develop the notion of *phronesis* and offer a lengthy explanation, which expounds on the interplay between *phronesis*, *Augenblick* and *Kairos*: "The concrete interpretation shows how the being which is καιρός constitutes itself in φρόνησις. The actional and solicitous [kind of] conducting is always a concrete conducting in the How of the concerned dealings with the world. Φρόνησις makes the location of the one who performs the action accessible: in securing the οὗ ἕνεκα (the "Why"), in making available the particular Towards-what-end [Wozu], in apprehending the "Now", and in sketching out the How φρόνησις looks to the ἔσχατόν, the outermost, the extreme, in which the determinately viewed concrete situation comes to a head. Φρόνησις is possible as a discussing, a solicitous and considerative *phronesis* only because it is primarily an αισθήσις, i.e., it is in the end a simple over-view of the moment-of-insight [Augenblick]. The πράκτον, as the being which becomes uncovered and available in the ἀληθεύειν of the φρόνησις, is something which exists as not yet such and such Being. As [36] "not yet such and such", and in fact as the that-with-respect-to-which of concern, it is at the same time already such and such, as the that-with-respect-to-which of a concrete readiness-for-dealings, whose constitutive illumination is determined by φρόνησις."[13] The latter part of this fragment from the *Natorp* Report indicates that, although the action has not yet been actualized, it is "held fast" within *phronesis*, as *phronesis* already establishes the means of the action. In this passage, it is made clear that *phronesis* is primarily an *aisthesis,* and it is only because it is

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[12] J. Backman, *Divine and Mortal Motivation*, 247.
[13] M. Heidegger, *PIA*, 382.

perceived beforehand as an *aisthesis* that it can thereafter be subjected to deliberation and become discursive. It is, above all, a seeing of what is given in the moment (*Augenblick*). The particular temporality of each situation is so unique that it cannot be understood and compartmentalized through *logos*. This particularity could only be grasped through *aisthesis*. Thus, the *Augenblick* is the moment in which the grasping of the particular givens of a situation occurs and informs the broader scope of *phronesis*, which eventually will involve deliberation. Therefore, deliberation is dependent upon what is already given in the moment-of-insight, as Heidegger notes: "[Φρόνησις] brings into circumspective view the how of the appropriate and authentically goal-achieving going-to-work, and does so out of the moment-of insight itself."[14] This passage reiterates the fundamentally intuitive aspect of *phronesis*, which would go beyond the purely rational grasp of *logos*. The attention brought by Heidegger to this intuitive character of *phronesis*, which is intrinsically bound to the notion of *Augenblick,* is of critical significance and bears noteworthy ramifications in Heidegger's interpretation, as we will also realize in the following texts covering the Aristotelean concept of *phronesis*.

GA 18

GA 18, Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie, is a lecture course given by Aristotle during the 1924 summer semester. It constitutes one of the main works in which Heidegger addresses the notion of *phronesis.* In this lecture, Heidegger departs from the ontological notion of *ousia*, which refers to the present-at-hand (i.e. things that are present to me and that I can use), and in attempts to gain a deeper understanding of it, he turns to

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[14] *Ibid.*

the everyday experience of *Dasein*. For one, he does not want to limit himself to a merely theoretical conception of *ousia*, but neither does he want to take at face value in its everyday usage. It is an attempt to shed light to the basic concepts of Aristotelean philosophy through a close examination of Aristotle's less fundamental concepts. In effect, he further investigates what the "there" *(Da)* of the "being-there" *(Dasein)* entails, that is what is given to us in our world, which is already there and in which we already find ourselves. Heidegger resorts to Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics, his Politics,* and *Rhetoric,* with the aim of uncovering and grasping the experienced/lived sense of these notions in order to arrive at what he holds to be their originary sense/experience, which has been hitherto concealed by the philosophical tradition. This project partakes in the broader attempt of Heidegger to further investigate the everydayness of *Dasein*, in order to illuminate the ontological ramifications of everydayness. It is an investigation which departs from the ontic. Precisely, it is an ontological interpretation of language and life that stems from Heidegger's reinterpretation of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Furthermore, it is important to underscore that in this lecture, Heidegger discusses quite extensively notions, such as ethics, community, and otherness, topics on which he has been accused to have remained silent time and again. This lecture also represents a significant study of *logos* and how it fundamentally affects our being-with-others and our being-there in the world. Additionally, it is quite important to note that the *GA 18* was not written by Heidegger himself, but based upon several manuscript notes written by his students. The strong cohesion that emerges from the comparison of these notes suggests that it is nonetheless a reliable source of Heidegger's thought.

Heidegger turns to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, as it provides an insight to philosophy and science in speech, within a community that shares a world. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is, as

Heidegger later put it in *BT*: "the first systematic hermeneutic of Being with one another in everydayness"[15]. Heidegger reinterprets the famous Aristotelean saying, which defines the human being as a *zoon logon echon*. According to Heidegger, the Greeks were fond of *logos,* which denoted multiple meanings in the Ancient Greek Language, among which we can identify "reason" and "speech". They acknowledged the fact that both philosophy and science could only exist and prosper by means of language. However, Heidegger underscores that the primordial sense of *logos* in Aristotle's corpus is speech and not reason. The latter meaning of the word emerges after the works of Aristotle, according to Heidegger. He does not dismiss the other meanings of *logos*, nevertheless he does maintain that they are ancillary, and that it would obscure our understanding of Aristotle if we were to take any other sense of *logos* other than that of discourse as its primary sense. Language is what ultimately differentiates us from the being-in-the-world of the animals. Moreover, he emphasizes the social dimension of language, as speaking is always a speaking with one another (*mit anderen*). Language is intrinsically communal. It is precisely because man is a *zoon logon echon* that he is a *zoon politikon*. Our world is given to us, primarily through *logos*. Thus, *logos* plays a fundamental role in the being-with of *Dasein*. Also, *logos* and its study, that is, rhetoric is inextricably linked to ethics insofar as language is, also, dependant on affects and as a consequence Heidegger discusses the Aristotelean notion of *pathos.* The successful achievement of a speech depends on the one hand, on the *ethos* of the speaker and on the other hand on the *pathé* (affects) of the listener. *Pathos* corresponds to the finding-himself of the listener, and the *ethos* amounts to the finding-himself of the speaker. The affects here refer to the mood or "attunment", which Heidegger reappropriates extensively

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[15] M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 178.

in his philosophy, especially in *Being and Time*. According to Heidegger, this represents a study of the moods, which is at the basis of rhetoric. For Heidegger, *pathos* is even more fundamental than *logos* as it participates in the formation of *logos*. Perhaps, Aristotle did not mean it exactly in this way, as for him *pathos* is not at the basis of *logos*[16]. Instead, *pathos* and logos are co-constitutive of one another. In other words, *pathos* should be shaped through *logos* and vice-versa, in the eyes of Aristotle, whereas for Heidegger *pathos* seems to occupy a more primordial position insofar as *pathos* precedes *logos.*

Moreover, in this lecture, Heidegger discusses the notion of deliberation. This discursive paradigm clearly illustrates how inextricably linked are the phenomena of language and community, as language is formed within the community and one is born in an already deeply linguistically-embedded world. Deliberation is relevant for our investigation, as it is the central mechanism set in motion in the unfolding of *phronesis*. It also demonstrates how *kairos* is constitutive of deliberation. Heidegger says about deliberation: "In this bringing-to-language of the συμφέρον, of the world insofar as it is concretely there, the world is first brought genuinely into the there. The here and now of the being of human beings becomes explicit in a determinate deliberating; through this deliberating, the human being— in modern terms—is in the concrete situation, in the genuine καιρός. The being of human beings is in this λόγος, λέγειν as λογίζεσθαι is a having-there of the world in such a way that I am in the world in a position determined by a here and now."[17] The expression "here and now" repeated twice in this passage reveals the emphasis that is put by Heidegger on the temporality of each particular situation, its significance in the process of deliberation and

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[16] O. Marjolein. *Heidegger's Reading of Aristotle's Concept of Pathos*, 18.
[17] M. Heidegger, *GA18*, 59-60.

more broadly in the unfolding of *phronesis*. The process of *logizesthai*, which is the mode of rationality of *phronesis* is fundamentally determined by the here and now of each situation, the particular circumstances, which are grounded in temporality and this constitutes the genuine notion of temporality, which is *kairos*.

Heidegger discusses the notion of *phronesis* in the context of *legein* (discourse) with relation to comportment, that he takes up from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. *Phronesis* constitutes one of the three aspects of *ethos*, which determine whether the hearer will trust the speaker or not. *Phronesis* is seen here as the ability of the speaker to "look around discourse itself". It is one of the three conditions the speaker must satisfy in order to bring about *pistis* in his listener, along with *arete* and *evnoia*. When speaking, one must also demonstrate *arete* (seriousness), that is, one says what one means, and *evnoia* (good will), namely to genuinely advise as best as one can one's listener. Heidegger formulates it as follows: "Alternatively, a speaker who shows himself to be one who speaks out for the matter out of good will, with seriousness, and in a way that looks around, will thus have real trust—he will himself be a πίστις in his λόγος."[18] A few lines later, Heidegger develops on the notion of *phronesis* as looking around the discourse itself. He explains that one must approach the subject matter within the correct perspective, and in order to achieve that he must understand the subject matter entirely. In other words, a speaker cultivating an *ethos* which will bring about *pistis* must demonstrate *phronesis*, in that he is able to seize the "bigger picture" of the issue at hand. If one does not demonstrate this kind of *orthotès* pertaining to the issue at hand, he will not awaken *pistis* in his listener. Hence, *phronesis* is here understood as the ability to speak in a way, which indicates that the speaker understands the object of discussion in a

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[18] M. Heidegger, *GA18*, 167-168.

comprehensive and thorough manner and is able to gauge the place that it occupies within a broader context. Therefore, he is able to adequately speak of the matter from the appropriate angle and that, in turn, is conveyed to his listener.

Heidegger discusses once more the notion of *phronesis* in relation to the *praxis* of human being. He differentiates between *techne* as *ergon*, and *praxis* as *ergon*, in order to determine what makes a *praxis* virtuous. On the one hand, a *techne* that is deemed good depends upon its *telos*, whereas a *praxis* which is deemed virtuous contains the *telos* in itself, in its becoming. This, in turn, is dependent of the manner in which one acts, which corresponds to the *hexis*, the "how" of the virtuous action. The first determination of the *hexis* must be *phronesis*, which entails that the one acting demonstrates a "looking around", which is "oriented towards the *Kairos* of the subject matter". One must have knowledge of its object, when one is acting. Furthermore, the *kairos* in which one is acting is critical in determining the *orthotès* of the action. This is a fundamental aspect of *phronesis*, which is crucial in Heidegger's reappropriation of it and, which, as we will discuss later, greatly influenced his student Gadamer. One's action must also be enacted when one is *prohairoumenos*, which entails that one's anticipatory orientation toward something, in the sense that one is open towards a possibility, which in this case is the virtuous action. One must also be *vevaios* and *ametakinitos*, which literally translates to firm and immobile. However, for Heidegger it does not imply that one permanently finds oneself in the same disposition. Rather, what Heidegger implies is that one must not lose one's composure and must remain committed to the virtuous action. In other words, our composure must find itself aligned to our *prohairesis*, and must also be aligned to its directionality toward *kairos*. One must attain composure each time one is faced with a new situation and attempts to carry out an action virtuously. Thus,

it is not to be considered a fixed or permanent state, but rather one must always try to reach

that state of composure, in order to remain steadfast and therefore act in a virtuous manner.

More importantly, this anticipatory orientation, which already guides action lies in

prohairesis. *Prohairesis* is the ethical disposition which is taken up in advance by *Dasein*; it is

the way in which one opens oneself to the situation and the *Augenblick*. And this very

prohairesis is the decisive factor, which determines the way one is, for one's being, and

ultimately for one's *ethos*.

In this lecture, Heidegger often refers to *phronesis* as a "looking-around". At some

point he also describes *phronesis* as follows: "It is the kind of ὁρίζεσθαι that a φρόνιμος

would do, λέγειν as λέγειν of the φρόνιμος; seeing not only as looking-toward that brings

facts of the matter into relief, but seeing of the world as looking-around, looking-around-

oneself in the world, primarily as looking-around in resolving-oneself. Being-in-care about

being-there has its mode of sight in φρόνησις."[19] Thus, *phronesis* is not a mere highlighting

of facts, but it is a looking-around of the relevant facts in a given situation. We might perhaps

put it as a *looking beyond* the mere facts, which opens up the way for one to deliberate about

the most virtuous path of action. Much like what we underscored previously, namely that

one must always have the bigger picture in mind in order to deliver a speech, which

engenders *pistis* in the listener, one must also be able to place the issue at hand in a wider

framework so that one can choose the most virtuous path of action. Heidegger also

characterized *phronesis* as a "being-in-care about being-there". Hence, one must care about

the facticity of the given situation and must also care about something that is beyond oneself,

looking-around-oneself, in order to accomplish a virtuous deed. What this points to is the

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[19] M. Heidegger, *GA 18*, 192-194.

movement that is required by *phronesis*, that is, to distance oneself from one's immediate involvements in everyday life, and more broadly from *Dasein*'s immediacy, in order to have a clearer and broader overview of what is called for in this concrete situation. *Phronesis* can thus be seen as this broadening of our field of vision, in order to take up the issue within the most appropriate perspective and act accordingly.

This lecture is undoubtedly helpful for us in bringing into relief what Heidegger intended when interpreting and making use of the Aristotelean concept of *phronesis*. The most crucial aspect of this interpretation is the emphasis that is exerted on the temporal character of *phronesis*, the *kairos*. When integrating *phronesis* into one of his discussions, whether it is regarding the *ethos* of the speaker in connection with the *pistis* in the listener or the proper manner of the virtuous action, the temporal dimension of *phronesis* is underscored. Heidegger highlights the *Augenblick* of *phronesis*, once again, when discussing the two highest forms of *hexis*, that is *phronesis* and *theoria,* and he says about *phronesis* that it is a "looking-around *in the moment*". Heidegger also emphasizes the holistic overview that is required by *phronesis*. *Phronesis* is a kind of wisdom necessitating an examination which surpasses the mere study of facts. One is *phronimos* when one is able to discern the right horizon in which these facts should be considered. This ties into what has already been said about keeping in mind the bigger picture of the situation at hand. However, it is primordial not to confuse this "bigger picture" with having a detached standpoint with respect to a situation, because one must indeed be informed by a larger portrait of the particular circumstances which one faces, but at the same time one must *care* about the situation. Indeed, one must demonstrate a solicitous "looking-around", not merely a disengaged type of "looking-around".

In this lecture, Heidegger deals exhaustively with the concept of *phronesis*. It is a lecture course, which immediately succeeds the *GA 18* lecture course. That is why, the ramifications that stem from this lecture are quite similar to those of the previous one, albeit in a considerably more developed manner with respect to *phronesis*. This volume was published in 1992 and constitutes a reconstruction of Heidegger's lecture notes. It is another critical volume among Heidegger's works, as it is a considerable work of interpretation of Ancient thought, and at the same time, it represents a substantial work as it constitutes a significant step in the development of *Being and Time*. Heidegger's ultimate aim, in this lecture, was the interpretation of Plato, but with Aristotle as a starting point. In other words, it is an interpretation of Plato through the lens of Aristotle. It is also in this lecture that he addresses Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in depth.

One of the most important achievement of this lecture pertaining to Heidegger's interpretation is the retrieval of the different modes of *aletheuein*, which signify that there is no unitary truth that is universalizable to all domains of human life. Indeed, the recovery of different modes of truth is significant for Heidegger in order to show that the Cartesian model of truth based on absolute certainty is no longer tenable, as Heidegger says: "the ways in which the world is uncovered [in human life] are not all indifferently on the same plane."[20] *Phronesis* is introduced as one of the five modes of *aletheuein*, which are *techne*, *episteme*, *phronesis*, *sophia*, and *nous*. Here, Heidegger translates the term *phronesis* as circumspection. Each of these modes of *aletheuein* are associated to the two main modes of disclosure, which are the *epistèmonikon* and the *logistikon*. *Phronesis* is regarded as the *veltistis hexis* of the

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[20] M. Heidegger, *GA 19*, 29-31.

logistikon, whereas *sophia* is the highest possibility pertaining to the *epistèmonikon*. *Phronesis* is concerned with what can be otherwise, namely an action which is contingent on its specific circumstances, while at the same time being able to change the course of these circumstances. *Phronesis* is described as the ability to deliberate well, not merely with regards to a particular end, but with regards to *zoe* itself. It is on the basis of their *telos* that *phronesis* and *techne* are distinguished. Although *techne* also deals with objects that can be otherwise, its *telos* concerns final products whose *arche* is another, whereas the *telos* of *phronesis* lies in *anthropos* itself. Heidegger underscores the ability that *phronesis* has to render *Dasein* transparent to itself, namely the capacity of *phronesis* to uncover *Dasein* to itself. Uncovering *Dasein* to itself entails that *Dasein* is initially covered up to itself. It is covered up by *Dasein's* immediate involvements in everydayness, in the "they", as Heidegger claims very clearly: "Insofar as man himself is the object of the ἀληθεύειν of φρόνησις, it must be characteristic of man that he is covered up to himself, does not see himself, such that he needs an explicit ἀ-ληθεύειν in order to become transparent to himself. […] What gives pleasure and what depresses one's disposition can destroy or confuse one's ὑπόληψις."[21] Later on, Heidegger contends that must never be taken for granted. *Dasein* experiences continuous struggle in an effort to go against the propensity of covering oneself. Heidegger furthers claims that phronesis is conscience, as it has the ability to render an action transparent and cannot be forgotten, in exactly the same manner as conscience cannot be forgotten, as Heidegger highlights, quoting Aristotle: "Hence there is no λήθη in relation to φρόνησις: "λήθη μὲν τῆς τοιαύτης ἕξεως ἔστι, φρονήσεως δ' οὐκ ἔστιν (b28ff)". As regards

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[21] M. Heidegger, *GA 19*, 51-52.

