CONFRONTING DEATH: CULTIVATING COURAGE FOR CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

The United States is a nation of many cultures. There is a diversity of ethnic and religious groups, and individuals of all, majority and minority, are granted constitutional rights including free speech and free exercise of religion. In such a liberal-democratic society, it is imperative to teach students to engage in dialogue about different ways of life. Yet any preferred way of life is predicated on a vision of the good life and of human flourishing that gives credence to that preference, and so discussion about different ways of life is at heart discussion of differing visions of the good. Without the ability to engage in dialogue about these differences, we risk growing intolerance and outright violence of one group against another, regardless of any rights abstractly granted to anyone within our borders.

To meet this challenge, educational theorists have proffered a wide range of theories of multicultural education and of dialogue about the good. However, these theories have been premised on the idea of equal worth, i.e., all visions of the good and all cultural practices are deemed a priori equally valuable. This levels all cultures to merely different variations of the same category of "others", which makes the claim of worth vacuous, presumes an epistemological point of privilege, and shuts down the possibility of one's own way of life being challenged. The very notion of a good life requires that one way of life is deemed preferable to others, and this requirement precludes the possibility of judging all ways of life as being of equally valued—of judging one way of life as being as good as any other. The challenge in this dissertation is to conceptualize dialogue about the good that allows for evaluative judgments and demands
deliberation about the good that takes seriously claims from those who do not choose the same way of life.

Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory of hermeneutic experience helps us conceptualize understanding others' visions of the good in a way that makes possible the choosing of one way of life as preferable while at the same time preventing a distorted understanding of others' ways of life. To understand in such a way requires us to move away from any dogmatism about what it means to lead a good life and towards acknowledging we might be wrong. It is to put our beliefs and, by extension, ourselves at risk: it is to confront death. As such, understanding requires courage, but courage here must be understood relative to the task of understanding. Courageous understanding is not a method, talent, or abstracted knowledge. It requires a balance between aggressive assertion and diffident reception, and it requires attention to the particulars of the conversation and its participants.

Courage for cross-cultural understanding can only be learned through practice, and this can be most fully realized in schools through the study of subject-matter that require interpretation, such as those found in the humanities. Subjects like art, literature, and philosophy allow students to become comfortable with the ambiguity of and diverse perspectives about human life as opposed to rigid certitude of correct answers and mastered skills. Students become intimately friendly with the finitude of human understanding, and in so doing they open up to the richness and infinite diversity of humanity.

The very survival of a diverse liberal democratic society requires its young to be taught how to be wrong and not just right. It requires an education richer than mere
knowledge and skill acquisition--one that aims at asking what it means to be human so that we might become more courageously humane.
To Stephanie, without whom this work would be still be a dream receding into the realm of impossibilities.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

There must be something midway between the inauthentic and homogenizing demand for recognition of equal worth, on the one hand, and the self-immurement within ethnocentric standards, on the other. There are other cultures, and we have to live together more and more, both on a world scale and commingled in each individual society.¹ --Charles Taylor

[The] inability to conceive of its own devastation will tend to be the blind spot of any culture. By and large a culture will not teach its young: 'These are the ways in which you can succeed, and these are the ways in which you will fail; these are the dangers you might face, and here are opportunities; these acts are shameful, and these are worthy of honor--and, oh yes, one more thing, this entire structure of evaluating the world might cease to make sense.'² --Jonathan Lear

E pluribus unum. In a pluralistic democratic society such as the United States, constituted by diverse ethnic groups and constitutional rights to free speech and free expression of religion, teaching students to engage well in dialogue about competing visions of the good is imperative for civic education. Does a good life privilege wealth aggregation over charity? Does a good life mean merely abiding by laws? Does a good life require the free and full expression of our creative capacities? Does a good life in America mean abiding by the mores of Christianity? Does it demand we question tradition or accept it? Question authority or obey it? Without the ability to engage in dialogue about questions of what it means to live a good life, we lose the ability to consider other ways of life as legitimate. As such, we risk growing intolerance and outright violence of one group against another, regardless of the rights granted to anyone

within our borders. We see numerous examples of the will of groups to establish their own vision of the good as the law of the land. For example, those who argue that America is a Christian nation, those who argue that socialism is anti-American, or those who argue that the freedom of speech of neo-Nazi groups should be protected; and let's not forget that America worked to annihilate the cultural traditions of Native American nations through forced acculturation and genocide. Are all visions of the good life acceptable? Certainly, it would be a mistake to put too great an emphasis on the unum, but so too would it be a mistake to emphasize the pluribus. If we push too far towards the unum, we risk violence to the voices (and possibly the lives) of the pluribus. If we push too far towards the pluribus, we wrongly deny the fact there are people who share in common social practices, customs and institutions--that there are cultures--and we wrongly ignore the common bonds that bind the plurality in the United States; we cannot discuss whether neo-Nazis have a right to free speech without first presuming that we all believe the protection of free speech is a shared good to some extent.

America has had the unique problem (although becoming less unique with growing international migrations) of creating and maintaining a nation comprised of immigrants from other nations. In order to ensure that e pluribus unum truly means that the one is derived out of the many and not that the one is the one into which the many are violently forced, freedoms are granted to citizens, and political mechanisms exist to prevent any one group from becoming the sole component of the unum. The unum that is America is by design a changing one, continually influenced and transformed by the flux of the pluribus. In order to preserve the fluidity of visions of good that guide our shared social practices and institutions at any time and to prevent the dogmatism of any
one group from prevailing, we need dialogue about visions of the good, or what we might call ethical dialogue.³

To say that we need dialogue about visions of the good, however, does not mean simply that we need to educate ourselves more about the practices of the cultures that comprise our nation and of the plurality of goods articulated within those practices. Dialogue about the good cannot solely rest on knowing about other ethical frameworks, because the mere fact that we know about them does not mean that we have any understanding of what it is to live according to them. For example, I might know that a group of people have lived under a repressive regime for years, I might know that their religious practices are different than mine, and I might know that they have such-and-such customs; but that does not mean I know what it means to be a member of that group—to exist within the social practices and institutions of that group and to grapple with the ethical dilemmas and visions of the good that accompany those practices and institutions. Nor does it mean I understand why it is one might choose to live another life.

A more specific example is that of fatherhood. We might know what the general parenting practices are in China, but this does not mean we know what it would mean to choose to be a parent in one way over another within that cultural milieu nor to live with the consequences of choosing one parenting style over another there. Once one knows what it means to be a father in a given cultural context, then one can deliberate over what it means to be a good father, and then, from that, how one might, in his specific life, articulate in a specific and unique way good-fatherness. Anyone's life is a composite of these deliberations and choices, all of which articulate a vision of what it means to lead a

³ I am borrowing this use of the term, ethical dialogue, from Robert Kunzman, whose work will be discussed in chapter 2.
good life. So, choosing how one lives one's life is possible only by virtue of the ethical horizon that lends actions moral significance, and our activities and actions are made intelligible to us by whatever cultural resources are present.