φρόνησις, there is no possibility of falling into forgetting."[22] It is in this lecture series, *GA 19*, that Heidegger explicitly states that *phronesis* is nothing other than conscience (*GA 19*, 56). This idea was further developed in his *magnum opus*, *Being and Time*. Moreover, *phronesis*, which is characterized as the making-transparent of an action to oneself, is dependent on the one hand on deliberation about establishing the means and the ends of an action and on the other hand it is most fundamentally dependent upon that which Heidegger calls the moment-of-insight (*Augenblick*). We will further examine both of these aspects of *phronesis* in the following paragraphs.

Indeed, Heidegger emphasizes the non-autonomous character of *phronesis*. *Phronesis* is not autonomous, as opposed to *sophia*, because it depends on the *agathon*. Hence, *phronesis* is dependent upon the prior disclosure of the *agathon*, the good, which entails that the disclosure of the *agathon* not only precedes the phronetic moment, but is also superior and inherently more fundamental than it. In order to arrive at the *agathon*, one must thus have a prior view of the whole, of the *katholou*, not merely of the *eschaton*, which is captured by *phronesis*: "Hence only someone who is already ἀγαθός can be φρόνιμος. The possibility of the ἀληθεύειν of φρόνησις is bound up with the proviso that the one who carries it out is himself, in his Being, already ἀγαθός. Thus, there appears, from this side as well, a peculiar belonging of φρόνησις to πρᾶξις. There pertains to πρᾶξις not only, as we have seen in the point of departure of our reflection, a certain orientation and guidance; it is not enough for praxis to be guided by circumspection, the sight of *phronesis*. For it is clear that this sight, the anticipation of the ἀγαθόν, as the mode of carrying out the disclosure, is only possible in an ἀγαθός. Φρόνησις is nothing if it is not carried out in πρᾶξις, and πρᾶξις as such is

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[22] *Ibid.*, 55-56.

determined by *arete*, by the πράκτον as ἀγαθόν.[...] The mere self-standing αληθεύειν of φρόνησις has no effect on action unless this φρόνησις is carried out by someone who is himself ἀγαθός."[23] Therefore, we can conclude that the ethical virtues must have precedence over *phronesis* in the accomplishment of the virtuous agent.

In *GA 18*, Heidegger discussed briefly the relationship between *phronesis* and *aisthesis*, as he highlighted the fact that *phronesis* is not merely a *hexis meta logou*, but it is also a kind of *aisthesis*. However, it is more so in *GA 19* and in the *Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle* discussed previously, that Heidegger develops more extensively this idea by laying out why *phronesis* is a specific kind of *aisthesis*. Heidegger takes up Aristotle's comparison between a *phronetic aisthesis* and a geometric one. Just as in geometry, one perceives the *eschaton* geometry (i.e. the *triangleness* of a triangle), so does the *aisthesis* in *phronesis* grasp the *eschaton* – albeit not of a particular geometric shape—but of the concrete situation. The *phronetic aisthesis* has also the added characteristic of being a circumspective kind of *aisthesis*, as Heidegger puts it: "The αἴσθήσις of φρόνησις is hence as φρόνησις related to the πρακτά. It is specifically an ultimate inspection of the state of affairs, but this inspection is in φρόνησις, not a mere inspection but a circumspection."[24] This claim ties into what was previously brought to light in *GA 18*, where Heidegger described *phronesis* as something more than merely bringing facts into relief. Moreover, *phronesis*, as *aisthesis* cannot be understood in the same terms as a geometric *aisthesis*, precisely because the objects studied by geometry are universal and atemporal, whereas *phronesis* as *aisthesis* ultimately deals with action, which is fundamentally unstable and unpredictable. Thus,

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[23] M. Heidegger, *GA 19,* 166-168.
[24] M. Heidegger, *GA 19*, 162-163.

phronetic aisthesis is a solicitous perceiving of the situation, which is intrinsically temporal. *Phronesis* cannot be reduced to *logos*, precisely because it exceeds it. Indeed, the deliberative aspect of *phronesis* is carried out via *logos*, that is *euboulia*, but it is more fundamentally dependent upon the "disclosure of the situation as the disclosure bears upon the approaching moment of action (*Augenblick*)"[25] It is exactly due to this transcending of the limits of rationality inherent in *phronesis* that Heidegger takes up this Aristotelean concept and confers to it such a central position in his early works, which lead up to *Being and Time*.

From this discussion of *aisthesis* in *GA 19*, ensues an examination of the practical *nous*, this practical seeing, characteristic of *phronesis* understood as the *Augenblick* of action. It is a decisive element of *phronesis*, as it is both its *arche* and its *eschaton*; it is its starting point while simultaneously constituting that towards which the whole of the deliberation is oriented. *Phronesis*, while being informed by a much wider environment than that of the concrete situation, must be extremely perceptive and responsive to the *Augenblick* of the circumstances and must carefully decide on the *kairos* of the action. Whilst *phronesis* is shaped by one's *hexeis*, by one's aims, by one's *theoria*, and by one's comprehension of life in its entirety, it must also be sensitive to the *Augenblick* of the situation, to the here and now of the situation. Heidegger puts it as follows: "Φρόνησις is the inspection of the this here now, the inspection of the concrete momentariness of the transient situation. As αἴσθησις it is a look of an eye in the blink of an eye [der Blick des Auges, der Augen-blick] a momentary look at what is momentarily concrete, which can always be otherwise."[26] In this excerpt, it is clear that what is brought to the forefront through the *Augenblick* is the temporal

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[25] W. McNeil, *The Time of Life: Heidegger and Ethos*, 115.
[26] M. Heidegger, *GA 19*, 162-163.

particularity of the situation one is confronted with in *phronesis*. *Kairos* designates the opportune moment of action. Heidegger also stipulates that *phronesis* and *sophia* have the same structure, that is an *aletheuein aneu logou*. Yet, they are different in that *sophia* is concerned with what is *aei*, the universal, which remains the same, and *phronesis* engages in the most extreme case of concretion, which occurs in a momentary glance, *Augenblick*.

The notion of *Augenblick* is one that Heidegger took up and radicalized, as he himself recognizes that there have been philosophers prior to him, who attempted to arrive at a more originary conception of time, but did not fully succeed in this undertaking, according to Heidegger[27]. Heidegger embraced the notion of *Augenblick* as the decisive moment of action itself in light of his authentic conception of *Dasein*. By contrast, other philosophers who have taken up this very concept, have merely represented it as a fleeting moment, according to Heidegger, as their view of time constitutes an inauthentic one. The notion of *Augenblick* drawn from *phronesis*, played a crucial role in the ekstatic conception of the temporality of *Dasein*.

In Heidegger's *Sophist*, lies therein a rich analysis of the concept of *phronesis*, revealing its complex nature and its intricate unfolding in *Dasein*. On the one hand, it is dependent upon rational deliberation about the means and the ends of an action, but at the same time, it is extra-logical as it is also more primarily grasped through a practical *aisthesis*, which is in turn contingent on the *kairos*, the opportune moment of engagement in action.

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[27] As Heidegger writes in his lecture course *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1927), "Aristotle already saw the phenomenon of the *Augenblick*, the *kairos*, and delimited it in Book VI of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, although without succeeding in connecting the temporal character specific to the *kairos* with what he otherwise knows as time (the *nun*)" (*GA24*, 409). In the same vein, Heidegger recognizes the importance assigned to the *Augenblick* in Kierkegaard's philosophy, but insists that Kierkegaard understands the moment only as the "now" of the ordinary concept of time, that is, he does not elucidate the originary temporality of the *Augenblick* (*GA24*, 408).

Ultimately, it is this extra-logical dimension of *phronesis*, which interests us in conducting this investigation. It is exactly this character of *phronesis*, which exceeds rational understanding that is taken up by Heidegger, contra the purely scientific conducting of phenomenology, and which heavily influenced Gadamer. Indeed, Gadamer encountered Aristotle through these early Heideggerian lectures and claimed that Heidegger : "took his first, decisive distance from 'phenomenology as a strict science"[28] Heidegger, expanding on Aristotle's *phronesis*, exposed the limitations of a purely scientific rationality, specifically with respect to adequately understanding the full implications of the facticity of human life. We will, without a doubt, analyze and compare more in depth what attracted Heidegger in the notion of *phronesis* in relation to Gadamer's own inclination to use this term and place it at the epicenter of his hermeneutics in the next chapters. For now, it can be said that the power of *phronesis* to shed light on phenomena that cannot be elucidated by a rigorous science is one of the main reasons for which both Heidegger and Gadamer are drawn to the Aristotelean *phronesis*. In the next chapter, we will turn to the secondary literature pertaining to Heidegger's interpretation of *phronesis*, as we will examine what Heidegger achieved through his interpretation of Aristotle, and more particularly, *phronesis.*

In the following analysis, we will concentrate on the ontologization of *phronesis* effected by Heidegger of Aristotle's work, more precisely of the *NE*. We will also examine the relationship between ontology and ethics, so as to find out that they are not two distinct fields in the eyes of Heidegger. Thereafter, we will analyze more closely Heidegger's position pertaining to the relationship between *sophia* and *phronesis*, which is rather complex and

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[28] Gesammelte Werke. Bd. 3, 286–87. Translated by John W. Stanley under the title *Heidegger's Ways*, 141 (translation modified) (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

ambiguous. We will maintain that Heidegger upheld the primacy of *sophia* over *phronesis*, albeit in a different way than Aristotle did. These two analyses are of primordial importance in demonstrating the similarity and divergence in Heidegger's and Gadamer's respective interpretations of Aristotle.

Ontologization and the Ethical

As we have just noted, Heidegger's intention in rehabilitating Aristotle is inextricably linked with the ontological scope of his project, namely to bring the question of Being to the forefront of philosophy. In order to achieve this, he conducts a recovering as well as a *Destruktion* of the philosophical tradition with the objective of re-establishing it anew in an authentic manner and in keeping with the ultimate question of Being. It is in the introduction of *Being and Time* that he clearly exposes this intention, but he operates this recovering and *Destruktion* more concretely in his other works. For instance, in *GA19*, Heidegger recovers Greek philosophy by tackling its two main figures, Plato and Aristotle. The figure that is of interest for us within the scope of this inquiry is Aristotle. What is essential to Heidegger is to retrieve what Aristotle had written on the topics of Being and beings. When analyzing the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *GA 19*, it is quite evident that Heidegger interprets Aristotle within an ontological horizon. We will attempt to demonstrate that Heidegger still takes into account the ethical, as ontology and ethics, we will try to show, are not two distinct spheres, but are intimately linked. Indeed, Heidegger does take into account the ethical dimension of *Dasein*. Even though, for instance, according to Taminiaux, Heidegger is not concerned with distinguishing good from bad, or just from unjust, but instead he is interested in the dynamic between authenticity and inauthenticity, which manifestly shines through in Heidegger's

exposition of Aristotle[30]. Even though we concede this point to Taminiaux, it does not follow that the distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity is not an ethical one. In fact, it would be almost impossible to remove any normative ethical implications from the Heideggerian concept of authenticity. In addition, in the previous examination of Heidegger's early lectures pertaining to Aristotle, it is clear that the *agathon* constitutes a central element. Therefore, even if Heidegger does not use the traditional language of ethics, it does not imply that he is not preoccupied with ethics altogether. In *GA 19*, Heidegger is mostly interested in the kind of relationship the dianoetical *aretai,* namely *phronesis* and *techne* maintain with the Aristotelean notion of truth, *aletheia*, a notion, which he has reappropriated from Aristotle as unconcealment. However, the ontologization operated by Heidegger does not necessarily imply a complete ethical abstraction, as we will contend wih the support of Reid's and Thanassas' claims, which both state that ontology and ethics are not mutually exclusive.

If we pay close attention to the analysis Heidegger makes of *phronesis*, we can confirm the ontologization that he operates throughout this reappropriation. For example, Heidegger translates Aristotle's *eu zen olos* into "what is conducive to the right mode of Being of *Dasein* as such and as a whole"[32] Further in the same section of Plato's *Sophist*, he equates *phronesis* with a *hexis of aletheuein,* which he then translates as "a disposition of human *Dasein* such that in it I have at my own disposal my own transparency"[33]. In addition, Heidegger also translates ευπραξία by *rechte Sein des Menschen*. The *ontologization* of Aristotle especially in regard to practical philosophy and more particularly φρόνησις is an expression posited by

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[30] J. Taminiaux, *Gadamer à l'écoute de Heidegger ou la fécondité d'un malentendu*, 24.
[32] M. Heidegger, *GA 19*, 47-49.
[33] *Ibid.*

F. Volpi[34], which has influenced numerous scholars and on which most seem to be in agreement. His main tenets are that, in his interpretation, Heidegger posits *Dasein*'s determinations as strictly ontological : (1) "as ways of being in the strict sense, such that all ontic meaning is excluded in principle"[35] and (2) "their content is not something that *Dasein* can freely choose to have or not to have but is something from which it cannot be abstracted"[36]. We might be in agreement with the second proposition, but the first tenet seems to be quite difficult to maintain, as there are inevitable ontic ramifications that result from the establishment of a way of Being. Furthermore, Heidegger's own ontological investigation begins from the ontic level.

One cannot claim that Heidegger does not retain any ethical concern, when carrying out the ontologization of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Thanassas claims that the ontologization of Heidegger was already latent in Aristotle, and does not necessarily imply a complete disregard for ethics. According to Thanassas, the ontological and ethical dimensions are not mutually exclusive. This conclusion is based on the erroneous assumption made by modernity that ethics must be conducted without any metaphysical basis.[37] He is in opposition to those who view Heidegger's operation as an *ontologization* of Aristotle and by the same token as an extrication of its ethical content, as he sees in Aristotle an inherent ontological dimension. For Thanassas, the concept of φρόνησις unquestionably already contains an ontological character, in the sense that it presents us with a "way of Being" of *Dasein*. Therefore, although Heidegger brings Aristotle's ethics within an

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[34] F. Volpi, *Dasein as Praxis: the Heideggerian Assimilation and the Radicalization of the Practical Philosophy of Aristotle*, 1998.
[35] P. Thanassas, *Phronesis vs. Sophia: on Heidegger's Ambivalent Aristoteleanism*, 42.
[36] *Ibid.*
[37] *Ibid.*

ontological framework, it does not follow that Heidegger subjects Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* to a total ethical abstraction. We should look at Heidegger's ontologization, more as an attempt to bind together the fields of ontology and ethics. He tries to ground ethics within a much deeper layer of *Dasein*, namely its Being.

It is also in *Plato's Sophist*, that Heidegger posits that *Gewissen* constitutes *phronesis*. He puts it in the following way:"Φρόνησις is nothing other than conscience set into motion, making an action transparent. Conscience cannot be forgotten."[38] Some have used this argument to back the claim that Heidegger implies a complete ethical abstraction when equating *phronesis* to *Gewissen*. Despite the fact that Aristotle would not have argued that *phronesis* is conscience, as this concept obviously had not yet emerged in the Greek world, conscience still has an unquestionable moral scope. Therefore, *Gewissen* does comprise an ethical connotation; it is the capacity of one to render one's actions transparent to oneself, it is the most intimate knowledge that one can have of one's own *Dasein*. Rendering one and one's actions transparent to oneself cannot be undertaken without any ethical ramifications. According to Volpi, this *ontologization* is predicated upon Aristotle's own claim that *phronesis* is something more than an "έξις αληθής μετά λόγου πρακτικών περί τα ανθρώπω αγαθά και πρακτική". In Aristotle's view, there is something of *phronesis*' essence that cannot be captured by the latter definition. The Stagirite also contends that *phronesis* cannot be forgotten, as opposed to *techne*. From these assertions, one can understand how Heidegger arrived at equating *phronesis* to *Gewissen*. For one, just like *phronesis*, our conscience cannot be forgotten, it is something that we are constantly aware of and it is also our conscience, which captures the *aesthesis* characteristic of the phronetic moment. Furthermore, it is very

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[38] M. Heidegger, *GA 19*, 55-56.

difficult to claim that the concept of conscience can be totally devoid of any moral content. What Heidegger arrives at is a deeper anchoring of *phronesis* and its ethical scope, as he renders it an integral part of *Dasein*'s *Gewissen*. Even, if one examines the concept of *Gewissen* in *Being and Time*, one will come to the realization that there are important ethical aspects that Heidegger attributes to the concept. Therefore, Heidegger's ontologization of *phronesis* cannot be viewed and characterized as an ethical dismissal. It is also what Heidegger explicitly states in one of his first manuscripts dealing with Aristotle, the *Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle:* "The Ethics, as the explication of the being which in Being-human, human-life, the movement of life, is then to be placed into this ontological horizon."[39] *Pace* Taminiaux, Heidegger's concern for the good is obvious in many parts of his early courses, which were the object of our attention in the previous section. Indeed, Heidegger devotes a whole section in *GA 18* (section 17.c) to the genesis of the good (*arete*). His own concept of *Besorgen* seems to be imbued with an ethical dimension, particularly as he describes it in *GA 18*: ""As knowing-one's-way-around, concern about something has an ἀγαθόν within itself, explicitly there. Concern is not something different than, and so only accidentally, a being-after."[40] James D. Reid even argues that there are significant parallels between the concept of *agathon* which Heidegger takes up from Aristotle and his later account of authentic existence in *Being and Time*.[41] Therefore, it is nearly impossible to claim that Heidegger's ontology is completely emancipated from any evaluative content.

In order to support the claim made by Thanassas, which stipulates that Heidegger's fundamental ontology does not preclude the possibility of any ethical concern, we will turn

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[39] M. Heidegger, *PIA*, 391.
[40] M. Heidegger, *GA18*, 126.
[41] James D. Reid, *Heidegger's Moral Ontology*, 109.

to James D. Reid's eminent work on this topic in his book, *Heidegger's Moral Ontology*. Indeed, Heidegger's aim at getting back to the question of Being and working at a fundamental ontology engenders significant ethical ramifications. Heidegger worked at a new definition of the human Being and life. This kind of inquiry will forcibly impact one's way of Being and by the same token how one ought to live one's life, as Reid puts it: "A philosophical claim can be construed as ethical insofar as it bears ultimately upon the way in which human beings attempt to live and to understand and interpret themselves, for the sake of living a better way of life. A species of philosophical criticism deserves to be called "ethical" insofar as it questions and evaluates certain positions, attitudes, and theses in terms of an ideal of human life at stake in the critical practice."[42] What is described by Reid is precisely the kind of inquiry Heidegger embarks on. What might seem, at first glance, as a strictly theoretical endeavour on Heidegger's behalf has indeed significant implications in the creation of a new ethical ideal, although it is not conveyed in the usual moral language, precisely because this new ethico-ontic ideal is more deeply rooted in the Being of beings, and goes beyond the habitual rules of conduct, which according to Heidegger, are removed of what he calls a *living morality*.[43]

Moreover, it is widely known that Heidegger was a fervent advocate of philosophy as a way of life, not as a field of study which examines various objects, just as other fields of knowledge do. It the same vein, when Heidegger attempts to go back to the fundamental question of Being, he precisely wants to avoid falling in the trap of delimiting factical life from his theoretical questioning. Therefore, the question of Being cannot be separated from *Dasein*'s

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[42] Ibid., 60.
[43] M.Heidegger, *GA 61*, 164.

life, as Reid puts it very justly: "The *Seinsfrage* is not an ethical question and the ontologist does not ask about ethics because the question concerning the meaning of being already reflects the deepest ethical determination of *Dasein.* Ontological questioning embraces the ethical from the very start. Philosophy is not, according to the early Heidegger, detached inquiry, an attempt to get things right, at least not in that (objectifying) way: the philosophical attitude is a life-stance, and philosophy itself a paradigmatic way of life."[44] Hence, in Heidegger's reinterpretation of the human being as *Dasein*, he is simultaneously aiming at a redefinition of the "how" of our way of being in the world, as he puts it in *GA 18*: "Ἀγαθόν is not an objective thing buzzing around, but instead it is a *how of being-there itself*"[45] In this passage, it is clear that Heidegger understands the good as an integral part of *Dasein* and its being, and does not view the *agathon* as something detached from the investigation into the question of being. It is also what Heidegger explicitly maintains in his much later *Letter on Humanism*, where he states: "If the name 'ethics,' in keeping with the basic meaning of the word *êthos*, should now say that ethics ponders the abode of the human being, then that thinking which thinks the truth of being as the primordial element of the human being, as the one who ek-sists, is in itself original ethics. However, this thinking is not ethics in the first instance because it is ontology." In this passage, it is made clear to us that, in the eyes of Heidegger, ontology cannot be thought as discipline dissociated from ethics, but that it is in itself a more originary sense of the ethical, that Heidegger aims at exploring through his study of ontology.

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[44] James D. Reid, *Heidegger's Moral Ontology*, 62.
[45] M. Heidegger, *GA 18*, 49.

In our previous section, we have also placed into relief the way in which Heidegger viewed *Dasein* as a deeply communal being sharing the world with other *Dasein*. The *Mitsein* that is deeply anchored in *Dasein* is also constitutive of the ontology of *Dasein*. By examining the everydayness of *Dasein* in *GA18* and accentuating the communal being that constitutes *Dasein*, Heidegger demonstrates that the ethical component of our existence is primordial, and that it is profoundly entrenched in our consciousness, more so than any theoretical enterprise, that is, it pre-exists any intellectual endeavour. We have also pointed out the ubiquitous instances where Heidegger defines *phronesis* in terms of care, and it is obvious that the concept of care takes up a primordial position in Heidegger's philosophy from his early lectures all the way to his *magnum opus*, *Being and Time*, in which Heidegger defines *Dasein* as care. Further, in GA 18, Heidegger makes it clear that care is a care about something, a care which is directed towards the good: "As knowing-one's-way-around, concern about something has an *agathon* within itself, explicitly there. Concern is not something different than, and so only accidentally, a being-after [the good]."[46] In light of these assertions, it would be an arduous task to maintain that Heidegger does not take into account the ethical in any way or respect. Heidegger's concern for the ethical is palpable throughout his work, although it might not be *prima facie* evident. We can view the whole project of phenomenological destruction and formal indication in light of a deeply ethical consideration on Heidegger's behalf. Indeed, the ultimate purpose of Heidegger conducting this phenomenological destruction of the history of philosophy and his project of establishing a new language to point to worldly phenomena is not to know for the sole purpose of knowing, it is the retrieval of a deeper kind of truth, a truth which pertains to life,

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[46] Ibid., 126.

and this is to be considered ultimately as an ethical truth.[47] Thus, the ethical function of Heidegger's phenomenological destruction is precisely to confront ourselves with the truth of who we truly are, removed from all the prejudices and misconceptions which have engendered the manipulation and distortion of our self-conception. Therefore, to say that Heidegger's thought did not bear any moral consequences is to miss the mark and to fail to grasp the broader and more profound implications of Heidegger's renewed ontology.

In defending the view that Heidegger's ontology had a significant ethical bearing, it is more likely that we are able to see that Heidegger's reappropriation of *phronesis* is brought into effect within an ontological framework that does not preclude the ethical in any sense. Rather, it is an ontological framework grounding and grounded within the ethical, as Reid writes: "The experiences that stand at the center of Heidegger's analysis of concernful being-in-the-world are ethical, in a broad sense articulated in the Introduction. At times the accent falls on an Aristotelian ideal of practical wisdom (*phronesis*), in other contexts Kant's distinction between things and persons and the life of freedom come more sharply into focus."[48] Indeed, what we have tried to demonstrate is that the ontologization of Aristotelean philosophy and more particularly of *phronesis* does not amount into an ethical abstraction. *Phronesis*, as it has been examined in the previous sections, obviously encompasses an ethical meaning. *Phronesis* as solicitous circumspection, as self-transparency, as an integral part of the *ethos* of a speaker, all these aspects attributed to *phronesis* by Heidegger point to the multifariousness of the concept, but also and most importantly its intrinsic ethical character.

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[47] James D. Reid, *Heidegger's Moral Ontology,* 200.
[48] Ibid., 212-213.

Sophia* vs *Phronesis

The examination of the relationship between σοφία and φρόνησις is of capital importance for the purposes of this inquiry, as it is an indispensable element of Aristotle's philosophy and by the same token of the ulterior interpretations that ensued. Both Heidegger and Gadamer have come up with substantial interpretations of the Stagirite. For the sake of gaining a deeper understanding of Gadamer's understanding of Aristotle, we must look closely into his master's interpretation, that is Heidegger. The task of this sub-section will be to elucidate Heidegger's stance pertaining to the relationship between *sophia* and *phronesis*. In order to render evident Heidegger's stance on this issue, which is complex and has yielded a lot of conflictual scholarly debate, it is of crucial importance that we turn to his initial intentions. We are well aware that Heidegger's main project was to establish an *authentic* way of doing philosophy. That is why he turned to tradition, namely in order to bring forth and uncover the *right* way of conducting philosophy. On the one hand, it is in order to bring to the forefront all the hidden assumptions that are taken for granted in the whole of the philosophical project since the Greeks, that he interprets their philosophy, on the other hand he does so in order to potentially retrieve within the whole of the history of philosophy a way of conducting philosophy which is authentic. Therefore, he inevitably turned to the Greek fathers of philosophy: Plato and Aristotle.

Indeed, Heidegger felt the urge to tackle the primacy of the theoretical over the practical, which has dominated the whole of philosophy since Plato and Aristotle, what he called the "*Generalherrschaft des Theoretischen*"[51]*.* In order to do so, he turned to Aristotle, the author of this capital distinction, which thereafter remained deeply entrenched in the

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[51] M. Heidegger, *GA 56/57*, 84-89

philosophical tradition. Given this motive behind Heidegger's philosophy, it is legitimate to suppose that he treats Aristotle thoroughly with the aim of destructing this well-established dichotomy and the equally deeply rooted authority of *theoria* over *praxis*. However, the issue is much more complex and the scholarly debate is far from homogeneous. Indeed, there is a debate amongst scholars, some of which claim that Heidegger reappropriates Aristotle's primacy of *sophia* over *phronesis* with the ultimate aim of refuting his position and others maintain that Heidegger follows Aristotle in considering *phronesis* as inferior to *sophia*, although both are, without a doubt, considered as the highest modes of reason. The goal of this inquiry is not to settle this debate once and for all as it is way beyond our scope, but we still want to be able to compare Gadamer's interpretations of Aristotle with the interpretations held by his master, and for that we need to grasp Heidegger's own interpretation and to have a clear idea -as much as possible- of the views that he held pertaining to *sophia* and *phronesis*. We will argue that Heidegger's position is not clear-cut and rather than hastily settling for the superiority of one mode of *aletheuein* over the other, he seems to be well aware of the dilemma that results from this relationship. However, we will still attempt to demonstrate that there are clear signs pointing to the similarities of Heidegger's concept of authenticity and his analysis of σοφία in *GA 19*, which alludes to the fact that *sophia* maintains its superiority over *phronesis*. In no way does he associate *phronesis* to inauthencity; both σοφία and *phronesis* constitute the two most authentic mode of being. Yet, in *GA 19*, it seems that Heidegger does contend that σοφία holds a superior position. How can this be the case if his initial purpose was precisely to defeat the persistence of σοφία as the ultimate mode of being throughout history? To answer this question, we will mainly focus on three commentators of Heidegger's interpretation in an attempt to clarify

this seemingly inconsistent position held by Heidegger. We will take a look at the commentaries of Jacques Taminiaux[52], Pavlos Kontos[53] and F.J. Gonzales[54], all going against some parts of Franco Volpi's influential commentary, which associates *sophia* to inauthenticity. First, we will expose the manner in which Heidegger stands together with Aristotle in upholding the supremacy of *sophia*, and then we will reveal in what ways Heidegger reappropriates the concept of σοφία and makes it his own, thus distancing himself from the philosophical tradition, which by the same token allows him to achieve his initial intention, namely challenging the reign of σοφία as it is construed traditionally.

Heidegger tackles the supreme modality of *theoria*, which is *sophia*, according to Aristotle. Ultimately, this is what interests Heidegger the most in *GA 19*, as his main goal is to address Plato's dialogue, which presents the *bios theoretikos* as the highest way of life. Aristotle attributed four characteristics to σοφία, namely *totality*, *difficulty*, *rigor*, and *autonomy*. In regards to totality, one can claim that the wise is not interested in the sum of the parts, but rather in a *totality* which is, according to Heidegger, the utmost expression of the beings in regard to Being.[55] Moreover, It is a *difficult* quest as the wise has to go against the current, that is against idle chatter and the fallenness in *das Man*. He opposes *sophia* with *aisthesis*, which is the object of the *polloi*. *Sophia* implies that one has moved beyond the idle chatter and everyday considerations that stem from the immediacy of *aisthesis*, as he discusses in *GA 19* : "Σοφία, however, is concerned with advancing into what remains covered in immediate *Dasein*, into the μάλιστα καθόλου, and this advancement occurs in

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[52] J. Taminiaux, *Gadamer à l'écoute de Heidegger ou la fécondité d'un malentendu*, 2009
[53] P. Kontos, *L'éthique aristotélicienne et le chemin de Heidegger,* 1997
[54] F.J. Gonzales, *Plato and Heidegger*, 2009
[55] J. Taminiaux, *Gadamer à l'écoute de Heidegger*, 14.

opposition to immediate vision. [...] Σοφία is a counter-tendency against immediate *Dasein* and its tendency to remain caught up in immediate appearances. As such, *σοφία* is difficult for *Dasein*. [...] Σοφία arises as a counter-movement to αίσθησις."[56] In this excerpt, it is clear that Heidegger, when describing *sophia*, it is his notion of authenticity, which strongly shines through. This passage highlights the correspondence between the concept of σοφία and that of authenticity in the eyes of Heidegger. Indeed, totality and rigor characterize the Aristotelean σοφία and Heidegger transposes these qualities to his own notion of authenticity. This proves that Heidegger does not merely expose Aristotle's ideas but identifies himself here with what the Stagirite wrote while melting Aristotle's position into his own. Hence, it is safe to claim that it is his own position that strongly shines through this interpretation.

Furthermore, *sophia's teleiosis* is ευδαιμονία which Heidegger translates as *Eigentlichkeit* (authenticity). Again, here we can see how Heidegger's appropriation of Aristotle serves the project that he elaborates more in depth in *BT.* It is *sophia*, the contemplative life which for Aristotle and Heidegger ultimately constitutes and leads to authenticity. As opposed to *phronesis*, *sophia* does not depend on the accomplishment of an action (*eupraxia*), in turn determined by the variability of circumstances, which *phronesis* must always overcome—or take into account to the least. Autonomy belongs to *sophia*—not *phronesis*—as it arises when one has moved beyond everydayness and has captured the totality, which is simultaneously the goal and the principle of *Dasein* and is achieved through *thaumazein* and *diaporein*. Thus, Heidegger praises Aristotle for seeing that σοφία is the *malista agathon*. Moreover, although both *sophia* and *phronesis* hold the good as their end,

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[56] M. Heidegger, *GA 19,* 98-99.

phronesis aims at an ontic good in the practical realm, whereas *sophia* is oriented towards the purely ontological concept of the good. However, there still remains a problem: even though σοφία can accomplish itself autonomously and is directed towards the pure concept of good, it is nevertheless utterly disconnected from facticity. From the start, Heidegger intended to shed light on facticity and to challenge a type of blind *theoria*, which is completely detached from human facticity. Hence, the real dilemma surrounding the notion of autonomy can be put in the following words: on the one hand *phronesis* does not possess autonomy and is dependent on factual circumstances, on the other hand, θεωρία is autonomous, but by its very definition, is cut off from human facticity. Is it possible for Heidegger to resolve the dilemma when choosing *sophia* over *phronesis* without defeating his ultimate purpose? It is difficult to give a definitive answer, as Heidegger himself is fully aware of this dilemma. Still, we can claim that Heidegger upholds the primacy of *sophia* in *GA 19*, but it is justified on the basis of different reasons in the case of Heidegger than in Aristotle's case, according to Taminiaux. For the Greeks, the theoretical life pertained to what is perpetual and immutable, whereas for Heidegger it pertains to the *being for-the-sake-of-which* (i.e. self-understanding) of *Dasein*. Further, Heidegger succeeds in his initial intention, as he does not uphold a stark opposition between the theoretical and the practical. Indeed, as Gonzales notes, Heidegger attempts to merge the theoretical in the practical. Instead of subjecting the practical to the theoretical, Heidegger posits the theoretical as the most genuine kind of practical life.[57] This demonstrates that, while he is upholding the primacy of *sophia*, the latter concept nevertheless undergoes a transformation initiated by Heidegger, which substantially departs from its traditional comprehension.

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[57] F.J. Gonzales, *Plato and Heidegger*, 84.

Another hint, which points to Heidegger's association of *sophia* with authenticity, as highlighted by Kontos, is the characterization of *sophia* as totality, as the view of the whole. This ultimately refers to the *being-toward-death,* which is attained when *Dasein* becomes fully aware of its ownmost authenticity. It implies the view of the whole, which equally qualifies *sophia*: "So he does not mean that the σοφός sees the whole as the sum of all the particulars; instead, the σοφός understands what every particular, along with the others, *is* ultimately."[58] Indeed, *Dasein* needs to view its existence as a whole and understand that what it fundamentally is, is *being-toward-death*. This view of the whole is what guarantees the authenticity of *Dasein* as *for-the-sake-of-which*. What σοφία is for Aristotle, Heidegger has neatly made it correspond with what he calls the *being-toward-death*, namely *Dasein*'s ownmost authenticity. Indeed, autarchy and totality discussed earlier as well as the view of the whole, which characterize *sophia*, both constitute attributes that Heidegger ascribes to resolute authenticity in section 60 of *Being and Time*.[59] Thus, it becomes more clear as to why and how *sophia* upholds the superiority, as its attributes correspond to those of authenticity in *Being and Time*. It is via the state of *sophia* that one actually realizes one's ownmost possibility, which is death and therefore attains authenticity, which is fundamentally characterized by this acute awareness of *Dasein*'s mortality.

Yet, the celebrated commentary of F. Volpi associated *sophia* with inauthenticity and attributed the reigning position to *phronesis*. This interpretation seems totally cogent with the initial purpose of Heidegger, which we discussed previously, that is to dethrone the primacy of *sophia* in the philosophical tradition. It follows from the distinction introduced

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[58] M. Heidegger, *GA 19*, 97-98.
[59] J. Taminiaux, *Gadamer à l'écoute de Heidegger*, 88.

by Heidegger between *Zuhandenheit and Vorhandenheit*. *Vorhandenheit* constitutes the equivalent of the thing-in-itself, which has been posited and widely accepted in the tradition of philosophy as *theoria*; the highest knowledge possible is the objective knowledge of the thing-in-itself. This is why Volpi associated *sophia* with inauthenticity because it is modeled after the Heideggerian notion of *Vorhandenheit* and for Heidegger, it is exactly this kind of Cartesian presupposition that must be swept away. However, Taminiaux rightly observed the ambiguity of the concept of *sophia* for Heidegger. The dilemma can be put in the following terms: on the one hand, *sophia* cannot escape the inauthenticity of *theoria (Vorhandenheit)* to which it has been subjected by the philosophical tradition from the beginning (including Aristotle), but at the same time Heidegger attributes to *sophia* the status of the highest mode of existence, which necessarily implies that he has *thoroughly* transformed the concept. How does he operate this kind of profound transformation? Indeed, in *GA 19* Heidegger exposes Aristotle's position on the supremacy of *sophia*, whilst also standing together with Aristotle on this claim, albeit for different *Heideggerian* reasons. According to Taminiaux, instead of cutting off the activity of *sophia* from *phronesis* and from human affairs, which was what the philosophical tradition had brought into effect, he subjects *phronesis* to *sophia* and attributes to *sophia* a higher ontological status, in a way that *sophia* finds itself parallel to *phronesis*, but it is superior as its authenticity is increased. Furthermore, in accord with Gonzales' commentary, the *theorein,* which Heidegger appropriates from Aristotle does not constitute a *theoria*, which is detached from human facticity. Thus, the Aristotelean notion of θεωρία as interpreted by Heidegger does not resemble the modern notion of the "theoretical", which is harshly criticized by Heidegger. Instead of being totally separated from life, it represents a

way of life: "*ich lebe in diesem* θεωρείν"[60]. Therefore, even if Heidegger stands together with Aristotle in maintaining the precedence of *theoria* over *phronesis*, he does not conceive the notion of *theoria* in the same manner as tradition has envisaged it. It is not an activity, which is disconnected from human facticity, and it does not entail a purge from life, an *Ent-leb-nis,* but constitutes rather the highest mode of living. We have to think of *theorein* not as the contemplative life, it is not a mere contemplation of the means that lead one to authenticity, it is a *state* in which one *finds* oneself. For instance, Gonzales compares the *theorein* not with the medical practice, i.e., the examination of the means securing health but with the state of *being* healthy, as such. In *Die Grundbegriffe der antiken Philosophie,* Heidegger construes the *bios theoretikos* as the way of being "in which man to the highest degree fulfills his very own possibility to be, in which man *authentically is*"[61]. To which he answers that the life lived by Aristotle is the highest kind of life, namely a life of "reine Erforschung"[62]. This passage, along with many others that we have highlighted, demonstrates how Heidegger is not solely interpreting Aristotle, but he is equally expressing his own vision through the appropriation of Aristotle. This predilection for σοφία is also evident in his previous manuscript of 1922, *Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle*, to which Gadamer made the remark that Heidegger's attention focused on σοφία rather than on *phronesis*. In this manuscript, Heidegger equally maintains that σοφία does not look at life as its object, but rather that it unfolds in the very movement of life, in its being.