Not only is the mere knowing-that of other cultures a deficient mode of understanding, it does not solve the problem of misunderstanding but merely shifts the place of misunderstanding. To explain this point, I turn to Charles Taylor, who warns us against a multiculturalism that presumes all traditional cultures are of equal value, that every culture has a right to be valued by others, that there are "judgments of equal worth applied to the customs and creations of different cultures." The problem here is not the presumption of value on a relative level but the absolute equalizing of the value of all cultures—demanding "as a matter of right that we come up with a final concluding judgment that [another culture's] value is great, or equal to others", including one's own. To claim that all cultures are equally valued is to make any claim of value vacuous. In addition, from Taylor's perspective, such a claim also presumes that one has the best means to measure value, which at the very outside reconstitutes one's ethnocentrism. For example, the claim that all religions should be valued equally in American society is an ethical claim grounded in the ethos of American culture, wherein the separation of church and state is valued. Take, as counterexamples, that Judaism is more valued to the Israeli state or Islam to the Iranian state. In other words, we cannot say that all cultures are of equal value without also saying that those cultures who believe differently are not as valuable; for we choose our value of "equal value" over the others, a simple act of preference that as such concretizes a judgment of unequal worth.

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5 Ibid., 69.
Thus, the presumption of *a priori* equal value does not escape the problem of marginalizing other cultures; it merely does so more insidiously. As Taylor eloquently states,

…real judgments of worth suppose a fused horizon of standards…they suppose that we have been transformed by the study of the other, so that we are not simply judging by our original familiar standards. A favorable judgment made prematurely would not only be condescending but ethnocentric. It would praise the other for being like us.\(^6\)

What we require, he says, "is not peremptory and inauthentic judgments of equal value, but a willingness to be open to comparative cultural study of the kind that must displace our horizons in the resulting fusions."\(^7\)

The distinction here is between (a) having an understanding of others that can be called forth and held in reserve in the mind at will and (b) one that permanently transforms the way one understands the world generally. In other words, the ethical framework being understood no longer is "other" but breaks into our own ethical horizon and transforms it. In order to engage with other visions of the good, then, one must fully accept the possibility that one's own vision of the good is not the best, if understanding is truly to take place. One must deeply and fundamentally ask the question, what would it be like for *me* to value within the other framework? Who might I become within that framework?

The transformation of horizons in ethical understanding is a transformation of how one chooses worthy activities. So, to say that we understand a way of life as something more than merely knowing that it exists or knowing what it is in the abstract is to make the claim that we have some deeper understanding of the why and the how of

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\(^6\) Ibid., 70-71.

\(^7\) Ibid., 73.
that way of life—we understand what it might mean to live that life ourselves. This, in
turn, requires that we understand why one might value one way of life over another and
what guiding goods articulate themselves in the actions of those who live that life. In
other words, understanding other ways of life requires us to understand different visions
of the good. So, it is a mistake to think of dialogue about other cultures without
implicating dialogue about differing visions of the good, and it is the same mistake to
think of ethical dialogue as something independent of concrete practices made intelligible
through cultural resources.

To sum so far, there are two pitfalls of judging cultural worth according to Taylor:
first, we must acknowledge that to make a claim about any way of life is to claim one
way of life as preferable to another, even if and when we say all ways of life are of equal
worth. Second, we must acknowledge that to truly understand any other culture one must
allow for the transformation of one's own horizon. If we take these in conjunction with
the claim that cultural practices and instructions are inextricable from visions of the good,
then any discussion of cultural worth is at root a discussion of ethics, and likewise any
discussion about the good implicates practices and institutions that are culturally bound.
The quest to find the balance between pluribus and unum is then at root an ethical one.
As such, any dialogue about cultural worth is ethical dialogue. To say that a culture's
practices or institutions are of worth is to say that the guiding vision of the good that
gives meaning to those practices or institutions is of worth.

The implication of these conclusions is that the way in which we pedagogically
approach the problem of diversity in the United States must be revisited. In the United
States, the primary pedagogical means by which we teach understanding others' ethical
horizons is through multicultural education. Yet unfortunately such education (a) is heavily predicated on the aim of teaching children about cultures in a know-that mode, and (b) it cowers from any judgment of worth of particular cultural practices, i.e., all cultures and their practices are judged just as valuable as any other.

Considering the intimate tie between discussions of equal worth and the vision of the good that are implicitly judged in them, multicultural education must take ethical dialogue as a central practice if true understanding of others is to be achieved. Moreover, ethical dialogue must avoid the same pitfalls listed above for cultural worth: (a) ethical dialogue, if it is rightfully to be called such, must acknowledge that differing visions of the good are inherently of unequal worth to those participating in a dialogue, and (b) ethical understanding requires the transformation of one's ethical horizon. To be clear, this transformation of one's ethical horizon is one that results in one thinking differently about the ethical but does not require one to slavishly accept the others claim as true.

We might ask whether there are any existing conceptions of dialogue that meet these criteria. Unfortunately, conceptions of dialogue mainly fall into two camps, and each fail to avoid the aforementioned pitfalls: conceptions that rely primarily on logos (language and rational thought) and those that rely primarily on the precondition of shared experience.

In the first case, the experience of the other can be talked about and understood in a way that allows one to keep the other's claims at a distance and precludes it from transforming one's own ethical horizon. These are conversations in which the subject matter remains abstracted and alienated from one's existence and can easily be forgotten.
once the conversation ends. These conceptualizations do not require the transformation of one's horizon.

In the second case, conceptualizations of dialogue require start with the assumption that experience between interlocutors is shared, and this shared experience serves as the foundation of dialogue. For example, if both people live in a war torn area of the world, both might find mutual understanding of each other on the grounds of that experience. Although I do not deny the importance of shared experience or of its creation within dialogue where it might originally be absent, in the case of ethical dialogue experience and visions of the good must be different if dialogue is to transform the ethical horizons.

Although either logos or experience alone are insufficient, I do not mean to say they are unnecessary. Dialogue requires language and rational thought (logos) in order to communicate and make intelligible to another one's ethical horizon, and engagement with the other ethical horizon creates an experience that transforms one's horizon of understanding. Thus, in addition to the aforementioned prescriptive criteria for avoiding the pitfalls of the doctrine of equal worth, two additional descriptive dimensions must be accounted for and made necessary in conceptualizing ethical dialogue: (a) the logos--language and rational thought--and (b) differing experiences that allow for the transformation of ethical horizons when they are communicated and understood.

To this end, in chapter 2 I contend that Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory of hermeneutic experience meets these criteria. Gadamer's theory rests on the idea that language is universal insofar as any experience we undergo can only be made sense of or communicated through language. Moreover, understanding requires what Gadamer calls
negative experience, wherein one understands properly only if one understands differently. The process of understanding, then, takes place when one's understanding itself is thwarted rather than confirmed. This negative experience is distinct from just understanding an abstract concept differently such that it does not touch the way I understand myself. In the case of Gadamer's hermeneutics, one's tradition provides the language and conceptual framework for understanding one's self and world. The negative experience that arises out of understanding one's tradition is a fortiori a negative experience of one's self-understanding. When such an experience is induced through conversations about the good that occur across traditions, the very framework through which one understands one's self can undergo radical transformation, for its foundation is called into question.

To explain further, I return to Taylor, who describes the fundamental role one's understanding of the good plays in everyday actions and in one's self-understanding when he says,

People may see their identity as defined partly by some moral or spiritual commitment, say as a Catholic, or an anarchist. Or they may define it in part by the nation or tradition they belong to . . . What they are saying by this . . . is that [such a commitment] provides the frame within which they can determine where they stand on what is good, or worthwhile, or admirable, or of value . . . [W]ere they to lose this commitment or identification, they would be at sea, as it were...It's what we call an 'identity crisis'...They lack a frame or horizon within which things can take on a stable significance. . . .