What then corresponds to *phronesis*? It is certainly not inauthenticity. It is evident throughout *GA 19* that *phronesis* corresponds to conscience for Heidegger, as was eminently

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[60] M. Heidegger, *GA 19,* 116.
[61] M. Heidegger, *GA 22*, 312.
[62] Ibid., 313

brought to light by F. Volpi.[63] For Heidegger, *phronesis* is the fundamental structure of *Dasein* which underlies all other modes of Being of *Dasein*; it is conscience (*Gewissen*). *Phronesis* constitutes the originary structure to which *techne* and *sophia* are construed as counter-movements (*Gegentendenz*). On the one side, τέχνη, associated with *Verfallen,* constitutes the inauthentic tendency of immediate *Dasein* and *sophia* designates the "counter-movement against immediate *Dasein*". *Phronesis* is characterized by the transparency to oneself. It is the space that allows for disclosure of what separates *Dasein* from its ends, according to Heidegger. As F. Volpi puts it, conscience corresponds to the space in which *Dasein* finds itself when it is ready to hear the call of conscience. That is the first step in the realization of *Dasein*'s authentic self. *Phronesis* constitutes this horizon in which authenticity can be achieved, as conscience constitutes the horizon in which *Dasein*'s own authenticity can be actualized, but it is not authenticity itself. It fundamentally precedes *Dasein*'s inevitable concealment in inauthenticity as well as its realization as authentic. It is the space in which *Dasein* can hear the call to authenticity.

In sum, we have showed that Heidegger stands by the superiority of *sophia* over *phronesis*, but he nevertheless subjects the notion of σοφία to a transformation, which strips it away from any pre-judgments embedded in the philosophical tradition. He finds in the qualities of σοφία a more authentic and radical way of being *Dasein*, which he transposes to his own notion of authenticity (i.e., totality, rigor, autarchy). And all the while, he paradoxically succeeds in the destruction of the theoretical supremacy that has pervaded philosophy, precisely because he understands *sophia* in a different light and frees the notion

[63] F. Volpi*, Dasein as Praxis : the Heideggerian Assimilation and the Radicalization of the Practical Philosophy of Aristotle,* 1992.

from its ingrained assumptions that have prevailed in philosophy. It is also important to underline that Heidegger's upholding of the primacy of *sophia* over *phronesis* does not entail that he abstracts from the ethical. Our aim is to demonstrate that although he does conserve the precedence of *sophia* over *phronesis* from Aristotle, it is not the Aristotelean notion of *sophia* which is set forth by Heidegger. Rather, what we have attempted to show is that precisely because Heidegger's notion of *phronesis* is different from Aristotle's, he can allow himself to maintain the superiority of *sophia*, without necessarily supporting a classical view of the theoretical life, that would be completely detached from the practical. On the contrary, what Heidegger wanted to arrive at was a merge of these two spheres by destroying philosophy's deeply ingrained postulate that the theoretical and the practical are two separate spheres.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have begun by surveying Heidegger's early texts with respect to Aristotle. Our aim was to look at Heidegger's texts themselves and what Heidegger said about the notion of *phronesis*. We attempted to bring into relief the basic characteristics of *phronesis* that Heidegger took up from Aristotle. Thereafter, we analyzed the broader ramifications of Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle, which consisted of an ontological reappropriation of Aristotle's philosophy. The main conclusions were that Heidegger's ontologization of *phronesis* lead him to equate *phronesis* to *Gewissen*. In spite of this ontologization, we have maintained that Heidegger is still concerned with the notion of the good and how one is to lead a good life, albeit not working within a traditional moral framework. We have also highlighted Heidegger's destruction of the classical notion of

sophia, which allows him to challenge one of philosophy's main tenets, namely the distinction between theory and practice.

Our analysis of Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle and its impact on his work will help us to elucidate Gadamer's interpretation in the next chapter, where we will focus on the continuity and the disruption of Gadamer's interpretation of *phronesis* with respect to his predecessor.

Chapter II: Gadamer and *Phronesis*

In the preceding chapter, we focused on Heidegger's reappropriation of the Aristotelean concept of *phronesis*. This analysis, also conducted for its own sake, is indispensable for a more comprehensive and profound understanding of Gadamer's use of *phronesis*. In the course of this second chapter, our attention will be focused on Gadamer's reappropriation of *phronesis,* yet always bearing in mind the influence of his teacher, Heidegger. Indeed, in this chapter, while our task will be mainly to examine the centrality of *phronesis* in Gadamer's thought, we will nevertheless attempt to identify a line of continuity as well as a breaking point between Gadamer and Heidegger. Thus, the aim of the chapter is twofold, on the one hand we will expose Gadamer's analysis of *phronesis* within his hermeneutical project, and thereafter we will examine in what ways did Gadamer diverge from his teacher.

As we have already pointed out, Heidegger initiated a series of lectures between the years 1920-1927 presenting Aristotle's philosophy which Gadamer attended and had a strong impact on his intellectual development. In 1923, when Gadamer was still ill with polio, Paul Natorp had given him a forty-page manuscript written by Heidegger for which Gadamer wrote: "This [the manuscript] had affected him like an electric shock"[64] It is one of the first manuscripts in which Heidegger solicits Aristotle and more particularly the notion of *phronesis*. There is no doubt that the *Natorp Bericht,* examined in the first chapter along with numerous other courses taught by Heidegger and thereafter published, has exerted a considerable influence in Gadamer's development of philosophical hermeneutics through

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[64] H.-G. Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 47.

the reinterpretation of Aristotle. It is in following the footsteps of Heidegger that Gadamer put Aristotle at the forefront of his philosophical hermeneutics. For the purposes of our inquiry, it is important to note that it is not merely Aristotle's philosophy, as such, that was of great influence to Gadamer, but it is the way Aristotle has been interpreted in the neo-Aristotelian tradition, and most prominently by his teacher Heidegger. For instance, Richard Bernstein emphasizes the centrality of Aristotle in Gadamer's thought as follows: "Gadamer's own understanding of philosophic hermeneutics can itself be interpreted as a series of footnotes on his decisive intellectual encounter with Aristotle."[65] To this statement, we could add the following specification, namely, it is his encounter with Aristotle and Aristotelian interpretations, and most notably, Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle and *phronesis* as was laid out in the last chapter that will help us illuminate our understanding of Gadamer's own philosophical hermeneutics.

The task of this chapter is twofold. On the one hand, we will examine the role that *phronesis* occupies in Gadamer's hermeneutics and on the other hand we will identify the elements of continuity and divergence in Heidegger and Gadamer's Aristotelian interpretations. After having closely studied Heidegger's reappropriation of Aristotle and in this chapter Gadamer's own interpretation, we will be much better equipped to carry out a comparison of these two interpretations. With respect to Gadamer, our task will be to clarify the relationship between *phronesis* and hermeneutics and to understand the position it occupies within hermeneutics. To do so, we must proceed to the elucidation of the connection between *phronesis* and the ethical component of Gadamer's hermeneutics. We will attempt to show that the ethical concern in *Truth and Method* is central for Gadamer.

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[65] R. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, 146.

Gadamer always had a profound interest for ethics, and the development of his philosophical hermeneutics is very much pervaded by an ethical motivation. In effect, the idea of the good and more generally the ethical have been ubiquitously present in Gadamer's works from his very first writings, until his very last ones. Therefore, we will expose the centrality of *phronesis* in Gadamer's hermeneutical philosophy while simultaneously bringing to the forefront the ethical implications brought about by Gadamer's rehabilitation of Aristotelian philosophy and its connection to hermeneutics, and more broadly Gadamer's whole philosophy.

We will begin by addressing the hermeneutical context to which Gadamer was reacting, namely the hermeneutical tradition of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, prevalent throughout the nineteenth century. Gadamer, following Heidegger in his conception of hermeneutics, promoted a very different approach to hermeneutics. Following Gadamer's account of hermeneutics, we will focus on the problem of application, which is where the notion of *phronesis* enters into play in his *magnum opus, Truth and Method*. That is not to say that Gadamer did not address *phronesis* prior to the publication of *Truth and Method*, but it is to be considered as his most significant treatment of this subject matter. More precisely, we will try to elucidate what Gadamer meant when he claimed that *phronesis* had to be regarded as "a model of the problem of hermeneutics"[66] even though Aristotle was quite obviously not directly concerned with hermeneutics. We will also attempt to bring to light the ethical implications of Gadamer's Aristotelian rehabilitation. Why does Gadamer find Aristotelian ethics to be superior to other theories, such as the deontological ethics founded

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[66] H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 324.

by Kant? In order to respond to this question, we will turn to later essays published by Gadamer, namely *On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics* published in 1963.

In this next section, we will briefly try to go over Gadamer's idea of hermeneutics and how it developed, both in reaction to classical hermeneutics and also in continuity with Heidegger's conception of the hermeneutic circle. We will also examine the notions of temporal distance and fusion of horizons, as they are critically addressed and developed by Gadamer. The philosopher has succeeded in modifying these concepts from their classical understanding in nineteenth century hermeneutics. Although this will be a brief and non-exhaustive survey of some of the central concepts in Gadamer's hermeneutics, it is essential that we acquire a clear understanding of these concepts in order to better assess the role of the notion of application and the introduction of Aristotelean *phronesis* in the equation. Prior to examining the texts in which Gadamer addresses directly the concept of *phronesis*, we will briefly discuss Gadamer's pivotal encounter with Heidegger.

Gadamer: Heir of Heidegger

It is during the summer semester of 1923 that Gadamer took part in three seminars that were taught by Heidegger. Two of these seminars dealt with Aristotle: "Phenomenological Exercises for beginners in view of the Nicomachean Ethics" and "Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle". These seminars and more importantly his encounter with Heidegger were pivotal for Gadamer with regards to the development of his philosophical hermeneutics and particularly for his reappropriation of Aristotle and the concept of *phronesis*. It is during these seminars that Gadamer was introduced to the phenomenological approach of the concepts of *phronesis* and *logos,* both of which he will

later integrate in his work. *Phronesis* constitutes an "ἄλλο εἴδος γνώσεως" (another kind of knowledge) and had become for Gadamer, as he had put it, "a truly magical word."[67] This phenomenological rediscovery of Aristotle through the eyes of Heidegger along with his already profound interest for Aristotle and more generally Greek philosophy constitute the driving forces of his early intellectual development.

It is undeniable that Gadamer was directly influenced by Heidegger's Aristotle in the unfolding of his own hermeneutical philosophy. However, the question that will be tackled in this section is to what extent does Gadamer inherit from Heidegger's Aristotle. In other words, in what respects does Gadamer's reappropriation of Aristotle converge with Heidegger's own, and in what respects does Gadamer depart from his master's phenomenological interpretation of Aristotle. For the purposes of our project, the focus of our inquiry will be narrowed down to their respective interpretation of the *Nichomachean Ethics* and more precisely the notion of *phronesis*. We will determine whether Gadamer's *phronesis* is an extension of Heidegger's or whether his interpretation constitutes a separation from his teacher. In what follows, we will attempt to demonstrate that Gadamer departs from his immediate predecessor in his broader interpretation of the *Nichomachean Ethics* and by the same token in his reappropriation of *phronesis*. This divergence resides mainly in Heidegger's primarily ontological interpretation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Their partition is also due to their differing motives in regard to the reappropriation of Aristotle. Both thinkers appeal to Aristotle in the development of their philosophy, albeit on the basis of different questions. Gadamer's interpretation appears to be much less radical and is in this

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[67] H.-G. Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings* (edited by R.E. Palmer), 12.

sense quite restrained. This comparison will also allow us to bring forth the different interpretative styles that characterize each one of them respectively in connection to the interpretation and understanding of ancient philosophy. Given that Gadamer's debt to Heidegger is indubitable, this section will mainly aim at stressing the ways in which Gadamer differs from his mentor, as we think that these differences merit further reflection and analysis. Here, our aim is not to determine which interpretation is better or more accurate. Instead, we want to render explicit the intentions of Heidegger, which propelled him to interpret Aristotle in this way, and in turn how this interpretation might have influenced Gadamer. Thereby, we will be able to better elucidate Gadamer's own intentions and how they differed from his master. In conducting this inquiry we will be in a much better position to understand the motives of Gadamer's reappropriation of Aristotle and by the same token the place that this interpretation of *phronesis* occupies in his whole hermeneutical project. In this section, we will discover that Gadamer has retained some elements of Heidegger's appropriation of Aristotle. Nevertheless, Heidegger's student has, without a doubt, made the Aristotelean concepts his own. It will soon become obvious that Gadamer worked *with* and *against* Heidegger (just as Heidegger himself worked *with* and *against* Aristotle). Our task will be to shed light on the ways in which he followed his professor and the ways in which he departed or even opposed his teacher.

The basis of this comparison will be predicated on both Heidegger's and Gadamer's texts which address the notion of *phronesis*. In this first chapter, we will mainly focus on Heidegger's texts dealing with *phronesis*, that is his early lectures at the University of Marburg. In order to get a clear sense of what Heidegger intended to extract from the Aristotelean notion of *phronesis*, we must refer to the texts in which he directly addressed

this concept, which are the following: The *Natorp Bericht* (*Phenomenological Interpretations with respect to Aristotle*, 1922), the lecture course *Grundbegriffe der Aristotelischen Philosophie* (Basic Concepts of Aristotelean Philosophy) of 1924 (*GA 18*), and *the lecture course on Platon: Sophistes* (*GA 19*) (1924-24). We will examine the three texts separately, although we can draw four distinct but interrelated moments, which mark the qualities that Heidegger intended to take away from *phronesis*, as an *allo eidos gnoseos*. Firstly, Heidegger emphasizes, in fact, radicalizes the implications of temporality in connection with *phronesis*, specifically with his concept of *Augenblick* and the Aristotelean notion of *kairos*. From this he concludes that *phronesis* is fundamentally shaped by the temporality of *Dasein* and the particular temporality of the situation to which *Dasein* is confronted. The analysis of the concept of *Augenblick* in relation to *phronesis* partakes in his much broader quest of arriving at a more originary sense of temporality that has hitherto not been achieved. Secondly, *phronesis* would involve an unconcealment of *Dasein*'s own being, which entails a distancing of *Dasein* from its immediate everyday engagements in the world and calls for a "seeing-oneself" and a "looking-around-oneself". Heidegger uses the latter expressions, when referring to *phronesis* throughout his works, and are obviously derived from Aristotle's *to hautou eidenai*. This characterization of "seeing-oneself" alludes to the power of *phronesis* to render one's actions transparent to oneself, and to uncover all that in which *Dasein* forgets itself. However, another element, which is characteristic of *phronesis* is that it does not solely correspond to a *hexis meta logou*. *Phronesis* would go beyond reason, as it is a type of *aisthesis*, which allows us to grasp the *eschaton* of the situation. Finally, *phronesis* is not to be regarded as an autonomous mode of disclosure in the accomplishment of becoming a virtuous agent, precisely because, unlike *sophia*, its object, namely *Dasein* and life itself are

inherently variable, and thus *phronesis* depends upon these variable circumstances and their particular temporality, which point to its extra-logical and uncontrollable dimension. Following the close examination of these texts from Heidegger, we will bring into focus and analyze what stands out from the Heideggerian interpretation of Aristotle.

Gadamer's Conception of Hermeneutics

The nineteenth century hermeneutics lead by philosopher Wilhem Dilthey arose as a romantic reaction to the Enlightenment[68]. The aim of this hermeneutical movement was to uphold the value of tradition in the face of the exaltation of reason put forth by the Enlightenment. Its objective was to reaffirm and recreate a meaning for ancient and classical texts in order to legitimize tradition. By doing so, nineteenth century hermeneutics also put forth a kind of knowledge, which cannot be conformed to the postulates of pure rationality. Although the scope of nineteenth century hermeneutics seems to be in line with Gadamer's concerns and goals, Gadamer was a fiery critic of the method by which hermeneutics were conducted. Indeed, Gadamer criticized this branch of hermeneutics as it defeated its own purpose by attempting to fit in the mold of objectivity and method[69]. The main tenet posited by the nineteenth century hermeneutic tradition is that in order to interpret accurately a text one must retrieve the intended meaning of the author. Within the framework of this particular conception of hermeneutics, it is indeed possible for the interpreter to get back at the original meaning of the text, and to achieve this in an exhaustive manner. Thus, one of the basic assumptions of nineteenth-century hermeneutics was that there is a totality of

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[68] J. Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground*, 106.
[69] *Ibid.*

meaning in the text which exists apart from the person understanding it. Therefore, according the hermeneutics as conceived by Schleiermacher and Dilthey, there is one valid and objective interpretation, which, in using the appropriate method will be reached by anyone regardless of his or her historical vantage point. It is possible for the interpreter to surpass his historical limitations, namely to suppress the temporal distance, which separates the interpreter from the text itself. This is achieved through the disengagement of the interpreter with his or her prejudices. In other words, it is possible to arrive at a unique and objective understanding of a text, as it would be feasible for each and every interpreter to do away with the prejudices of his or her era, precisely in order to attain this universal understanding and interpretation of the text.