To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what is not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary.⁸

Taylor uses the language of moral space here, but I will use the phrase ethical horizon to designate the understanding one has of the good life. The reason for this shift is to be

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clear that I am referring to the framework of intelligibility that determines actions as being right or wrong and not to specific allowable activities one carries out as right or wrong. In other words, any moral space in which questions about the good and bad arise is framed by and made intelligible through an ethical horizon that provides the parameters and language of that space. This horizon could be a collective horizon or an individual's horizon constituted in part by horizons shared with others.

Thus, engagement in ethical understanding transforms ethical horizons. It follows that there are implications in ethical dialogue for one's self-understanding, for one's identity is defined at least in part by moral commitments, which are made intelligible through one's ethical horizon. Taylor contends that to know who one is to be oriented in moral space. That is, I understand myself through my activities, I choose one activity or another because one is preferable to the other, and this preference is anchored in my understanding of what is good. More broadly, I choose one way of life over another because it stands in accord with my vision of the good life. For example, I choose to be a father or not to be a father because my choice accords with what it means for me to live a good life. Who we are and who we choose to become require a conscious effort to direct our activities. To some, the good life is to aggregate large amounts of wealth. To others, the good life of study leads them to aggregate large amounts of debt. If one who chooses to lead one's life by the pursuit of aggregating wealth as one of the highest goods of American life encounters another who believes that such pursuits are fundamentally evil, then activities fundamental to how each organizes her activities and through which she comes to understand herself as an American or, more fundamentally, as a self, can be called into question. When there is a breakdown in the ethical framework, there is a
breakdown in self-understanding. In short, a challenge to my vision of the good is a threat to the way I have chosen to live my life and thus how I understand myself.

A central claim of this dissertation, predicated on Taylor's argument and which I attend to in greater detail in chapter 3, is that challenges to one's ethical horizon are inextricably tied to threats to one's self-understanding, and one must be courageous if one is to confront this threat well. Courage becomes important, because when faced with such threats, one's faces a kind of death of one's self, and one might react rashly or cowardly in the face of that death. In other words, were one's ethical framework to be challenged in such a way that it no longer becomes tenable, one's self becomes untenable: one faces the death of one's self as one knows it. Thus, as Ernest Becker rightfully observes, "No wonder men go into a fit of rage over the fine points of belief: if your adversary wins the argument about truth: you die."9

When we encounter mortal threats, we share the same instinct of self-preservation with the animal kingdom: we physically fight or flee. The animalistic reaction to threats to one's body is for the sake of maintaining one’s own physical life. Yet human beings perceive a second dimension of threats: those that threaten how we understand ourselves—as good or bad, wealthy or poor, virtuous or base, etc. Threats to the existential/cultural self can lead to the same violent defense as mortal threats. Take, for example, Rudolph J. Rummel's study, which found that “the more ethnic groups in state, the more likely it will have a high rate of guerrilla and revolutionary warfare. And the more religious groups in a society, the more intense the general violence.”10 Conflicts between ethic groups are often conflicts between ways of life and visions of the good, and sometimes the

confusion between an existential threat and a mortal one is great enough that existential threats are met with physical defense. Here, the human or cultural reaction is not to maintain one's physical life but rather to maintain one’s way of life, and one's way of life is inextricably tied to one's understanding of one's self.

In its milder forms, protective measures taken against cultural threats can range from delegitimizing threatening practices by refusing to acknowledge them or by ostracizing certain groups. In its extreme forms, protective measures lead to the ultimate act of annihilation: eliminating the human(s) in which such practices and ways of being present themselves--individual murder, democide, or inter-group genocide. Examples of this are the murders of people on the grounds of sexual orientation, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or people who otherwise carry on a life or promote ideas about how one should live a life that are not considered “right”.

Certainly, flying into a fit of rage over a challenge to one's understanding of the good could hardly qualify as dialogue in the way that I have framed it. Thus, engaging in dialogue requires specific comportments by those who participate in it. In conceptualizing dialogue, I have made implicit claims about what it means to engage in dialogue well. It stands to reason that it would be a mistake to theorize ethical dialogue on the grounds that activities are always chosen in preference over other activities (and ways of carrying out those activities) and then fail to acknowledge that such a theory of dialogue is dependent on preferable ways of being towards others. That is, ethical dialogue presumes an ethics of dialogue.

In the transition from conceptualizing a theory of ethical dialogue to conceptualizing an ethics of dialogue, I examine the specific phenomenon of aggression
towards cultural otherness. I do so from the standpoint that cultural otherness can be seen as an existential threat that evokes the same feelings as if one's one physical existence were at risk, and in chapter 4 I specifically develop the concept of courage for the case of understanding.

At this point, one might object that it is entirely possible to provide a descriptive account of dialogue without implicating an ethics, and so formulating an ethics of dialogue for ethical dialogue rests on false assumptions. In fact, Gadamer's theory of hermeneutics, upon which this dissertation relies, is a descriptive account. This is true. However, as I will point to later, Gadamer clearly sets conditions for understanding to take place, and, although hermeneutic understanding is not ethical in itself, in order for it to take place one must comport one's self in a certain way towards that which one aims to understand. In other words, there is a right way to comport one's self in order for understanding to take place; there is the ethical dimension of understanding. By extension, one must comport one's self in a particular way in order for in ethical dialogue to take place: one must be courageous.

One might object also to the very idea of positing a virtue like courage for ethical dialogue. Whose virtues will I choose? whose form of dialogue? from whose ethical horizon? speaking of ethnocentricity, shouldn't we deconstruct these virtues instead of creating new forms of power that marginalize those who do not conform? Obviating reinvention of the wheel, I briefly turn to the work on communicative virtues by Suzanne Rice and Nicholas Burbules to offer their compelling answer to such charges. Rice and Burbules clearly give merit to the underlying concerns held by such critics, but at the same time they assert that relying solely on the dissenting and destabilizing of meaning
carried out by deconstructionism leaves nothing positive to affirm other than dissent and destabilization itself.\textsuperscript{11}

To make such a claim is not to deny that some are marginalized from dialogue or that there are people whose ways of engaging in dialogue are seen as deficient merely by fiat of the dominant cultural hegemony. Rather, Rice and Burbules implore us to ever be on the lookout for such forms of domination and to strike down barriers of power asymmetry in dialogue. Nonetheless, in opposition to these critiques, Rice and Burbules make the positive assertion that communicative virtues like patience and careful listening are necessary, because without them "one is likely to resort to whatever tactics available to promote one's own perspective over others', or to refuse conversational engagement altogether.\textsuperscript{12} They argue it is important to think of communicative virtues as "a cluster of affective dispositions that together promote open, inclusive, and undistorted communication...[and that] helps thwart the tendency to regard certain virtues as appropriate only to some groups..." working against the exclusions of difference or the unilateral mandate that one must be a certain way.\textsuperscript{13}

One can argue, as René Arcilla does, that Rice and Burbules's position unduly marginalizes from dialogue those they critique. Arcilla claims that the two discourses of dissent and destabilization (deconstruction) on the one hand and of communicative

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{11} The radical freedom-from such critics attempt to provide leaves one with no grounds for freedom-to do anything but dissent and destabilize, a position that swallows its own tail. If it is not self-defeating circularity, then in the very least such a position fails to recognize it assumes a point of privilege granted by a tradition of thought that assumes a true vision of freedom, and that carrying out the liberation towards such freedom annihilates the Other by immediately assuming the Other's claims must be deconstructed [destroyed], making the thoughts of the Other new territory of the Self and claiming the Other's voice as spoils from its war.