As we have already mentioned, although Gadamer shares similar ambitions with the development of nineteenth century hermeneutics, that is, to present an alternative to the Enlightenment movement which advocates for a celebration of reason, Gadamer nevertheless adopts a radically different approach with respect to the means that should be embraced in the process of interpretation. Albeit Gadamer agrees that interpretation cannot be engulfed by the rational and methodical thought process put forth by the Enlightenment, he accuses the nineteenth century hermeneutics of falling into the trap of a unitary and universal method of thinking, which ultimately defeats the whole purpose of the movement. That is why Gadamer developed his conception of hermeneutics, on the one hand, in opposition to Schleiermacher and Dilthey, and on the other hand, in continuity with Heidegger's conception of hermeneutics. Indeed, Gadamer closely follows and further develops the concepts of hermeneutics and facticity that heavily influenced Gadamer's work on hermeneutics. More specifically, in *Truth and Method,* Gadamer reappropriates the notion

of hermeneutic circle elaborated by Heidegger in *Being and Time*[72]. Gadamer uses the hermeneutical circle to characterize interpretation as always already achieved through a *Dasein* which is, in turn, part of a tradition. According to a more phenomenological approach to hermeneutics put forth by Heidegger, the context and tradition within which *Dasein* has been thrown into and into which it has evolved cannot be subtracted, as opposed to what was believed by the nineteenth century hermeneutics trend. This is exactly the point of contention between the nineteenth century hermeneutics and the hermeneutical conception elaborated by Heidegger under the influence of Husserl, and which directly contributed to Gadamer's own notion of hermeneutics. In effect, Gadamer, in solidarity with Heidegger, views the hermeneutical circle as a primordially ontological matter. It is considered to be an interpretative circle because we, as finite and temporal beings, are limited insofar as we understand something, i.e., a text. We are able to understand something only within the limits of our finite existence, which is riddled with presuppositions and projections. "Ontological" in the context of the hermeneutical circle means that it is constitutive of our being-in-the-world to be constantly engaged in the task of understanding and interpreting, and that it is only within and from this incessant engagement in the life-world that we are able to understand and interpret things in general. At the same time, Gadamer also emphasizes the fact that we must open ourselves up to the things, be it text or tradition, and that we must let these things speak to us, as he claims in *The Problem of Historical Consciousness*: "A consciousness formed by the authentic hermeneutical attitude will be receptive to the origins and entirely foreign features of that which comes to it from outside its own horizons. Yet this receptivity is not acquired with an objectivist "neutrality": it is

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[72] H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 267.

neither possible, necessary, nor desirable that we put ourselves within brackets. The hermeneutical attitude supposes only that we self-consciously designate our opinions and prejudices and qualify them as such, and in doing so strip them of their extreme character. In keeping to this attitude we grant the text the opportunity to appear as an authentically different being and to manifest its own truth, over and against our own preconceived notions."[73] What this passage shows us, is that we must not bracket the prejudices of our own existence when it comes to understanding something, but at the same time we must not let the fore-structures of our existence blind a clear and authentic understanding of the object we are examining. In order to rectify this seeming paradox, Gadamer has elaborated a thematization of our prejudices, so as to make us more aware of them and our inescapability with regards to these presuppositions, and that it is thanks to these prejudgments that we are able to understand anything at all. That is why he lays out his theory of prejudices in *Truth and Method*, in section 4(B) where he argues that prejudices are the very conditions of our understanding, and that it is somehow absurd to pretend that their abolishment is possible, as did the Enlightenment thinkers. Gadamer puts it as follows: "Working out appropriate projections, anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed "by the things" themselves, is the constant task of understanding. [...] Thus, it is quite right for the interpreter not to approach the text directly, relying solely on the fore-meaning already available to him, but rather explicitly to examine the legitimacy –i.e., the origin and validity –of the fore-meanings dwelling within him."[74] In this excerpt, Gadamer explains the resolution for the paradox that we have brought to our attention. According to Gadamer,

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[73] H.-G. Gadamer, *The Problem of Historical Consciousness*, 44.
[74] H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 270.

there is a to-and-fro movement between our prejudices, which are inevitable, and the things themselves. We must temper our own presuppositions by the things themselves. The things themselves constitute a type of criterion for evaluating our pre-understanding, and the latter is constantly revised by the former, in a continuous back-and-forth movement.

Another assumption made by nineteenth century historicism, which both Heidegger and Gadamer (more so Gadamer) challenge, is the claim that we must extricate ourselves from our present situation, and that includes the time we live in, in order to transport ourselves into the period in time at which the text we are attempting to understand has been written. This implies that the temporal horizon of the past is something distinct from that of present time. However, Gadamer is surely one to challenge this assumption. When discussing the provenance of our prejudices, one quickly comes to find out that they are handed down to us by tradition. Hence, the horizon of the present cannot be completely distinguished from that of the past. Just as Gadamer regards prejudices as something that need not be overcome but embraced and rendered productive, he holds the same view for temporal distance: "Temporal distance is not something that must be overcome. This was, rather the naïve assumption of historicism, namely that we must set ourselves within the spirit of the age, and think with its ideas and its thoughts, not with our own, and thus advance towards historical objectivity. In fact, the important thing is to recognise the distance in time as a positive and productive possibility of understanding. It is not a yawning abyss, but is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition, in the light of which all that is handed down presents itself to us."[75] Indeed, when Gadamer is referring to the temporal distance which separates the reader from the time of the production of the text, he does not conceive of it as

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[75] *Ibid*, 297.

a "gulf" but he refers to it as a "supportive ground", emphasizing the positive and productive effect of temporal distance. What Gadamer arrives at here, is already implicit in Heidegger's discussion of the hermeneutic circle, that is, when he mentions the fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception. Heidegger posited this idea that the hermeneutical circle must be embraced and viewed under a positive light, as it is inevitable that *Dasein's* possibility of understanding and more importantly of self-understanding can only be realized within this very circle. He formulates this idea in *Being and Time*, section 32[76]. It is from this conception of the hermeneutical circle as something fundamentally inevitable, but also productive, that Gadamer also developed his notion of legitimate prejudice.

What is also reappropriated by Gadamer here is the idea that *Dasein* is itself a historical being and does not merely constitute a subjectivity, which is inserted at a certain point of time. Rather, *Dasein* is inherently historical, that is, the tradition that has been bestowed upon it, is an integral part of its being. Gadamer took the notions of pre-understanding and historicality, which are inextricably linked in Heidegger's hermeneutics and he further expanded on these concepts and made them central to his own philosophical hermeneutics. For example, Gadamer develops the notion of horizon and the fusion of horizons, which excludes the possibility that there are two distinct horizons that meet each other when a reader encounters a text. According to Gadamer, understanding, as such, is already a fusion of horizons. A horizon is always open and when a reader encounters a text, both of these open horizons fuse and make one, as Gadamer writes: "There is no more an isolated horizon in the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. *Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by*

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[76] M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 188-195.

themselves."[77] Both the horizon of the reader as well as the horizon of the text succumb to change resulting from their interconnectedness. This is when the notion of application enters the picture, because the concept of a fusion of horizons necessarily involves a process of application. When the interpreter encounters the text, there is a process of application which takes place: to understand the text one must be able to apply it to oneself and to one's situation, as Gadamer puts it: "Every encounter with tradition that takes place within historical consciousness involves the experience of a tension between the text and the present. The hermeneutic task consists in not covering up this tension by attempting a naïve assimilation of the two but in consciously bringing it out."[78] That is why Gadamer considers the problem of application to be central to hermeneutics; there is always a tension between our present situation and the text we are interpreting. Instead of not properly acknowledging the full extent of our limited historical point of view, Gadamer not only intends to acknowledge it but to embrace it, and from this arrive at a deeper understanding of both tradition and the text in question. In this next section, we will examine this notion of application more thoroughly and why it is of capital importance for Gadamerian hermeneutics.

Application and the Appeal to Aristotle

In this part of our investigation, we will take a look at the concept of application that is central to Gadamer's hermeneutics, by examining mainly the section of *Truth and Method* that addresses this concept, in the section 4(2), *The recovery of the fundamental hermeneutic*

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[77] H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 305.
[78] *Ibid.*

problem[79]. As opposed to the hermeneutical tradition, which regarded application as a mere part of the process of hermeneutics, Gadamer insists on the fact that application is central to hermeneutics. Indeed, classical hermeneutics posited three moments which constituted the hermeneutical task, namely the *subtilitas intelligendi*, *subtilitas explicandi*, and *subtilitas applicandi*. Instead, Gadamer contends that the three moments are not to be viewed as distinct and happening at different times nor should they be viewed as independent from a conceptual point of view. Rather, understanding along with interpretation and application are to be considered as a "unified process". He uses the examples of legal and theological hermeneutics in order to demonstrate that application is an integral part of hermeneutics. Just as a judge must apply a universal law to a concrete situation so as to arrive to the appropriate ruling, the preacher must also apply the text of the gospel to his context, and Gadamer contends that it is precisely in the application of the law of of the gospel to one's own situation that the full meaning of the law of the gospel is reached, each time in a renewed way. That is why, according to Gadamer, we must refashion the conception of hermeneutics in accordance with the way legal and theological hermeneutics were conducted in the eighteenth century[80]. In other words, historical hermeneutics must also be in a position to adapt the texts and apply them to one's own context, and thus, overcome the temporal distance. In order to achieve this, application is of central importance, given that when we read a text, our task is to apply it to our modern situation and make it speak to us in a meaningful way. It is the only way we can really understand a text. That is why Gadamer revives the notion of application and its significance for hermeneutics. It is also at this point

[79] H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 306.
[80] J. Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, 101-02.

in the text that he reminds us of the pertinence of Aristotle in dealing with the crucial problem of application.

It is within the ethical framework of Aristotle that Gadamer retrieves the notion of *phronesis*, which is intimately related to application. Although Aristotle's *phronesis* is not directly concerned with hermeneutics, Gadamer has found that his notion of *phronesis* comes as a great help in properly understanding the unfolding of hermeneutics, and in giving a more accurate, a more humane conception of hermeneutics. As we attempted to explain, application is at the very heart of understanding: there can be no understanding without application, according to Gadamer. It is for this reason that application is not to be viewed as ancillary to understanding, but, in the eyes of Gadamer, it is an essential part of it. It is an aspect of hermeneutics that was rightly highlighted by the pietist form of hermeneutics of the eighteenth century[81], which Gadamer seeks to go back to, as it had been replaced by an objectivist form of hermeneutics of the nineteenth century, as is noted by Grondin[82]. In effect, Gadamer retrieves the centrality of the notion of *subtilitas applicandi* from pietist hermeneutics. It is precisely because the notion of applying the text to one's present situation was considered detrimental to an objective interpretation, that the nineteenth century hermeneutics tried to minimize the importance of application in the process of understanding and interpretation. Gadamer puts it in the following way: "Understanding, then, is a special case of applying something universal to a particular situation. This makes Aristotelian ethics especially important for us [...] It is true that Aristotle is not concerned with the hermeneutical problem and certainly not with its historical dimension, but with the

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[81] *Ibid.*
[82] *Ibid.*

right estimation of the role that reason has to play in moral action."[83] In this passage, it becomes more clear to us what Gadamer means when he is discussing the issue of application, per se, and why he finds it to be so crucial for hermeneutics. As we have noted earlier, application is very much involved in the process of understanding. For instance, in our attempt to understand a text, we must somehow be able to apply the text to our current situation, in order for the text to mean something to us, and by the same token to understand it.

What attracts Gadamer in going back to Aristotle is how the conception of Aristotelean ethics is wholly aware of its distinctness from pure mathematical knowledge, that is. what the Greeks called *episteme* at that time. Aristotle maintains that the practical wisdom, *phronesis*, which is required in ethical situations cannot be subjected to the same rigor and exactness that are required from mathematics, for example. Gadamer asserts that this is equally valid for hermeneutics, as he wants to better assess the role of reason within the ethical equation. By revaluing the notion of application and making it central to the process of understanding and interpreting, Gadamer avoids the trap of mimicking the natural sciences and instead promotes a conception of hermeneutics, which puts the individual and his inherited tradition at the forefront. Grondin expresses this idea very accurately: "He had the good fortune to remember that understanding or application is less a mechanical process than a capacity, less a matter of rules than an ability to be, less a procedure than a mental subtlety."[84] In this sense, the type of application that is required for hermeneutics is one which cannot be equated to the mere application of general rules to a

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[83] H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 345.
[84] J. Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, 102.

particular situation, but it is a conception, which is much richer and deeper and cannot be captured by the neutrality embodied in the natural sciences, that is the notion of *phronesis*. When we grasp a truth which is found in a text, just as one which is found in a work of art, we cannot reduce the essence of this truth to a mathematical equation or procedure.

Gadamer wants to arrive at a conception of understanding, whose primary criterion would be the notion of application to oneself and to one's situation. However, this must not be interpreted as a claim to relativism. His conception of hermeneutics attempts to surpass or move beyond the perennial debate about objectivism and relativism. As Grondin remarks, Gadamer does not opt for relativism, he rather sets out to better assess the role that is assigned to reason in the context of hermeneutics, as did Aristotle when he confronted the tradition of Platonic intellectualism. Ethical knowledge, as discussed by Aristotle, is not simply an intellectual affair, namely it cannot solely be a study of universal claims that characterize the idea of good. Rather, it is the ability that one has to apply the good when faced with a concrete situation. What Gadamer challenges is this very objectivity, which derives from Plato's intellectualism, and is reinstated by the epistemology of the natural sciences, and wrongly transposed to the domain of human sciences and human action: "The alienation of the interpreter from the interpreted by the objectifying methods of modern science, characteristic of the hermeneutics and historiography of the nineteenth century, appeared as the consequence of a false objectification. My purpose in returning to the example of Aristotelian ethics is to help us realize and avoid this. "[86]

It is following the discussion of the fusion of horizons and the importance of the notion of application in hermeneutics, that Gadamer introduces the section pertaining to

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[86] H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 312.

Aristotle, and more precisely the notion of *phronesis*, which plays a significant role in his philosophical hermeneutics and we could even say that it is this very concept along with the notion of application, that is at the epicenter of Gadamerian hermeneutics.

The Special Case of *Phronesis*

In the section called *The Hermeneutic Relevance of Aristotle* in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer discusses the peculiar way in which *phronesis* constitutes an *allos eidos gnoseos*. He first claims that it is to be distinguished from *techne*, as *techne* is an objective skill that one acquires. It is something that can be forgotten after a while, especially when it is not practiced enough. But, moral knowledge does not resemble technical knowledge, insofar as it is not an objective skill that can be acquired through teaching and practice. Moral knowledge is effectively a different kind of knowledge, precisely because it stems from a situation which we already find ourselves in. It is a knowledge which pertains to us, it is inseparable from our being, whereas the art of carpentry, for example, relates to the correct cutting and shaping of wood, which takes place in the external and material world. The crucial difference is that in the case of moral knowledge, the correct response cannot be determined prior to acknowledging the facts of the situation, whereas in carpentry, for instance, one can always use the same set of skills regardless of the specific circumstances in which the art is being crafted. And, precisely because this knowledge is inseparable from our being, it is the kind of knowledge that cannot be forgotten. This is another fundamental characteristic of the kind of knowledge that *phronesis* yields, namely that it is unforgettable, as it is intimately linked with our being. We can see how this inability to forget within the unfolding of *phronesis* is to be traced back to Heidegger who stated that *phronesis* is conscience, precisely because it cannot be forgotten. When a realization occurs in our

consciousness, it is impossible for us to forget it, and thus it compels us to act upon it, as Schmidt puts it: "The point that Gadamer wants to emphasize here is that I cannot hide from the knowing defining both conscience and *phronesis* since it has already constituted that which I am. It is profoundly intimate. It defines that sense of *ethos* that defines me."[87]

A second point that is brought up in this discussion by Gadamer is the way in which *phronesis* breaks from the conventional framework of means and ends. In effect, Gadamer highlights that when it pertains to moral knowledge, one cannot always employ the same means in order to arrive at a particular end, as is the case with technical knowledge. One must constantly evaluate the proper means to achieve the good, in light of the particularity of each situation. Gadamer also emphasizes that the means that are undertaken to arrive at a particular outcome are as important as the outcome itself, meaning that the means must be equally as ethically right as the ends, which again might not be the case with respect to technical knowledge, as Gadamer writes : "Hence also mere expediency cannot enter considerations about what might further moral ends; rather, the consideration of the means is itself a moral consideration and it is this that concretizes the moral rightness of then end."[88] A few lines later, Gadamer writes that moral knowledge embraces both means and ends simultaneously. Thus, what really helps one in moral reflection is not to distinguish means from ends nor to have an a priori formula that is applicable to all situations, but rather it is a kind of seeing that guides one in acting morally. It is a kind of perceiving, which allows one to see what is required by the situation one finds oneself in. It is also in continuity with what Heidegger had revealed of the peculiarity of *phronesis* in his lectures on Plato.

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87 Dennis J. Schmidt, *Hermeneutics and Ethical Life* in *The Blackwell Companion to Hermeneutics*, 110.
88 H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 319.

Heidegger emphasized the perceptual immediateness, which characterizes *phronesis* in its quest for moral knowledge and he described *phronesis* as a kind of seeing. *Phronesis* requires the ability for one to deliberate with oneself, which requires significant self-knowledge, and precisely because understanding is brought about by a self-knowledge and knowledge of one's situation, there is no need for an application of external rules to our behavior. Application is already under the way of happening, when we are understanding something.

The third element that Gadamer points to as a marker of *phronesis* as a different kind of knowledge is its counterpart notion of *synesis*. *Phronesis* can be viewed as self-knowledge insofar as it constitutes knowing what one is to do in a particular situation that will promote the good life. *Synesis* is the counterpart of *phronesis* insofar as it is the ability that we have to put ourselves in the place of another in a particular set of circumstances. *Synesis* can be described as the phenomenon of understanding another. Gadamer explains *synesis* as "an intentional modification of ethical knowledge when it is a moral question, not for the sake of myself, but for the sake of another."[89] Therefore, *synesis* is a special kind of knowledge, which is fundamentally different from any type of technical knowledge. Gadamer gives the example of moral counsel, in which, for instance, a friend will give moral advice to another friend who is confronted with a difficult situation. This constitutes the concretization of *synesis* and reveals the special and unique bond which lies behind genuine moral advice. It is precisely this element of *phronesis* that distinguishes it from a neutral scientific kind of knowledge. Even when one is an external actor to a given situation, one must not act as a mere observer of the situation, but one must rather put oneself in the situation and in the protagonist's

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[89] H.-G. Gadamer, *The Problem of Historical Consciousness,* 37.

shoes in order to arrive at a thoughtful piece of advice, which will genuinely be of service to the moral agent in pursuit of the good life.

All these elements mentioned above explain why *phronesis* is to be seen as a model for hermeneutics. When one comes to understand a text authentically, one must not employ the techniques and methods put forth by the positive sciences. The understanding and interpretation of a text cannot be arrived at by a psychological investigation of the author and a thorough historical investigation of his/her context. The understanding of a text is very much contingent upon the *kairos* of the interpretation, just as an ethical decision is. This also means that the interpreter of the text is not to disregard himself or his situation, in order to understand or interpret accurately the meaning of a text, as would do a scientific researcher. On the contrary, one must enter into a dialogue with the text, and this dialogue consists of the concerns that preoccupy the interpreter and his prejudgments, which are ultimately unavoidable. That is precisely how Gadamer approaches Aristotle, as Bernstein claims, that is, Gadamer enters into a dialogue with Aristotle, carrying his own preoccupations in the conversation, namely his concern with the domination of scientific knowledge and technology. Gadamer is entertaining a dialogue with Aristotle's texts from his own hermeneutical horizon. In this way, Gadamer, himself, is transformed by Aristotle's text, as he allows his own being to be part of the process of understanding and opens himself up to Aristotle. This is what the essence of *phronesis* is about, namely it is a kind of knowledge that affects us, our being, as Bernstein puts it: "And this understanding, as a form of *phronesis,* is a practical-moral knowledge which becomes constitutive of what we are in the process of becoming. Gadamer seeks to show us that authentic hermeneutical understanding becomes integral to our very being and transforms what we are in the process of becoming, just as

phronesis determines the being of the *phronimos*."[90] This passage really shows the power of hermeneutics as conceived by Gadamer. Gadamer put forth a concept of understanding, which does not exclude our being; our being cannot be left unaffected in the face of true and meaningful understanding. It is precisely this conception of hermeneutics that renders it deeply ethical as well. In the next section, we will examine some of Gadamer's ethical writings with the aim of rendering explicit the relationship between ethics and hermeneutics.

We have to place Gadamer's reappropriation of *phronesis* in *Truth and Method* within an attempt to retrieve the value of humanism. Indeed, Gadamer, prior to introducing the notion of *phronesis* in *TM*, discusses the notion of *Bildung*, *sensus communis*, of judgment and taste, all epistemological models derived from European humanism, which embrace self-knowledge and the knowledge of shared values and traditions, as opposed to the mathematical model of knowledge. Gadamer sees *phronesis* as a model for human comprehension, as it is a kind of knowledge which is intimately tied to self-knowledge. It is the problem of the concretion of the universal in the particular that Gadamer brings to the surface. In other words, it is the application of a text, a tradition, a value that has been written or consolidated through history, that constitutes the hermeneutical task of understanding. What Gadamer achieved in the reappropriation of Aristotle in *Truth and Method,* even though its central concern is not ethics, is to show how *phronesis* and *ethos* are extremely interdependent, that is, *phronesis* always operates from the background of a common tradition, a set of shared values and significations, a shared history. This is one of the most illuminating contributions of Gadamer, namely that self-understanding can only be achieved

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[90] R. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism,* 149-50.

through the understanding of our shared world. That is why, ethics and hermeneutics are so deeply connected. Although, ethics are not at the forefront of the debate in *Truth and Method*, in the next section, we will examine several of Gadamer's essays which directly pertain to ethics, and will help us render explicit the relationship between ethics and hermeneutics, at the crossroads of which lies the concept of *phronesis*.

Gadamer and Ethics

In order to fully understand the significance of *phronesis* and the place it holds in Gadamer's hermeneutics, it is inevitable that we must address Gadamer's relationship with ethics, as *phronesis* a concept that Aristotle used within an ethical framework. Therefore, *phronesis* is, first and foremost an ethical notion that Gadamer adapted to his hermeneutical theory. In the following section, we will focus on Gadamer's views on the ethical, and the reasons why he finds in Aristotle a superior alternative to the very possibility of a philosophical ethics, which is beholden on the very notion of *phronesis*.

On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics

This essay of 1961 is one of the most important writings of Gadamer with regards to ethics. As we have already mentioned, although hermeneutics seems to be what Gadamer is known for, his philosophical work in ethics is not to be neglected. Gadamer has always had a strong interest for ethics, and more specifically for Greek ethics, as his doctoral thesis was to be about Aristotelean ethics with a foreword on Plato's *Philebus*, but ended up being a complete thesis on Plato's ethics.[91] Nevertheless, his interest in Aristotle and more

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[91] J. Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography*, 134-36.

particularly Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* has always been a driving force in his philosophical career. Indeed, as our task here is also to render explicit the relationship between hermeneutics and ethics, and the role that *phronesis* has to play in this interplay of concepts, it is essential that we examine some of Gadamer's essays pertaining to ethics. The 1961 essay is of particular interest to us as it addresses Aristotelean ethics in light of a Heideggerian background, which is strongly felt, as Richard E. Palmer puts is: "And as one reads it, the parallels with Heidegger are also clear, insofar as Heidegger based his ontology on the finite lifeworld of *Dasein*, while Gadamer suggests an ethics relying on the Aristotelean *ethos* of finite human institutions and training, without recourse to transcendental subjects or subjectivity. It would seem that Gadamer is going back to Heidegger's source and actually articulating an ethics."[92] After examining Gadamer's essays on the ethical, we will attempt to further substantiate this claim made by Palmer that Gadamer continued the project that Heidegger had started, namely to elaborate a more "original" ethics.

In the beginning of the essay, Gadamer challenges the long-held philosophical conviction that theory is to be viewed as a tool to master the multiplicity of empirical appearances, and that it is thus superior to practical knowledge. Gadamer holds that this conception of theory leads to an unsolvable problem within moral philosophy, namely the application of theoretical knowledge to practical life, especially as he emphasizes that he goal of ethics is not mere theory, but its ultimate goal is to enable us to lead a good life. According to Gadamer, ethics is not at all a matter of knowing at a distance, as is the case for scientific inquiry. Quite the opposite is the case, knowing at a distance would be in fact harmful to the development of a proper ethics, one which should incite us to live well. Therefore, in order

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[92] R.E. Palmer, Introduction to *On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics* in The *Gadamer Reader*, 277.

to come up with a new moral philosophy, it is of the essence that we rethink the notion of theory and practice, which is precisely what Heidegger had undertaken to do. It is in continuity with what Heidegger had instigated, namely an investigation that would lead to a more "original" ethics, that Gadamer also developed his ethics. Heidegger has not written an ethics *per se*, but had started to "ponder the essence of action" as he stated in *Letter on Humanism*, which for him was primordial to the writing of an ethics.[93] That is why, we can affirm that Gadamer's project follows the initial intent of Heidegger, as he also attempts to investigate through a new lens the issues of theory and practice with the aim of establishing a more *originary* ethics, which ultimately rests on a broader foundation.

In the 1961 essay, Gadamer highlights the dilemma, which has pervaded moral philosophy. This dilemma stems from the patent misconception of theory as superior to practice and by the same token the notion that all knowing is a theoretical knowing, which amounts to a knowing at a distance. We can see how this kind of knowledge, which has been transposed to the ethical, is quite ill-suited with respect to the ambitions of an ethical framework. In addition, Gadamer highlights that we are all finite subjects, and that it is therefore impossible for us to create an ethical theory transcending our existence, which sets forth eternal ethical laws, which is what Kant attempted. Gadamer offers two alternatives for the resolution of this dilemma: on the one hand he presents law-based ethics, and on the other hand he offers an ethical framework dealing with the concreteness of situation. He first offers a brief review of Kantian ethics and concludes that it does not lead out of the dilemma, as it is still fundamentally based upon a metaphysics of moral, which renders them transcendental. He also examines the alternative of a value-based ethics, put forth by Max

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[93] *Ibid.*

Scheler and Nicolai Hartmann. However, he finds that this path is an unsatisfactory one, as the problem of methodology remains, as Gadamer puts its very explicitly: "This methodological claim can be fulfilled by no human (and that ultimately means by no historically applicable) moral system at all. What the fundamental idea of an *a priori* value system essentially calls for is an infinite subject."[94] Again, Gadamer finds that this kind of ethical framework does not remain true to our fallibility as human beings.

That is the moment of the essay where he turns to Aristotelian ethics. The part of the essay which is the most interesting for the purposes of our investigation, is the final and longest part of the essay, where Gadamer finds in Aristotle the best way out of this ethical dilemma. What Aristotle has achieved essentially is to distance himself with the "radical intellectualism" of Socrates. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that Gadamer does not view Aristotle's ethics as opposed to the Socratic-Platonic tradition. Just the reverse holds, as Aristotle, according to Gadamer, developed his ethics by following this tradition. What is crucially different in Aristotle's ethics is the acute conscience of our finitude and of our dependability on external circumstances. Concretely, the virtue ethics posited by Aristotle were able to fuse together ethical being and ethical know-how, as acting morally does not merely depend on possessing moral knowledge, but is intimately connected with the kind of person one *is*. It is at this point that Gadamer discusses Aristotle's notion of *phronesis* and he states: "His analysis of *phronesis* recognizes that moral knowledge is a way of moral being itself, which therefore cannot be prescinded from the whole concretion of what he calls *ethos*."[96] Gadamer goes on to explain that, on the one hand, there is a general

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[94] H.-G. Gadamer, *On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics* in *The Gadamer Reader*, 283.
[96] H.-G. Gadamer, *On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics* in *The Gadamer Reader*, 285.

rule which is to be applied in light of a concrete situation experienced by the moral agent, but that it does not merely amount to a "subsumption" of the general under the particular. The successful result of the deliberation which stems from *phronesis* is also fundamentally determined by the being of the person, what the Greeks called *hexis*, which Gadamer qualifies as an ontological category, namely something that can be this and not otherwise. This is also highlighted by Heidegger, as our analysis in the previous chapter has demonstrated. What is central for both Heidegger and Gadamer with regards to ethics is that it is a matter of being, and not a matter of mere knowledge. It is what was discussed in the first chapter regarding the importance of ontology in the ethical, especially when it pertains to arriving at an "original" ethics. It is precisely this balance that has been lost with the Enlightenment which put forth the *hubris* of reason. Both Heidegger and Gadamer have retrieved this balance in the spirit of Aristotle. Gadamer states the following: "The crux of Aristotle's philosophical ethics, then, lies in the mediation between *logos* and *ethos*, between the subjectivity of knowing and the substance of being."[97] It is precisely this element of Aristotle's ethics that attracts Gadamer insofar as it is this middle ground between reason and being, which must prevail in the conducting of ethics as well as in the unfolding of hermeneutics. It is the balance that Aristotle was able to strike with Platonic intellectualism. For Aristotle, ethics is fully actualized in the accomplishment of the concrete action in a particular situation, as opposed to the Socratic-Platonic discourse which maintains that ethics is fully realized in the Idea of the Good.

As we are attempting to respond to the question we have posed earlier, namely what exactly is the connection between ethics and hermeneutics, in light of our reading of the

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[97] *Ibid*, 284.

previous essay, the most important element of the answer lies in the conception of understanding as self-understanding, which entails that understanding, as the central object of hermeneutics, necessarily involves a self-understanding. When we are understanding something, be it a text or a conversation, we are inevitably contributing to the forging of our *Bildung*, our *ethos*, or our character (however we want to put it). A quotation from Dennis J. Schmidt makes this point concisely: "when I take a text into my hands, when I enter a conversation, or engage the idioms of life and other in whatever way I do, the stakes are high and, in the end, what is most at stake is who I am and will become, how I will be with others."[98] This claim reflects what has been discussed earlier, which is central to Gadamer's hermeneutics, namely that application is never a secondary act to understanding, but rather it happens simultaneously. It is precisely because Gadamer views understanding as a phenomenon which is much deeper as it is inextricably linked to the ethical life.

In addition, Gadamer has a very humble conception of ethics, which is also at the heart of his hermeneutics. Gadamer is a philosopher of human finitude. It is the ethical dilemma that he presents in his essay *On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics*, that is, how is it possible to construct a universal ethical framework considering that we are all mortal beings, contingent upon our particular historical situation. The solution that Gadamer proposes in order to resolve this dilemma is a return to factical life and by the same token to an awareness of our finitude. Gadamer wants us to remember that philosophy is, first and foremost, a way of life and that it must be enacted, as Schmidt puts it : "It knows rather that philosophy is above all a way of life and that it requires a peculiar practice which is not at all

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[98] D.J. Schmidt, *Hermeneutics and the Ethical Life* in *Blackwell Companion to Hermeneutics*, 111.

a technique, but much more a matter of struggling to understand."[99] That is why philosophical hermeneutics is to be considered deeply ethical, as the aim of hermeneutics is to help us understand life and how one is to live it.

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The relationship between theory and practice is one that has been absolutely central within philosophy, and more specifically for practical and ethical philosophy. For the largest part of its history, theory and practice have been viewed as two distinct domains and theory has often been viewed as superior to practice, as theory has been considered essential to practice, whereas the inverse case does not hold. This relationship is equally significant within the hermeneutical tradition, as its main endeavour is to devise a theory of understanding and interpretation. Although, Gadamer himself admits that what he is doing is, in effect, theorizing about the nature of understanding, he still believes that practice must be brought back at the epicenter of hermeneutics. It is in following his predecessor, Heidegger, that he has called for a return to practice and more precisely a conception of theory, which is not detached from practice and vice-versa. In the essay that we will examine, which was originally in the form of a talk pronounced in 1978, Gadamer wants to emphasize the practical dimension of hermeneutics, which might not be all that obvious, at first glance.

Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy

In order to further understand the link between practical philosophy and hermeneutics, which is absolutely central to Gadamer, we must also examine another one of his essays published in 1978 titled *Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy*. This essay will

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[99] *Ibid.*

allow us to gain deeper insight into the connection between ethics and hermeneutics and show us that they are extremely interdependent concepts. In this essay, Gadamer highlights the peculiar status of practical philosophy, as it is neither purely theoretical nor technical. Gadamer describes practical philosophy in one of the passages in a very clear way: "It must arise from practice itself and, with all the typical generalizations that it brings to explicit consciousness, be related back to practice. In fact, this constitutes the specific character of Aristotelian ethics and politics."[100] The practical character is simultaneously what is at the basis of the ethical, and also what the ethical aims for. According to Gadamer, this is how Aristotle regarded the functioning of the ethical and the political and that is how both ethics and hermeneutics should continue to be conducted. Just as with ethics and politics, hermeneutics must arise from practice and must also lead to practice.

Further, what is analogous in the experience of hermeneutics and that of practical philosophy is the degree of uncertainty which is to be found in both. In fact, just as there is a possibility of misunderstanding a text in the process of interpretation, it is also possible that the path of action that we have deliberated upon and chosen in a given situation might not result in what we had anticipated. This can be attributed to an element of chance and fortune, which we must concede that we cannot control. This idea can also be traced back to Aristotle with the use of the concepts of *tuche* and *automaton*. But, most importantly, in both cases, there is a peculiar relationship between theory and practice, which somehow blurs the lines that delineate these two attitudes. According to Gadamer, both ethics and hermeneutics are the theoretical study of a subject matter; in the first case, it is the theory of the good life and in the latter case it is the theory of understanding and interpretation. What they both have

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[100] H.-G. Gadamer, *Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy* in *The Gadamer Reader*, 231.

in common is that, on the one hand, they are not worth much if they do not reach concretization in practice in everyday life and at the same time it would not be possible to theorize on hermeneutics and ethics without having experiences that relate to them. That means that the universal desire to know theoretically is only possible, precisely because we have concrete experiences. In order to clarify the relationship between theory and practice and the place that *phronesis* occupies in this debate, we will refer to Joseph Dunne's eminent work, *Back to the Rough Ground*. This analysis will also help elucidate the radically different conception of the relationship between theory and practice that is proposed by Gadamer.

One of the reasons Gadamer is drawn to Aristotle's *phronesis* is precisely because it does away with the classical notion of theory as a general and universal law which applies to particular cases. Gadamer finds in Aristotle a model for revising the relationship between theory and practice, as Aristotle was acutely aware of the peculiar nature of the object-domain of ethics. As opposed to Platonic intellectualism, Aristotle did not assimilate ethical knowledge with mathematical knowledge, which according to him, eventually leads to a distorted view of the nature of the ethical. In addition to this, Aristotle does not simply prioritize theory over practice with respect to ethical knowledge. Rather, he offers us "an idea of knowledge that has taken the opposite path leading from practice towards making it aware of itself theoretically."[101] Just as was brought up previously, theory in fact arises from practice, and thus there can be no theory, which is separated or independent of practice. As Dunne puts it: "Theory here contributes to a heightened awareness on the part of the practiced moral agent of what is already implicit in his way of life."[102]. It is not a distinct

[101] H.-G. Gadamer, *Hermeneutics as a Theoretical and Practical Task* in *The Gadamer Reader*, 260.
[102] J. Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground*, 160.

theory, which eventually applies itself to a concrete situation. It can be argued that the relationship between theory and practice is on the one hand reciprocal and on the other hand circular, as practice feeds into theory, and theory feeds into practice as well. This reciprocal conception of the relationship of theory and practice within the framework of practical philosophy is exactly what Gadamer appeals to in the construction of his theory of hermeneutics.