\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 37-8.
\end{footnotesize}
virtues on the other should not be seen as mutually exclusive. Rather than maintaining ideological stances towards each other, "both discourses stand to help each other foster a more understanding community, and so should enter into dialogue rather than debate".\textsuperscript{14}

Although I am sympathetic to Arcilla's warning, I think it is a misdirected admonishment, at least insofar as it might be directed towards Rice and Burbules, as it misunderstands the type of critics Rice and Burbules set themselves against: those who take from the outset that every read is a misread--that understanding is impossible. It is not Rice and Burbules that exclude such critics from dialogue. These critics exclude themselves, and Rice and Burbules do them more justice by recognizing this as their position than by attempting to force upon their critics an activity they reject.\textsuperscript{15} Rice and Burbules make this clear when they say, "If persons have chosen not to be a part of this social frame, we only have two alternatives: one is to strive to engage them…the other is to respect their separateness and way of life."\textsuperscript{16} This is not to claim that deconstruction lacks value; it is to acknowledge that it categorically rejects dialogue as an activity worth pursuing.

One might also raise the objection that establishing rules or procedures for dialogue can suffice and is preferable to establishing virtues, which are by necessity culturally biased. However, the attempt to theorize a set of transcendental regulative rules cannot escape the charge that any such rules are constructed and understood from


\textsuperscript{16} Rice and Burbules, "Communicative Virtues and Educational Relations."
the perspective of an ethical horizon, which sets the boundaries of what any person or people find to be right or wrong. In other words, such rules cannot transcend the culture from which they find their reason. As such, denying the cultural influence on such rules makes the same mistake of reconstituting ethnocentrism as the doctrine of equal worth. Virtue ethics, on the other hand, does not try to escape the ethical horizon or separate good conduct with the ethical fabric of a culture. As such, rather than hiding cultural influence virtue ethics is empowered to bring its biases into dialogue.

Second, merely setting regulative rules would fail to adequately support any theory of ethical dialogue that meets the necessary conditions of dialogue, because ethical dialogue requires the undergoing of an experience that cannot be assured through rules or procedures. More to the point, transcendental rules of conduct in dialogue ignore the psychodynamic forces that close off understanding, even if by all appearances one seems to understand the other. It is quite possible that one can, if one is able to avoid lashing out in anger, sit across from another with whom one disagrees on important matters and merely dismiss what the other says, if not overtly, then by merely taking the stance that they "understand" the other in the same deficient way discussed above. Do these criticisms make rules for dialogue superfluous? Perhaps not. But saying so does not mean any set of rules sufficient for the conditions of true understanding to take place.

Thus, in this dissertation I attempt (a) to theorize a form of ethical dialogue that requires both language and experience and that avoids the pitfalls of equal worth and self-immurement, and I attempt (b) to take the first step in theorizing an ethics of dialogue that is compatible with ethical dialogue: an aretaic ethics centered on the virtue of
courage. I end the dissertation with an inquiry into the process and possibility of cultivating courage in schools.

Before summarizing the chapters, I wish to forewarn the reader that central to this dissertation is the role death anxiety plays in understanding. It is important that this point is not misunderstood. First, as the reader already might have been picked up on, it should be noted that generally I am speaking of the death of one's self that occurs in the breakdown of self-understanding.

We are always bumping up against our existential finitude as possibilities open up and close down before us with each decision we make. Yet when we reach our physical end, our existential finitude reaches its finality: all possibilities are extinguished. So, I will argue later that our fear of our biological end is at root a fear of a complete existential collapse or a foreclosure of all possibilities, and thus it makes sense to speak of the anxiety of our selves becoming unintelligible as part and parcel of the anxiety we feel towards our biological end. So, death anxiety is the anxiety we feel toward losing either a part or all of ourselves. In other words, it is not hyperbolic or exaggerated to speak of death anxiety from the perspective of our existential possibilities and impossibilities. One must remember that the role death anxiety plays in dialogue has to do more broadly and directly with one's existential finitude and not one's biological end.

It also might be argued that using a term like death anxiety to discuss ethical dialogue might drive people away from wanting to engage in dialogue. However, I think the alternative of not acknowledging strong psychodynamic forces that can come to play in ethical dialogue is a much greater risk. In doing so, we might diminish, cover over, or outrightly dismiss the anxiety as nothing worth noting or nothing worth considering in an
ethics of dialogue. If we ignore this central dynamic in ethical dialogue, any solution to breakdowns in dialogue is incomplete, and any constellation of communicative virtues will be deficient because it would fail to take into account an important virtue of character necessary for sustaining ethical dialogue: the ability to deal with such anxiety in well.

I also want to note that in making death anxiety central to ethical dialogue, I am not saying that death anxiety is always active in ethical dialogue, nor am I saying that death anxiety necessary plays a role in all forms of dialogue. It is quite possible for someone to seek out fundamental transformation in dialogue and thus have diminished or altogether absent anxiety about such a transformation. Nonetheless, death anxiety is present, at least as potentiality, in ethical dialogue because ethical dialogue as such opens up the possibility of radical challenges to one's understanding of the good and thus the possibility of radical challenges to one's self-understanding. It is true that someone might say that one enjoys such radical challenges and that one thrives in them, but the point here would be to ask what would happen if that understanding of one's self were challenged, that in fact one is not as open to the challenge as one thought, that one is not so certain of who one is, even when one's self-concept is one in which one is certain one is comfortable with uncertainty.

Finally, I want to be clear that my approach in this inquiry is one of Gadamerian hermeneutics. It should be understood that this stands in contradistinction to the critical hermeneutics of Habermas and the radical hermeneutics of Derrida. I will briefly describe my approach here, and further discussion of Gadamer's theory vis-à-vis his
critics can be found in Appendix A.\textsuperscript{17} Essentially, the differences among hermeneutic approaches are about different starting points for ethical understanding and analysis.

When distinguishing between the hermeneutics of Gadamer and of Habermas, we are distinguishing between the starting assumptions, respectively, of a situated self with finite consciousness and that of a Cartesian self with access to universal Reason. Rather than assume the universality of reason, I aim to engage with other texts in order to confront the finitude of understanding and thus to understand something differently. From this perspective, discussion is not a resolution of discrepancies but is, borrowing from the words of Christopher Smith, a "running together of my world and [my interlocutor's] in what has become a shared sense of sensus communis."\textsuperscript{18} Gadamer makes this point clear when he says that Enlightenment philosophy, with one of its primary aims being the rejection of tradition, failed to see itself as a tradition of intellectual thought as well. In other words, the Enlightenment attempted to access a universal reason that could abstract itself from the embedded life and concerns of the individual and from the social fabric that constituted the individual. Tradition stood in opposition to reason. To Gadamer, tradition provides the intelligibility of reason. Gadamer presents an exemplary demonstration of a work that is hermeneutic in its approach in his \textit{Truth and Method}. In it, Gadamer aims to present a new understanding of hermeneutics by critically engaging with and bringing together the intellectual

\textsuperscript{17} Gadamer's theory of hermeneutics will be discussed in greater detail on chapter 2. An informative analysis delineating the hermeneutics of Hirsch, Gadamer, Habermas, and Derrida can be found in Shaun Gallagher, \textit{Hermeneutics and Education}, ed. Dennis J. Schmidt, Contemporary Continental Philosophy (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992).

\textsuperscript{18} P. Christopher Smith, \textit{Hermeneutics and Human Finitude: Toward a Theory of Ethical Understanding} (New York: Fordham University Press, 1991), 64.
tradition of hermeneutics (e.g. Schleiermacher, Dilthey) with Aristotle, Hegel, and Heidegger.