Ultimately, what Gadamer is attempting to achieve is to construct a theory of hermeneutics, which corresponds to the phenomenon of understanding as it happens, not as it *ought* or *should* happen, nor as it is supposed to happen following the logic of the positive sciences. Thus, it is not the case that the reader applies the text to himself as if the text were a universal theory, but rather, as we have explained earlier it is more of a fusion of open horizons, the horizon of the reader and the horizon of the text. That is, they co-determine each other, just as theory and practice do in the case of Aristotelian practical philosophy, and this is precisely the reason why Gadamer goes back to Aristotle and practical philosophy. Gadamer has made the further claim: "practical philosophy is more than a mere methodological model for the hermeneutics sciences. It is also something like its substantive foundation."[103] In this claim, we remark the significance that is placed on practical philosophy for Gadamer. In effect, Gadamer wants hermeneutics to take the place of Aristotle's practical philosophy, which was at the antipodes of Platonic intellectualism, just as Gadamerian hermeneutics attempt to overcome the neutral methodology governing hermeneutics. Although Gadamer like Aristotle does concede that theory is of little help in practical terms when one is faced with a concrete situation, theory is still an essential part of

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[103] H.-G. Gadamer, *Autobiographical Reflections* in *The Gadamer Reader*, 28.

ethics and hermeneutics. However, what is most crucial is for our conception of theory not to be the result of a neutral observation method, but for it to be as close and reciprocal as possible to practice itself. Gadamer views theory as the "heightened awareness" of our everyday experience, which indubitably requires reflection and theorizing: "And yet the universal desire to know does not break off at the point where concrete practical discernment is the decisive issue. The connection between the universal desire to know and concrete practical discernment is a reciprocal one. So it appears to me that heightened theoretic awareness about the experience of understanding and the practice of understanding, like philosophical hermeneutics and one's own self-understanding, are inseparable."[104]

Gadamer: In the Footsteps of Heidegger

There is not a shadow of a doubt that Heidegger heavily influenced his student Gadamer regarding his intellectual development. In this section, we will attempt to bring out exactly what is the insight with respect to *phronesis* that Gadamer inherited from Heidegger and in what manner he adapted it for his own purposes. As is highlighted by Rodney Coltman, the most important element of continuity between Heidegger and Gadamer is the radical facticity that characterizes *phronesis*. In other words, *phronesis* is a type of knowledge which is always already *immer schon* situated, which means that knowing does not come before doing or being.[105] This is what allows Gadamer to transpose the notion of *phronesis* to his theory of hermeneutics. Just as *phronesis* consists in a being-conscious of one's rootedness

[104] H.-G. Gadamer, *Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy* in *The Gadamer Reader*, 245.
[105] R. Coltman, *The Language of Hermeneutics: Heidegger and Gadamer in Dialogue*, 22.

in one's ethical circumstances, so does the interpretation of a text consist in the convergence of the text's and the interpreter's historical circumstances.

What is really innovative in Gadamer's reappropriation of *phronesis* is precisely the fact that he adapts *phronesis* to the realm of hermeneutics. By doing so, he is not merely reinscribing *phronesis* into hermeneutics, he is redefining and widening the scope of hermeneutics and including the ethical phenomenon under its wing. Effectively, he follows Heidegger's footsteps in the reappropriation of *phronesis* so to speak, but he also takes up the Aristotelean concept within an ethical framework, which is its original place, and at the same time, he enlarges our understanding of hermeneutics, by encompassing the ethical into it. What Gadamer has successfully achieved is to incorporate the multifaceted and complex notion of *phronesis* into hermeneutics, namely into the understanding and interpretation of texts.

Commonality and Language

The most important divergence between Heidegger and Gadamer regarding *phronesis* is perhaps the conditions of its actualization. Namely, can we meet the sufficient and necessary conditions that will favor the actual concretion of *phronesis*? It seems that Heidegger might have a more pessimistic view of this possibility, whereas Gadamer might be more optimist and focused on the actual practice of *phronesis*. It is in a letter addressed to Richard J. Bernstein, that Gadamer makes this point clear: "Clearly your [Bernstein's] decisive argument is the collapse of all principles in the modern world, and I certainly agree with you that if this were correct, my insistence on *phronesis* would be nothing more than pure declamation. But is this really the case? Don't we all then run the risk of a terrible

intellectual *hubris* if we equate Nietzsche's anticipations and the ideological confusion of the present with life as it is actually lived with its own form of solidarity? Here, in fact, my divergence from Heidegger is fundamental."[106] This divergence consists in a fundamental belief that there is and will always be a bond of solidarity within society, which will allow for the proper exercise of *phronesis*. As opposed to Nietzsche and Heidegger who might think that this task is almost impossible, Gadamer urges us to hold on to common values and norms, which result from mutual understanding: "Rather, I am concerned with the fact that the displacement of human reality never goes so far that no forms of solidarity exist any longer. Plato saw this very well: there is no city so corrupted that it does not realize something of the true city; that is what, in my opinion, is the basis for the possibility of practical philosophy."[107] This mark of optimism can also be found in *Truth and Method* where Gadamer also emphasized in a very poetic manner that we should not be preoccupied by the "fading light of the sun", but we should turn our attention to the "first shimmer of its return"[108]. Indeed, as opposed to Heidegger's, at times, harsh criticism about everydayness and the corrupt state that language finds itself, Gadamer shows himself more hopeful about the state of language and *ethos*.

Furthermore, Gadamer strongly believes that the truth can be retrieved via language (more specifically, through dialogue), whereas Heidegger contends that language is too inauthentic and permeated by *das Man*, for us to be able to recuperate any truth from it. In fact, it is Gadamer's *nonlapsarian* view, as Dunne puts it, that fundamentally distinguishes him from

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[106] H.-G. Gadamer, *A Letter by Hans-Georg Gadamer* in *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, 264.
[107] *Ibid*.
[108] H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, XXXIV.

his predecessor[109]. Gadamer's philosophical approach seems to have a more practical focus, while Heidegger remains in the realm of the theoretical. Gadamer calls for a more practical approach in order to solve the probing problems that our contemporary society is facing: "what man needs is not only a persistent asking of ultimate questions, but the sense of what is feasible, what is possible, what is correct, here and now."[110] It is pretty clear that this sentence is an explicit critique of Heidegger's way of conducting philosophy. Although Gadamer is heavily indebted to Heidegger, there is still a sense in which he has rendered the concept of *phronesis* his own, by integrating *phronesis* at the heart of the problem of application. More importantly, Gadamer's interpretation of *phronesis* is quite different, in the sense that Gadamer believed that *phronesis* contains an irreducible dialogical character, whereas Heidegger admired Aristotle for having gone beyond Plato's dialectics and for perceiving the pernicious character of dialogue with respect to the pursuit for truth. On the contrary, Gadamer emphasized that it is solely on the basis of dialogue that there can be mutual understanding and it is only in this sense that *phronesis* can be properly exercised. Heidegger praises Aristotle for distancing himself from the dialogical tradition, ubiquitous in his predecessor Plato. For Heidegger, there are inherent limitations to the dialogical method, for example falling victim to *Dasein*'s own fallenness. In other words, expressing truth in dialogue exposes it to the declivity of idle chatter and might also lead one to falsely reduce philosophy to mere counter-argumentation and refutation. As Heidegger puts it, in *GA 19*: "On the contrary, it was because he [Aristotle] understood it more radically, because he saw Plato himself as being underway toward *theorein* in his dialectic, because he

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[109] J. Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground*, 166.
[110] H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, XXXIV.

succeeded in making real what Plato was striving for. Aristotle saw the immanent limits of dialectic, because he philosophized more radically."[111] In this passage, Heidegger clearly manifests a predilection for Aristotle's way of philosophizing, for being able to go further than Plato pertaining to his views on discursive language. The diagnosis that is conducted by Heidegger with regards to the present state of language is much more somber than Gadamer, and that is precisely why Heidegger himself uses language in a disruptive manner, a style that Dunne characterized as "oracular"[112]. Heidegger's neologisms and his admiration for the poetry of Hölderlin are examples of his rebellious attitude against the existing condition of language, as it is not possible for him to retrieve the question of being via this existing language. While Gadamer does agree that the growing and all-pervasive technocratic consciousness does pose a threat to language, he does not maintain, as Heidegger does, that it is impossible to retrieve the question of being via the current state of language. As a consequence, Gadamer does not appropriate the division of idle chatter and authentic modes of disclosure either, which in turn has direct ramifications on his views on language and dialogue. For instance, Gadamer, *contra* Heidegger, does not contend that the quest for truth might be endangered when treated in dialogue or conversation, risking it being reduced to idle chatter. We can state that Gadamer is starkly opposed to this particular view of Heidegger, as for Gadamer, openness and dialogue are crucial in attaining truth. As a result, Gadamer is a fervent advocate of the dialectical method and zealously believes in the power of genuine dialogue in our quest of attaining truth, as he states in an essay written after *Truth and Method*: "I have pointed towards the interchange of dialogue and to the dialogical

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[111] M. Heidegger, *GA 19*, 138.
[112] J. Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground,* 154.

structure of language in which an entirely undogmatic dialectic is enacted, and I have shown the way a communal language is shaped in it beyond the explicit awareness of the individual speaker and how a step-by-step unveiling of being comes about in this way."[113]

The Ethical

As it pertains to the ethical, we argue that Gadamer follows the footsteps of Heidegger in establishing an "original" ethics. As we have already discussed, there is a scholarly debate regarding whether Heidegger had completely ignored the ethical component of *phronesis*. We have maintained, in the previous chapter, that there is definitely an ethical resonance in Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle, albeit not within a traditional ethical framework. With respect to Gadamer, there is no doubt that he has preserved the ethical character of *phronesis* and it is also evident that ethics is at the very heart of his hermeneutics. We do not contend that there is a divergence between Heidegger and Gadamer regarding ethics; it is not the case that Heidegger accomplished the abstraction of the ethical and that Gadamer restored it. Instead, what we are trying to imply is that Heidegger instigated an inquiry into a more "original" ethics, that is prior to establishing an ethical framework per se. He wanted us to reflect more profoundly on the essence of action. Indeed, according to Heidegger, ontology, that is the question of being is of fundamental importance for the question of the ethical. Therefore, there can only be an "original" ethics if it stems from a well-thought out ontology. Heidegger intended to free ethics from all the prejudice that it has succumbed to under traditional metaphysics, which encompasses the separation of theory and practice. An original ethics aims to undercut this false dichotomy, which has been at its epicenter for

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[113] H.-G. Gadamer, *The Heritage of Hegel* in *Reason in the Age of Science*, 57.

several centuries. The word *ethos*, which in its most ancient meaning denotes a native place, a place where one is able to grow and flourish really gets to the essence of what an "original" ethics should be, at least in the eyes of Heidegger.[116] It should neither be considered as theory or practice. Rather, an "original ethics" offers us a reflection of what allows for the very possibility of conducting an ethical life and more broadly how we can make sense of our world and ourselves within this world. It is in the same vein that Gadamer pursues his investigation into the ethical. Gadamer completely revaluated the relationship between theory and practice, so as to arrive at a point where theory is not anymore considered superior to practice and where we view both attitudes as equally essential and interdependent.

What is common to Heidegger and Gadamer is that they do not offer us with a body of rules of ethical conduct, as both thinkers do not view as philosophy's task to posit these kinds of rules and norms. Rather, both think that the primary task of a philosophical ethics is to reflect upon the very possibility of acting, as is highlighted by Jean-Luc Nancy[117]. Indeed, both Heidegger and Gadamer were acutely aware of the peculiarity of the ethical and did not want to assimilate the ethical to the objectifying method of the positive sciences. Ethical life and ethical dilemmas are lived out by different individuals in a very singular way, and that is why the ethical, when it is reduced to generalities and concepts, does not remain authentic to its very nature. That is why both Heidegger and Gadamer did not conduct ethics in a conventional manner, by positing a set of rules to abide by. In fact, Heidegger once stated that: "in the tragedies of Sophocles we find *ethos* though more originally than in Aristotle's

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116 Dennis J. Schmidt, *Hermeneutics and the Ethical Life* in *The Blackwell Companion to Hermeneutics*, 104.
117 J.-L. Nancy, *Heidegger's "Originary Ethics"* in *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, 70.

lectures on Ethics."[118] Indeed, there is something about literature and art that grasps the singularity of the ethical and does not subsume it under general conceptualizations. In the same vein, Gadamer does call for a return to the word instead of the concept, namely a return to the factical life, as was also urged by his teacher, Heidegger. Essentially, this is one of the most significant contributions of Heidegger with regards to ethics, that is a return to life as it is lived out. It is also the most significant philosophical contribution that Gadamer inherited and reappropriated. Dennis J. Schmidt raises an important excerpt to this effect from one of Gadamer's latest essays, "*Vom Wort zum Begriff*": "from the word to the concept, but we must move from the concept to the word if we are to reach the other… this belongs to the great achievement of art … and in the end, touches upon the basic conditions of our lives together as human beings."[119] What is striking is that both thinkers view the ethical as domains which cannot abide by generalizable rules, but instead embrace the singularity that characterizes it.

In addition to the call for a return to the factical life, Gadamer also inherits and reappropriates Heidegger's acute awareness of the finitude of *Dasein*, which is also of the main reasons why Gadamer promotes *phronesis* as the more appropriate attitude to have over *theoria* in the accomplishment of the hermeneutical and ethical task. Within the ethical realm, *Dasein*'s finitude means that as human beings, we cannot transcend our own existence and posit universal rules and fixed significations, which are to remain eternal and unchangeable. As Nancy puts it: "Instead, "finitude" means precisely the non-fixing of such a signification: not, however, as the powerlessness to fix it, but as the power to leave it

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[118] M. Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism* in *Pathmarks*, 269.
[119] Dennis J. Schmidt, *Hermeneutics and the Ethical Life* in *The Blackwell Companion to Hermeneutics*, 107.

open."[120] The finitude of *Dasein* posited by Heidegger, in order to stray away from the dogmatism of substance metaphysics is not only taken up, but also made central by Gadamer in the development of his hermeneutics and his ethics. It is precisely because we are finite beings that we cannot conduct hermeneutics as it was conducted by Dilthey and Schleiermacher who believed that it was possible to put our existence into brackets and to arrive at an objective and universal interpretation of a text. Further, it is precisely because we are finite beings that we cannot posit a timeless universal ethical system. Gadamer takes up this notion that we are finite beings highlighted by Heidegger and radicalized it in his quest for truth. Indeed, Gadamer's whole hermeneutics, which rests upon the notion of *phronesis* is the result of an acute awareness that we are not some smaller version of an all-knowing God. *Phronesis* calls for prudence form one's own behalf when interpreting a text or when making an ethical decision. It calls for our being aware that we are fallible beings, and that we cannot blindly abide by rules, which have been posited by other finite beings. It is also this awareness of our finitude that is at the source of Gadamer's humility and his radical belief that we must always remain open to the possibility of the other being right.

Another fundamental similarity in the reappropriation of *phronesis* by Heidegger and Gadamer is their interpretation of *phronesis* as a knowledge which is impossible to separate from the being of the person involved. In the first chapter, we have pointed out Heidegger's description of *phronesis* as "conscience" or as a radical "transparency" to oneself. In effect, we find this same understanding of *phronesis* in the case of Gadamer, when he speaks of *phronesis* as a knowledge which is inextricable from self-knowledge. This understanding of *phronesis* as an *allo eidos gnoseos*, due to its intimate connection with being, as opposed to

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[120] J.-L. Nancy, *Heidegger's "Originary Ethics"* in *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, 70.

technical or even theoretical knowledge has significant ramifications for their understanding of the ethical. In Heidegger's case, this implies that ontology and the ethical are inseparable, and hence his questions pertaining to ontology have direct implications for our understanding of the ethical and more broadly how one ought to live one's life. In Gadamer's case, the same holds for the relationship between hermeneutics and ethics, namely that hermeneutics is deeply ethical, that is our understanding of the everyday world significantly impacts our conception of the life we ought to lead. Ultimately, our being cannot remain unaffected by its environment, and that is fundamentally characteristic of our being, for both Heidegger and Gadamer. Furthermore, both Heidegger and Gadamer view *Kairos* as being determining for the outcome of our action. In the first chapter, we have extensively showed how Heidegger deems *Kairos* to be a crucial aspect of action and more generally the unfolding of *phronesis*. Gadamer also highlights that we must always take the *Kairos* into account and deems it to be as important as knowledge itself: "In addition to all that goes into knowledge […] real knowledge also has to recognize the *Kairos*. This means knowing when and how one is required to speak. But this cannot be acquired merely by learning rules or by note."[122] In effect, choosing the right moment to act or to speak (in the case of rhetoric) is not a kind of knowledge that is formulable, and still it is an essential component of leading a good life. Both Heidegger and Gadamer's emphasis on *Kairos* which stems from Aristotle demonstrates that another kind of knowledge is required in order to fully capture the notion of *Kairos* as well.

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[122] H.-G. Gadamer, *Hermeneutics as a Theoretical and Practical Task* in *The Gadamer Reader*, 253.

Sophia* vs *Phronesis

This clarification on Heidegger's position pertaining to the primacy of *sophia* over *phronesis* was conducted in order to carry out a more accurate comparison of Gadamer and his teacher. It is clear, following this examination, that Gadamer was right in claiming that σοφία was ultimately what interested his master in Fribourg. Gadamer rather appealed to the Aristotelean concept of *phronesis* and made it central in *TM*, and *in lieu* of distinguishing it from σοφία, he distinguished it from the notion of *techne*, a distinction which he evidently also borrowed from Aristotle. Gadamer definitely did not follow his predecessor in positing the primacy of *sophia* over *phronesis*. Heidegger's project is ontological, that is, to rethink radically the ultimate question of Being, which has not been properly addressed hitherto. However, Gadamer's main concern is not to tackle the ultimate question of Being. It is obvious that Gadamer's concerns are more practical than those of his mentor. It is also on the basis of *logos* that Heidegger endorses the primacy of *sophia* over *phronesis*, as *phronesis* is inextricably bound to *logos*. For Heidegger, *logos* can only explain something as something else, it cannot directly access the Being of that something. Hence, *phronesis* is not capable of grasping the *aletheia* of a thing fully, as this essential truth finds itself mitigated by language.