In taking the hermeneutical approach, I do not aim to set forth an a-historical, universal concept of courage that exists in an unmediated realm of reason. Rather, I come with the questions, how should I understand courage in the context of dialogue and how might one develop such courage? and I seek help from others in answering these questions. Of course, not all of those others will agree on what courage is, and so my engagement is done critically as well. That said, I do not aim to take the tack dissent and destabilization. By rejecting some claims, accepting others, and modifying yet others in light of new discovery, I aim to adequately expand the my own (and hopefully the reader's) understanding of courage. Courage will superficially maintain its commonsense meaning, but I aim for it to become richer through its engagement with the intellectual works of others.

The approach of engaging other texts for the sake of reconceptualizing courage leads to the potential problem that I assume I can understand objectively what Aristotle, for example, said in the same way Aristotle or other Ancient Greeks understood it. This objectivity purportedly can be achieved in two ways: first by transcending the temporal gap by shedding one's own historicity through methodology (historicism), and second by claiming that there is no temporal gap to be bridged to begin with--I judge Aristotle's ideas by present day conceptual frameworks and standards without regard to my historicity (presentism).

From the perspective of Gadamerian hermeneutics both historicism and presentism are misguided stances: historicism denies the universality and inescapability
of our historicity, and presentism denies historicity altogether. Put differently, historicism disregards the present horizon of understanding, and presentism disregards the past horizon of understanding. Gadamer says, "Even a master of the historical method is not able to keep himself entirely free from the prejudices of his time, his social environment, and his national situation, etc."\(^{19}\)

Yet although historicity's universalism means that one can not objectively understand an idea in the same way as an historical author might understand that idea, this fact does not mean that historicity creates an unbridgeable gap of understanding. To Gadamer, the interpretation of a historical text necessarily involves the fusing of the horizon of the historical text with the horizon of the reader of that text. In this fusion, the assumptions of the reader's present-day understandings are challenged and transformed, and, in so doing, the reader's understanding of the text is transformed. It should not be misunderstood that Gadamerian hermeneutics is in any prescriptive. Gadamer says, "Fundamentally I am not proposing a method; I am describing what is the case."\(^{20}\)

Put to my own work in this dissertation, I cannot escape the fact that when I turn to Aristotle with a particular question in mind that that question, which arises out of my present circumstances, acts as a selective lens through which certain passages stand out and others are disregarded, shaping my interpretation of what he says. No method can transcend the prejudicing power of the question or the fact that one's historicity makes any such question meaningful.

This leads me to my last point on the matter of my approach. In speaking of the prejudicing power of the question, would it not make sense to critique Aristotle in light of

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\(^{20}\) Ibid.
the prejudices of his own questions? Put another way, why not approach the problem of cross-cultural understanding and of ethical concepts by deconstructing those concepts? For example, I might discuss how a concept like courage has been inherited to us from the Ancient Greeks with the aim of dismantling this concept and freeing ourselves from it. I might also analyze the concept of dialogue and how Ancient Greek philosophy has shaped our understanding of the word and activity rather than taking such an understanding as a starting place for discussion. There is merit to these kinds of analysis. Indeed, I follow Gadamer's hermeneutic reorientation of Platonic dialogue in order to understand in a new way what dialogue is and entails. I also engage with the work of Tibetan tulku Chögyam Trungpa in order to rethink the concept of courage as something beyond the metaphors of battle. However, to historicize a concept is to assume that one can detach one's self from the very intellectual tradition that makes the concept intelligible to begin with. In critically historicising concepts, we once again disregard the prejudices of the present, and we disregard that those prejudices are part-and-parcel of the very tradition from which we are attempting to temporally distantiate. Such a stance starts with the assumption that the text has nothing to say to the reader that will change the reader's understanding of himself or his world. Rather than an interpretation that seeks the "tearing off of masks, an interpretation that reduces disguises" as Paul Ricoeur might describe it, the hermeneutical stance I take is one of integrating interpretations, of attempting to see the potential truth in what others have said in relation to the question I seek to answer.

In this dissertation, then, I approach other works with the understanding that I am distanced from them by the prejudices of my time and social environment, yet I also recognize that the claims made in those works might have something meaningful to say to me. In other words, I allow those works to change the way I understand the world without slavishly accepting what they have to say.

Summary of Chapters

In this chapter, I claimed that in a pluralistic democratic society, teaching students to engage well in dialogue about visions of the good is imperative for civic education. Dialogue about visions of the good life requires us to understand others' ethical frameworks by allowing them to transform our own. However, from a hermeneutic perspective, any understanding must open up the possibility that one's own beliefs are challenged. That is, if one is to ensure understanding, one cannot guard against revision to one's own framework. Taylor's insight that the intelligibility of the self is bound up in our ethical horizon and that the loss of an ethical horizon can lead to something akin to an identity crisis means that we must acknowledge that true understanding can lead to a great ontological anxiety. Thus, for dialogue to occur one must be able to work with this anxiety well. To engage in such dialogue well requires a shared understanding of what constitutes good dialogue, a question that has been taken up in the conversation on communicative virtues. Although it is not the exclusive communicative virtue, the one I am offering in this dissertation is the one involved with ontological anxiety: courage.

In chapter 2 of the dissertation, I outline Gadamer's theory of hermeneutic experience as a means of conceptualizing dialogue, and I do so by placing his theory
alongside two other ways of conceptualizing dialogue: one centered on language and rational thought and the other centered on experience. In the former category I place and discuss Burbules's and Robert Kunzman's work on dialogue. In the latter category will be Martin Buber's theory of dialogue. I show how these two forms of dialogue--the one centered on language and rational thought and the other on experience--are insufficient for conceptualizing courage for dialogue when competing visions of good are the subject of dialogue. Finally, I show how Gadamer's theory of hermeneutic experience best satisfies the conditions needed for ethical dialogue by pointing to the role negative experience, the hermeneutic circle, the fusion of horizons, and language all play in his theory.

In chapter 3, I argue that if we ground ethical dialogue in Gadamer's theory of hermeneutic experience, we then open up the possibility that one's self-understanding can be called into question. Drawing from the philosophical perspectives offered by Martin Heidegger, Jonathan Lear, and Becker, I contend that the terror of death is a latent possibility in any ethical dialogue. It follows that if death is what must be grappled with in any ethical dialogue, then courage is the most appropriate excellence to cultivate in order to best participate in ethical dialogue.

In chapter 4, I show that conceptualizing an aretaic theory of ethical dialogue is compatible with Gadamer's theory of hermeneutics. I then conceptualize courage as a communicative virtue by developing three dimensions of courage according to a hermeneutic theory of dialogue: confronting death, a discourse of warriorship, and courage as the mean between two extremes. To do this, I engage with the work of Justen Infinito and Paul Tillich to better comprehend how facing death can be understood from
an ontological perspective. I also draw from Erich Fromm's discussion of self-assertive and malignant aggression and of the psychoanalytic concept of recognition to set out the extremes that lie on either side of the mean of courage. Finally, I look to Chögyam Trungpa to address courage as a virtue of warriorship and to contend that courage is a virtue that requires gentleness.

Finally, in chapter 5, I explore how one learns the courage of dialogue, and I inquire into the possibility of educating courage in schools. I start by turning to Aristotle to establish the conditions for learning any virtue: a space to practice exercising those virtues and the presence exemplars. I then argue that the humanities play a central role in providing the existential space in which to practice courage, because they provide an opportunity for students to engage in questions about the good. However, merely providing the content alone is not sufficient, because just as logocentric accounts of dialogue cannot account for one's anxiety, readers of the humanities could very well keep the claims of the works at a distance. Thus, the teacher plays an important role in pushing the student to acknowledge the claims of the other, in this case the text or even another student. One manner of doing this is through Socratic questioning, and I turn to the Platonic Dialogues to illustrate how Socrates is able to push his interlocutors to acknowledge the finitude of their understanding and in so doing is able to educate courage. I also look at two cases in which Socrates fails to educate courage in order to show that educating courage requires a willingness of the interlocutor to undergo such an education.

Taken together, Socratic questioning and the humanities provide the method and the material for cultivating courage. In the last section of this work, I contend that
today's schools fail to provide the conditions for teaching courage both in relegating the humanities in the curriculum and second by devaluing Socratic questioning. In an effort to help conceptualize the schooling endeavor in such a way that it supports the teaching of courage, I draw from Gadamer's discussion of Bildung. Finally, I argue that if we are to take seriously the charge that teaching courage for dialogue is a civic imperative and if we expect schoolteachers to do this educating, then teacher education itself must also educate courage.
CHAPTER 2
DIALOGUE AND ETHICAL UNDERSTANDING

To men alone is logos given as well, so that they can make manifest to each other what is useful and what is harmful, and therefore also what is right and wrong. A profound thesis. What is useful and what is harmful is something that is not desirable in itself. Rather, it is desired for the sake of something else not yet given, in whose acquisition it aids one. The distinguishing feature of man, therefore, is his superiority over what is actually present, his sense of the future. And in the same breath Aristotle adds that with this the sense for right and wrong is given--and all because man, as an individual, has the logos.22

--Hans-Georg Gadamer

In the previous chapter I claimed that the preference of living one way of life over another is reflective of our understanding of what is good, and choosing to live one life over another requires our ability to think about and deliberate the merits of each life. In a pluralistic world in which we must make shared decisions about living well with each other, this requires we are able to deliberate about those decisions well with others who might have differing visions of the good. I also argued that ethical dialogue, if it is to truly take as its aim the understanding of other visions of the good, must require that the participants put at risk their own ethical horizons and by extension their selves. This risk-putting does not occur if dialogue is understood in such a way that language plays an instrumental role or if understanding an other is alienated from one’s own understanding of one’s self and world. Rather, dialogue participants must open themselves up to the experience of losing the intelligibility of their world. That is, dialogue must be more than mere discussion about experience and concept; it must open the possibility for negative

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experience. The first task of this chapter is to show how language-centered and experience-centered conceptualizations of dialogue fail to meet the criteria presented in chapter 1. Then I will show how Gadamer's theory of hermeneutic experience and the notion of understanding it entails provides an adequate theoretical framework with which to conceptualize ethical dialogue.

Logos as the Foundation of Dialogue

Nicholas Burbules observes that there is no universal understanding of what constitutes dialogue, and that in many cases there is no clear line to demarcate when dialogue is taking place and when it is not. What, then, do we mean by the term dialogue? To answer this question, Burbules proffers what he calls "family resemblance criteria" of dialogue, meaning it can meet any combination of some or all of the following to be considered dialogue: it includes two or more participants, involves a climate of open participation that unfolds in a developmental sequence, is guided by the spirit of discovery, and "manifests an attitude of reciprocity." Burbules labels dialogue generally as a pedagogical communicative relation, because it is "an activity directed toward discovery and new understanding", and it is a communicative relation because it refers to something talked about or thought about between/across/through two people.

This term and the criteria above provide a working concept of dialogue in general. Nonetheless, there are several ways in which dialogue specifically presents itself and carries itself out. Burbules categorizes four primary types of dialogue along two axes,

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 15.
one of which might be considered the end of dialogue (the divergent/convergent axis) and the other the relation to the pedagogical partner (the inclusive/critical axis). This is illustrated in the following table, adapted from *Dialogue in Teaching: Theory and Practice*.26

Table 1

*Ideal Types of Dialogue*

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<th></th>
<th>Inclusive</th>
<th>Critical</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Divergent</strong></td>
<td>Conversation</td>
<td>Debate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Convergent</strong></td>
<td>Inquiry</td>
<td>Instruction</td>
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Regarding the end of dialogue, convergent dialogue assumes a final answer or end point to the dialogue, while the divergent dialogue assumes views that are "irresolvably plural". For example, in the context of mathematics instruction (convergent/critical), it is the task of the teacher to show the student how a particular problem is solved or theorem proven. In such a case, the aim of dialogue is not that the student comes to a different understanding of mathematics than the teacher. The teacher will show how the student's thinking is incorrect until the student has the correct view. Likewise, in scientific inquiry (convergent/inclusive), the aim is to come to a unified understanding of something, say gravity. Collectively, those in the scientific community work together to come to a shared understanding of what gravity is, working out disagreements and inconsistencies among theories.

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26 Ibid., 112.
The divergent aim on the other hand does not assume a convergence onto correctness or consensus, but rather assumes the attempt to understand "the outlook and experiences of the partner in dialogue . . . learning more about what made each who they are today."27 Here, one does not seek to have the same experience as one's partner. One does not seek to understand her position as "correct" or "incorrect", nor does one aim to agree or disagree. The aim is merely to understand the other person as different.

Regarding the relation among participants in dialogue, the divergent with an inclusive view towards the participant requires a "provisional plausibility to what one's partner says", and the divergent end with a critical view towards the other places emphasis on skeptical questioning.28 For example, in conversation (divergent/inclusive), although I am not looking for correctness in outlook, I do nonetheless take the attitude that my partner's perspective is plausible. The critical relation is quite the opposite. It "emphasizes a judgment about the objective accuracy of the partner's position, and does not hesitate to test it against evidence, consistency, and logic."29 Debate (divergent/critical) does not seek to see how the partner's claims are plausible but rather how they are not.

It is important to note that these four modes of dialogue are not intended by Burbules to be exhaustive. He clearly recognizes other forms of dialogue that might or might not fit in these categories, for example therapeutic dialogue. Nonetheless, the four categories are meant to be "ideal types" insofar as they sketch out primary ways out of which a hybrid form of dialogue might be comprised.30

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 110-2.
29 Ibid., 111.
30 Ibid., 124-27.
In terming dialogue a pedagogical communicative relation, Burbules is right to make the knowing of something new a necessary criterion for dialogue. However, what is learned in all four categories remains primarily in the domain of the *logos*, of language and concept that does not necessarily involve immediate experience. Indeed, experience can be the *object* of such dialogue, e.g., to communicate to another what one's own experience might be. However, even though Burbules includes in his categorization conceptualizations of dialogue that require the undergoing of experience, such as those of Gadamer and Martin Buber, on Burbules's view one is not required to undergo any form of experience in order to be in dialogue. In short, dialogue is a knowing—that in such a way that it does not necessarily transform one's understanding of the world or of one's self. Its fundamental content, so to speak, is rational thought and abstracted concept communicated through the word. It is not necessary for understanding of the world or one's self to be transformed as much as it is that one's totality of knowledge must be transformed. In terms of ethical dialogue, transformation of knowledge alone does not mandate that one risk one's understanding of the good in any substantive way and as such does not require a transformation of one's ethical horizon. Thus, Burbules's ideal types do not meet the criterion of the transformation of horizons.