In addition, Heidegger writes: "*sophia* is *Dasein*'s positionality toward the beings of the world in the full sense. *Phronesis* is *Dasein*'s positionality toward the beings, which are themselves *Dasein*"[123] Here it is clear that Heidegger shows his preference for *sophia*, as it is through *sophia* that we can attain the truth of Being, the full essence of Being. *Sophia* has the prerogative of accessing a superior kind of truth, precisely because it is accessed through *nous* and not through *logos*. *Sophia* brings into play *nous*, whereas as *phronesis* is inherently

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[123] M. Heidegger, *GA 19*, 113.

discursive. Thus, *phronesis* does not possess this exclusive privilege. This ties into and confirms what we have just highlighted, namely that through its mode of being *sophia* represents authenticity to Heidegger's eyes. Accordingly, for Heidegger, hearing and silence —not dialogue—constitute authentic modes of disclosure.

We must also inevitably turn to Gadamer's own words pertaining to his position vis-à-vis his master, Heidegger. For instance, in the aforementioned letter to Bernstein, Gadamer goes on to state: "As important as Heidegger and his 1923 *phronesis* interpretation were for me, I was already prepared for it on my own, above all by my earlier reading of Kierkegaard, by the Platonic Socrates, and by the powerful effect of the poet Stefan George on my generation."[124] Furthermore, in one of the last published works of Gadamer, which is about the sixth book of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, he also makes some remarks about the influence that Heidegger exerted upon him: "What struck me today is that in the manuscript of Heidegger, it is not at all *phronesis* which comes to the fore but rather the *arete* of the *bios theoretikos*, *sophia*. What on the whole strikes me the most is the preponderance of the ontological interest which goes as far as to include the general analysis of *phronesis*, to such an extent that in this programmatic writing the concept of *ethos* is hardly mentioned at all."[125] Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that these remarks were written at the end of Gadamer's philosophical career, and they should not make us think that Gadamer worked exclusively against his teacher. We maintain that Heidegger was concerned with *ethos*, and that is especially apparent in *GA18*, which we examined in the previous chapter. We should be prudent not to forget the actual evidence which points to Gadamer's significant

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[124] H.-G. Gadamer, *A Letter by Hans-Georg Gadamer* in *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, 265.
[125] J. Taminiaux, *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, 25.

Heideggerian influence, but they do still indicate that Gadamer's focus was not perfectly aligned with Heidegger, and that he did diverge in some way or another, especially with the later Heidegger. It is apparent that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is much more a reflection of the early Heidegger all the way until *Being and Time.*

What we tried to demonstrate above is that, both with regards to *phronesis* and *logos*, Gadamer seems to diverge in some ways from what his mentor had contended. Indeed, Gadamer does not uphold the model of *sophia*, but he opts for *phronesis* as the epistemological model *par excellence*, which constitutes the only light through which the human sciences can be properly understood and conducted. Gadamer also contends that the model of practical philosophy to which he associates the Aristotelean *phronesis* must replace the model of *theoria*, as human existence is not grounded on any kind of revelation. Rather, we must better assess the role of *theoria* within the hermeneutical and ethical framework. Conversely, Heidegger maintains the supremacy of *theoria* over practice in spite of *Dasein*'s finitude. Their divergence is also apparent when it comes to *logos.* Indeed, as we just mentioned, Heidegger and Gadamer have completely different views on whether *logos* should prevail in the attainment of truth. For Heidegger, monologue and vision prevail, as they avoid falling in the traps of everydayness, such as idle chatter. For Gadamer, it is authentic dialogue which triumphs over monologue as it forces to question one's own prejudices when confronting the other. We also tried to make clear throughout this comparison that Gadamer has distinct intentions from his predecessor. On the one hand, Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle partakes in a wider-scoped ontological project and on the other hand, Gadamer's reappropriation of Aristotle fits into a hermeneutical understanding of the human sciences and of ethics, and more generally of human existence.

Diverging Styles of Interpretation

There is also a significant difference in their understanding of understanding as such, and by consequence, the way in which their hermeneutics unfold. In this chapter, we have brought into focus the general lines of the Heideggerian and Gadamerian interpretation of the Aristotelean notion of *phronesis*. In order to understand more deeply in what they differ, we will resort to some differences highlighted by Jean Grondin[126] , who distinguishes the approaches of Heidegger and Gadamer pertaining to hermeneutics, and simultaneously sheds light on their different ways of interpreting Aristotle. It is important to remind here that Gadamer, in spite of being significantly indebted to Heidegger, has developed a different conception of hermeneutics and by the same token of comprehension and interpretation. For instance, the first distinction that can be identified between Heidegger and Gadamer, which is apparent throughout all the analysis that we have conducted, is their different view on tradition. On the one hand, for Heidegger, it is clear that tradition must undergo a destructive interpretation, seeing that it has been so deeply concealed and concealing, whereas on the other hand Gadamer does not view tradition in such a negative light, and his attitude towards it is not a destructive one. On the contrary, Gadamer views tradition as a fertile ground for the development of contemporary philosophy. More precisely, he talks about the *Fruchtbarkeit* of tradition, which we can translate as fertility or even fruitfulness. That is why, as we have seen, Heidegger seems to distance himself from the traditional interpretation of Aristotle, much more so than Gadamer. Heidegger seems to have a rather violent approach to Aristotle's text and the concept of *phronesis* as well as the concept of σοφία. Gadamer has himself characterized Heidegger's interpretation as a violent one on

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[126] J. Grondin, *Le passage de l'herméneutique de Heidegger à celle de Gadamer*, 18.

more than one occasion. By contrast, Gadamer tends to be more careful in his interpretation, as he acknowledges tradition and does not intend to destroy it. That is not to say that Gadamer does not appropriate the text. In fact, Gadamer contends that from the moment that understanding involves translating, it consists of an appropriation of the original text and of tradition, as there is no translating without imparting something of oneself into the text. In this sense, Gadamer is also more acutely aware of the limits of Heidegger's project of the destruction of tradition's blindly-accepted sediments, as for him, it is not possible to bring to our awareness the entirety of these pre-judgements, which are constitutive of our comprehension and therefore our interpretation. This is what effectively constitutes the second difference raised by J. Grondin (which goes hand in hand with the first difference), namely that Heidegger thinks of genuine interpretation as the comprehension that is aware of its own pre-suppositions and that can in turn can get rid of these pre-suppositions, which conceal the true essence of the text. Instead, Gadamer does not think of interpretation as something that can be deconstructed in a way that all of our pre-suppositions can be unpacked and laid out bare in front of our eyes, so to speak. Understanding is an event that happens to us, and we are so submerged by it, that clearing it from all our pre-judgments is hardly achievable. To acquire a deeper insight on what separates Gadamer from Heidegger, we will use a distinction, which has also been posited by J. Grondin between a *disappropriating* interpretation and a *translation-type* interpretation.[127] Indeed, Heidegger's interpretation aims at a *disappropriation*, meaning an awareness and rejection of the sediments of tradition, which conceal the actual text, in this case Aristotle's texts. By contrast, Gadamer, by doubting the overly ambitious possibility of unpacking and exposing all these

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[127] J. Grondin, *L'avenir de la philosophie est-il grec?,* 74-75.

sediments, aims at a more *appropriating* reading, which at the same time does not seek the destruction of tradition, precisely because he is aware that it is not possible to render every aspect of tradition transparent to oneself and to thus be able to effectively contest and destroy its tenets. It does not mean that there must therefore be no effort from our part to combat these pre-suppositions. Gadamer would actually contend the opposite, namely that we must make the effort and become self-aware of our pre-judgments, but in practice we quickly realize that this task is an exacting one, and that we can never render transparent all of our pre-suppositions. It would indeed be pretentious on our behalf to admit that this constitutes an attainable possibility. According to Gadamer, there is an inherent opacity, which characterizes our comprehension of things and we must be aware of this opacity and thus stay humble with regards to our understanding of things. That is why Gadamer emphasized that understanding must be open-ended and must remain subject to change and verification.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout this second chapter, we have attempted to clarify several concepts that are central to Gadamerian hermeneutics with the aim of acquiring a deeper understanding of the place *phronesis* occupied within his philosophy. We have demonstrated that *phronesis* ultimately amounts to an alternative to the way interpretation and more generally philosophy has been conducted until now. Furthermore, it offers a new way of understanding the very concept of understanding. Understanding is no longer to be ruled by the methodology of the natural sciences, but instead can be explained by the richer and more complex functioning of *phronesis*. We have also emphasized the importance of the

relationship between hermeneutics and ethics, which runs deep throughout all of Gadamer's works. On the one hand, ethical understanding which essentially amounts to *phronesis* is also the kind of understanding that is to be promoted for the interpretation of pas texts, but more importantly hermeneutics and understanding is a crucial part in the building of one's character and therefore the life that one will lead. Within the more traditional ethical frameworks that constitute the bulk of today's curriculum on moral philosophy, we are not taught the primordiality of understanding our environment in the construction of one's ethos. Gadamer reminds us that before one can reflect upon the means and ends of an action, or on the categorical imperative, there is something much more primordial, which affects our character and our behaviour, namely the understanding of our life-world. What we are taught at school, in our families, what our friends say to us are things that can deeply affect us, and the world we live in. If there is one lesson to take away from this analysis of *phronesis* is Gadamer's call for a return to the factical life, to the singularities of factical life.

CONCLUSION

The task of the present study was to put into relief the reappropriation of *phronesis* in Heidegger and Gadamer's philosophy. Our aim was twofold: on the one hand, we wanted to expose the role that *phronesis* occupies within the framework of each of the thinkers' philosophy and on the other hand we also wanted to highlight the continuity and the discontinuity in the relationship of Gadamer to his teacher Heidegger.

With respect to Heidegger, his reappropriation of *phronesis* is to be located within his larger attempt to "destroy" the history of philosophy in order to bring to light a more authentic interpretation. That is what he intended to do with the Aristotelean concept of *phronesis* and more broadly with Aristotle's philosophy. Heidegger attempted to unearth an authentic interpretation of Aristotle which had been buried under the scholastic tradition. Thus, naturally, Heidegger was intrigued by the notion of *phronesis* and dedicated quite extensive work to the subject, as it is a way of *being* concerned with action and deliberation. In order to gain a deeper insight of Heidegger's interpretation of *phronesis*, we closely examined several of his earlier texts pertaining to Aristotle. What we found is that Heidegger viewed *phronesis* as a special kind of "seeing" or "perceiving" with regards to a situation in which one is called to act. He interprets *phronesis* as an ability to look beyond mere facts, because mere facts are not sufficient for one to choose the right path of action in a given situation. In addition, our close reading of Heidegger's lectures revealed a Heidegger concerned with the others and the world, and interpreted *phronesis* as a caring for the others. This realization is very illuminating, as many maintain that Heidegger had no concern whatsoever for otherness in his philosophy. That is in part why there is a debate amongst

scholars regarding whether Heidegger did abstract the ethical from the concept of *phronesis.* Although some view Heidegger's interpretation of *phronesis* totally as extricated from any ethical signification which Aristotle had intended for it, we maintained that the opposite is true. After closely examining the early lectures of Heidegger pertaining to Aristotle as well as his later essay *Letter on Humanism*, it is untenable to claim that Heidegger completely disregarded the ethical component of *phronesis* by ontologizing the Aristotelean notion of *phronesis.* The strong ontological inclination of his philosophical thought does not altogether preclude the ethical. On the contrary, Heidegger's attempt to get back to the question of being and to challenge the blindly accepted assumptions that have been made about being until his time have significant ethical ramifications. As we have already mentioned, it is precisely because philosophy has misunderstood what it is to be which leads to the construction of ethical systems that bear more of a resemblance to the scientific model than to what it is to be a human being. It is for this reason that Heidegger's attempt to redefine what it is to be is of primordial importance for the pursuit of some sort of ethical truth.

We also arrived at the conclusion that Heidegger, although he saw in *phronesis* a unique way of being, ultimately upheld the primacy of *sophia*. We argue that he did so as his conception of authenticity bears a strong resemblance to what characterizes *sophia*. Nevertheless, Heidegger does not reappropriate the notion of *sophia* as it has been understood in the past several decades in the history of philosophy. Rather, he effects a radical transformation to the concept of *sophia* in order to arrive at a more authentic understanding of it. However, *phronesis* is not to be considered as inauthenticity, but as the most originary structure of *Dasein,* namely conscience. It is the horizon in which *Dasein* either is in a state of authenticity or inauthenticity, and it is by virtue of the call of *phronesis*

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that one is able to authentically disclose oneself' to oneself. Hence, for Heidegger, *phronesis* occupies a central role in *Dasein*'s quest to authentically be oneself.

As to Gadamer's reappropriation of *phronesis,* we argued that it is to be mainly situated within his quest for a more authentic understanding of the human sciences. Indeed, it is in his *magnum opus*, *Truth and Method*, that Gadamer retrieves the notion of *phronesis* in the context of the fundamental problem of application which pervades the hermeneutic tradition. Gadamer's most significant contribution to hermeneutics was to put to the forefront the notion of application as an integral part of the process of understanding and interpretation. When one comes to an understanding of something, be it a text or a tradition, the application of this text and this tradition to understand oneself is an essential part of a complete understanding. Instead of viewing application as a subsequent part of the process of interpretation, Gadamer insists on it being integrated into the phenomenon of understanding itself. That is where the notion of *phronesis* enters into play, as the peculiar nature and unfolding of *phronesis* is what Gadamer deems to be the appropriate manner in which the application of a text to oneself, namely the fusion of horizons should proceed. Gadamer is primordially attracted to the notion of *phronesis* because it is so distinguishable from the rationality of technical knowledge. As a case in point, *phronesis*, as opposed to *techne*, cannot be forgotten. Also, *phronesis* breaks with the traditional relationship between means and ends. Most importantly, it is a knowledge which is intimately related to one's self-knowledge, which is not all that often the case with the natural sciences.

Furthermore, Gadamer discusses *phronesis* in some of his later essays where he addresses *phronesis* within an ethical discussion. Gadamer upholds the superiority of Aristotle's ethics in the face of the issue he brings up with regards to ethics, that is to

overcome the superiority of theory over practice, and by the same token to stop conceiving of practice as something that must be subsumed under theory. At the same time, he highlights the notion that human finitude is impeding us from devising a set of eternal ethical laws. What Aristotelian ethics were able to achieve is to fuse together ethical know-how and ethical being, while at the same time being acutely aware of the limits of human knowledge. This is also the point on which hermeneutics and ethics coincide, for understanding always involves an application to oneself, which will inevitably influence one's *ethos*, one's character. This is precisely why we have highlighted that hermeneutics is deeply ethical, specifically in the way Gadamer conceives of hermeneutics. Furthermore, hermeneutics and ethics are similar insofar as they are both theories, hermeneutics being the theory of interpretation and ethics the theory of the good life. However, we have attempted to show that Gadamer wants us to conceive of theory and practice under a different light. Gadamer is attracted by the radically different conception of the relationship between theory and practice that *phronesis* offers us. Indeed, within the framework of *phronesis*, theory is not understood as a set of general rules under which every particular case must be subsumed. Rather, *phronesis* provides us with a more complex framework which involves a reciprocal relationship between theory and practice, a constant to-and-fro movement between the two.

In the latter part of this study, we exposed the ways in which Heidegger and Gadamer's interpretations of *phronesis* are similar or dissimilar. What strikes us the most, and not surprisingly, is that there are, for the most part, a lot of elements of continuity between Heidegger and Gadamer. Most importantly, both view *phronesis* as an *allo eidos gnoseos* and as constituting a radically different conception of knowledge than that of the Cartesian model, for instance. What is radically different with *phronesis* is the fact that it

cannot be extricated from being, and that is what Heidegger first highlights when interpreting this Aristotelian concept which he bequeathed it to his student Gadamer. In fact, with hindsight, we can truly affirm that Gadamer is the inheritor of Heidegger's thought by taking up many ideas and concepts in Heidegger which he further develops and makes his own. In other words, Gadamer's thought can be considered as an extension and development of Heidegger's thought not only for his own aim of rethinking the way the human sciences were conducted, but more broadly to rethink what it *is* to be and *how* one should be. In our comparative analysis, we have underscored the development of Heidegger's hermeneutical circle in Gadamer's own thought in order to reinstate the inevitability and legitimacy of prejudices. We have showed how Gadamer takes up Heidegger's intention to devise an "originary" ethics which would be built upon a more thought out reflection of the essence of action and its relationship to theory. Their solidarity is even more apparent when it pertains to their views on the relationship between ontology and hermeneutics and ethics. Both view the impossibility of separating being from ethics, or hermeneutics, as irrefutable. And it is this very assumption which represents the impetus for both their rethinking of the way in which philosophy is conducted. Most importantly, this assumption is also what motivates their call for a return to the factical life, as one's self-knowledge arises from the everyday structures and our world which are fundamentally grounded upon our living together. Thus, there is no point in devising a theory, which is totally detached from our being, as it will clearly not be representative and truthful of who and what we are.

The present study aimed at underscoring the importance of an *allo eidos gnoseos*, that is *phronesis*, by virtue of the examination of two central figures in German philosophy of the twentieth century, namely Heidegger and Gadamer. Their contribution to philosophy is

considerable as they mark a turning point in the history of philosophy. Both Heidegger and Gadamer, in following the phenomenological revolution of Husserl, constitute challenges to the way mainstream philosophy had been and is still conducted, and that is partly why they are so fascinating to study. By specifically turning to their interpretations of *phronesis*, we have been able to get to the heart of both their philosophies, and specifically how they intended to transform philosophy. By examining the notion of *phronesis* within a more contemporary philosophical setting, our study wanted to show how valuable it can be to go back to the fathers of philosophy and attempt to see the merit in their philosophy even when trying to fight present-day battles. Indeed, we firmly believe that the more human and empathetic approach to understanding philosophy and understanding one another more generally, especially advocated by Gadamerian hermeneutics, under the influence of Aristotelian ethics and his master's interpretation of Aristotle is inestimable in challenging the hegemony of technique in today's society.

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