While Burbules talks about dialogue broadly, Robert Kunzman is concerned with the same kind of dialogue I am here: ethical dialogue. As I mentioned in chapter 1, I am borrowing the term *ethical dialogue* from Kunzman, but it is important to note that he capitalizes the term, whereas I do not, because I want to be clear when I am speaking of Kunzman's conceptualization and when mine, and I do not want to indicate that I might be positing a Platonic idea of ethical dialogue (not that Kunzman necessarily is). For
Kunzman, Ethical Dialogue is an essential component of civic education because it "involves cultivating sympathetic understanding of unfamiliar perspectives and then engaging in thoughtful, civic deliberation in light of this understanding," and it helps students "explore questions about the good life and human flourishing, and understand the different ways people answer those questions." Rather than be merely tolerant, he says, we must strive to understand. For example, Kunzman gives the example that if my employee wishes to take a break for religious worship, I must understand the religious requirement if I am to appropriately address that wish. Merely being tolerant on the other hand does not require any positive action. It merely requires abstaining from any destructive action to the other, and tolerance makes no demand on ignorance. To this point, in his argument for the inclusion of religious views in Ethical Dialogue, Kunzman starts with the basic premises that "mutual respect is a vital feature of any good society" and that "amidst ethical conflict, mutual respect requires that we strive to understand others' ethical frameworks."

Ethical Dialogue, then, is not only about ethics but is ethical itself, which Kunzman expresses when he says, "mutual respect is not merely instrumental in the pursuit of the common good, but partly constitutive of it." Here Kunzman posits mutual respect as a fundamental dimension of the common good of liberal-democratic society. In so doing, Kunzman moves away from procedural models of liberalism that, as Taylor puts it generally, "insists on uniform application of the rules defining [rights], without exception," and Kunzman moves towards a liberalism "grounded very much on

32 Ibid., 36.
33 Ibid., 42.
judgments about what makes a good life—judgments in which the integrity of cultures has an important place."34

In finding the middle ground between understanding and dogmatism, Kunzman argues that just as important as understanding is ethical commitment. The aim of ethical commitment is that students value their own frameworks as well as understand how others might value theirs, and one way to do this is through imaginative engagement. Kunzman attempts to utilize both logos and experience in order to develop a fuller concept of understanding. Yet the goal of this understanding "is not to change students' beliefs but to widen their appreciation for ways of life different than their own. Such an imaginative engagement is, to borrow Deborah Kerdemam's phrase, 'a negotiation between familiarity and strangeness.'"35 This kind of deep appreciation for other frameworks, if it is not allowed to make a fundamental challenge to my own framework, is still just tolerance, albeit a friendlier one. As such, although it might be argued Kunzman meets the logos-experience criterion, he does not escape the doctrine of equal worth, because students are not forced to challenge their own beliefs and, as such, the very framework through which they appreciate the ways of life of others is still always their own.

In short, I think it goes without saying that in a world of growing intercultural contact and interdependence, respecting others' ethical frameworks is necessary to prevent war and violence and as such is a good worth choosing. Yet this marks my point of departure from Kunzman, because he stops short of diagnosing a fundamental problem. The aversion to engaging with others' ethical frameworks is not merely the

35 Kunzman, Grappling with the Good: Talking about Religion and Morality in Public Schools, 61.
absence of the opportunity to imagine what it would be like to be the other or to value another good. In fact, the very notion of competing goods requires that one must choose one over the other. One good must be found to be more valuable than the other.

In this section, we have looked at two conceptualizations of dialogue, both of which fail to meet the necessary criterion of avoiding the traps of the doctrine of equal worth and self-immurement as well as the criterion of requiring both language and horizon-transforming experience. Burbules provides an account of dialogue that includes forms that require language and relational thought as well as forms that might also include undergoing an immediate experience or include experience as an object of understanding; however, both logos and transformative experience are not required for a communicative relation to be labeled dialogue. Kunzman takes up the specific task of ethical dialogue and includes dimensions of both language and experience; however Kunzman fails to meet the requirement that the experience is transformative to the degree that it transforms one's own ethical horizon. The next logical step would be to consider conceptualizations of dialogue that, rather than take logos as fundamental to dialogue, instead take experience as the fundamental criterion of dialogue.

The Foundation of Dialogue as Shared Experience

One robust account of dialogue that takes experience as central is that of Martin Buber. While to Burbules experience might be included in dialogue in many ways, to Buber experience is a necessary and fundamental aspect of dialogue. The former understanding of dialogue (Burbules) involves engaging in the truth of what another says within language and the latter understanding (Buber) involves a shared experience
without which dialogue cannot take place. To Buber the constitutive quality of dialogue is that it is inclusive, where inclusion has three elements:

…first, a relation, of no matter what kind, between two persons, second, an event experienced by them in common, in which at least one of them actively participates, and, third, the fact that this one person, without forfeiting anything of the felt reality of his activity, at the same time lives through the common event from the standpoint of the other.\[36\]

Buber's dialogical relation is defined by a shared event between two people in which one person that participates is able to consider the standpoint of the other without compromising anything of his own experience. To explain inclusion, consider the dialogical relations Buber terms education and friendship. Within Buber's framework, education is a process that requires inclusion, but the inclusion is not mutual; it happens from only one side. In the educational event, the teacher can experience the student's education from the standpoint of the teacher's own previous experience as a student. Yet the same cannot be said of the student, who has never been a teacher and thus cannot relate to the teacher in a way that includes the teacher's experience qua teacher. The other special form of the dialogical relation laid out by Buber is that of friendship, which is characterized by a mutual form of inclusion, as opposed to the one-sided inclusion of education.\[37\] In friendship, each participant in dialogue can experience the other's standpoint without compromising her own. In all cases, there is shared experience, whether it is mutually shared or not.

The problem with Buber's account of dialogue is that it is not consistent with the requirement of ethical dialogue that interlocutors do not have a shared experience, and that one's experience becomes compromised in ethical dialogue insofar as the experience

\[36\] Martin Buber, Between Man and Man (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), 115.
\[37\] Ibid., 119.
of dialogue leads one's self-understanding to be put at risk. In fact, ethical dialogue pivots on the fact that interlocutors orient and make sense of their experiences around fundamentally different understandings of the good.

To give a fairly simplified but nonetheless adequately illustrative example, take the task of haggling. In India, haggling is a fundamental social practice and is a meaningful context for social intercourse. In the United States, aside from buying a used car, haggling is something most stay away from (e.g., why so many Americans hate the task of buying a new or used car or why it is rare to see a used car salesman in a film or piece of literature that isn't lampooned or portrayed as morally base). To have one interlocutor believe that haggling is a social good and another to believe that it is not is to have two interlocutors who have very different experiences of what it means to engage in acceptable marketplace activity. The necessary dimension of dialogue in such a case is that each has experiences foreign to the other and these differing experiences call into question one's understanding of what is good.

To be fair, we could say from Buber's perspective that what is important is that we both understand that each interlocutor has the experience of having a good, of having a way of life that one takes for granted as the preferred way of life. However true this might be, it still leaves us without a conceptualization of dialogue that takes experience as fundamental in such a way as to mandate the transformative experiences. Moreover, as ethical dialogue also requires the communication of one's understanding of the good, Buber's conceptualization fails insofar as one can be in dialogue without ever saying a word. Language takes a secondary role for Buber, as it is not a necessary dimension of
dialogue: "Human dialogue…although it has its distinctive life in the sign, that is in sound and gesture…can exist without the sign."\(^{38}\)

I turned to Buber in this section to see whether his theory of dialogue could adequately meet the criteria necessary for ethical dialogue. Although Buber makes experience constitutive of dialogue, he does not require the transformation of one's horizon in dialogue because he does not require that one put one's self at risk. I now turn to Gadamer's theory of hermeneutic experience to show how it meets all necessary conditions for ethical dialogue.

Gadamer's Hermeneutic Theory

Gadamer's theory of hermeneutic experience makes both logos and experience constitutive of dialogue, and it precludes both the possibility of maintaining the stance of equal worth and the possibility of self-immurement. What follows is a rehearsal of Gadamer's theory of hermeneutic experience, paying particular attention first to how experience plays a fundamental role in understanding, and second how language plays a fundamental role in understanding. Through an exploration of the theory of hermeneutic experience, we can see how it fits the criteria of ethical dialogue.

\textit{(Negative) Experience in Gadamer's Hermeneutic Theory}

Gadamer's \textit{Truth and Method} takes aim at the attempts of the social sciences to methodologically eliminate the interpretive dimensions of its understanding. He says the social sciences mimic the physical sciences in seeking to make experiments repeatable: "Experience is valid only if it is confirmed; hence its dignity depends on its being in

\footnotesize{\begin{center}
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 5.
\end{center}}
principle repeatable.  Repeatability and verifiability are the primary concern to both the physical and social sciences, and this concerns Gadamer, because he believes that the social sciences rely on a partial understanding of what experience is. On the view of the social sciences, experience is an event that allows one to make universal claims; it is a necessary constitutive of inductive reasoning that leads to knowledge and to stable concepts. Yet Gadamer believes that to think of experience only in terms of how it leads to universal knowledge is an emaciated understanding of what experience is. In other words, to think of experience in terms of repeatable results is to relegate if not completely marginalize our understanding of experience as a process of negation.  

In order to understand this claim better, consider if experience were only that which is repeatable. How then would we account for the experience that is novel? That is, if I undergo an experience that makes me see an object of understanding in a new light, then this new experience tells me that I did not see the object as fully and properly as I did before this experience. In this way, the experience that allows me to see an object of understanding in a new light allows me to see the object more correctly. This seeing more correctly is different than the confirmation of scientific understanding wherein one seeks not to experience something new but to experience again what one has already experienced.

An experience that leads me to see something in a new light Gadamer describes as negative insofar as it negates our previous understanding rather than confirms it. Yet it does this in a way that is productive, i.e., experience does not negate my experience such that it leaves a vacuum, but rather it provides me with a fuller understanding of the

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39 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 342.
40 Ibid., 347.
object. For example, imagine that for twenty years I thought that what it meant to be courageous in dialogue was to defend my own claims at all costs. Then, one day, I have an experience with a person or group of people in which I realize that in some cases courage might mean to find merit in another's claims. Now, my previous understanding of courage is no longer the complete picture I thought it was. I see courage in a new light--one that retains some of the assertiveness of the old understanding but tempers it to be more receptive.

More generally, my new understanding thwarts my old understanding, and yet at the same time my new understanding is predicated on my old understanding. When I undergo an experience that causes me to think differently about the concept, I only come to understand the concept differently from the perspective I understood the concept beforehand. Thus, the new understanding subsumes the old, and my understanding becomes fuller, broader, and more robust. Gadamer expresses this when he says, "It is not simply that we see through a deception and hence make a correction, but we acquire a comprehensive knowledge." On this view, the object changes as our understanding of it changes. In the example above, my new understanding of courage is not my old understanding. As such courage becomes a new object for understanding, as it is understood differently. And this new way of understanding courage, in turn, allows me to encounter more novel experiences about courage, because any experience that allows me to understand the concept differently will be predicated on this new understanding. Both my knowledge and the object of knowledge itself change through experience.

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41 Ibid., 347-48.
42 Ibid., 349.
So, hermeneutic experience is negative in that it thwarts our expectations, but it is also productive in that it retains previous understanding. Understanding that is predicated on negative experience leads to a fuller understanding of the object being understood. Finally, this new experience can only be new once; it cannot be repeated. Once I gain my new understanding of courage through an experience, I cannot erase the understanding from my consciousness and have that same experience over again. The experience cannot be taken away—something Gadamer expresses when he says the experiencing consciousness acquires “a new horizon within which something can become an experience for him.” As such, consciousness is historical. It does not remain static or wholly independent from that which it understands. Moreover, as we shall see, consciousness is finite insofar as its understanding is always limited. To more fully understand these final claims, I briefly turn to Gadamer's description of historically effected consciousness.

Gadamer’s discussion of historically effected consciousness is in reference to one person interpreting an historical text. However, historically effected consciousness is not limited to the interpretive work of the historian. Recall that understanding an object through negative experience changes not only the object but also the way of understanding the object. Gadamer describes this dynamic within the context of interpreting an historical work: "historically effected consciousness is at work in all hermeneutical activity, that of the philologist as well as the historian. . . . [historically effected consciousness] is a consciousness of the work itself, and hence itself has an

43 Ibid., 348.
Here again we see that knowledge and effect "belong together." What Gadamer is pointing to is that historically effected consciousness "is something other than inquiry into the history of a particular work's effect--as it were, the trace a work leaves behind. It is, rather, consciousness of the work itself, and hence itself has an effect." In other words, one's understanding of the work only comes through engagement with that work, and in so doing one's understanding is changed by it. Thus, the work has an effect on our consciousness and by extension our understanding of the work itself. Yet this is only one dimension of historically effected consciousness.

To Gadamer, the world that already exists before we come into existence conditions our existence; it conditions our consciousness. Consciousness is conditioned in such a strong sense that Gadamer says it is historically affected, i.e., it is brought into being through historical forces. This understanding of consciousness decenters the subject as something apart from and weakly conditioned by a reality and posits instead consciousness as part and parcel of a reality that is the product of history. To put it somewhat glibly, one is a product of one’s time. One can only understand things through the lights of his historical era. The self does not have access to universal reason.

This might sound reminiscent of Hegel, and it is no surprise. To conceptualize historically affected consciousness, Gadamer specifically defines it "with an eye to Hegel", who "claims to achieve the total fusion of history with the present" and "is not concerned with a reflective formalism but with…the historical dimension in which the problem of hermeneutics is rooted." To this, Gadamer says, "…the historical work of the mind is neither self reflection nor merely the formal dialectical supersession of the

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44 Ibid., 336.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., 341.
self-alienation that it has undergone, but an *experience* that experiences reality and is itself real."47 It is the Hegelian dialectic of alienation and return that Gadamer wants to translate to historically effected consciousness of hermeneutical activity.

This is not to say that Gadamer wants to endorse Hegel's teleology of *Spirit*, wherein there is some universal point towards which experience ultimately aims and at which "experience has ceased and a higher form of knowledge is realized."48 What Gadamer wants to take from Hegel is the negative yet productive dynamic of experience that is dialectical. Experience is such insofar as it thwarts our expectations so as to lead to a new understanding of an object and insofar as it also subsumes the old understanding. However, this dialectic is not headed towards a predetermined end or towards knowledge that transcends individual consciousness.

The point of all of this is to underscore that in ethical understanding, each of us has our own history, and the way in which we understand something like the good life will also be shaped by the unique forces that shape us. This is not to collapse into relativism. There are both the forces of shared history that allow, for example, a fellow American and I to discuss the scope and relevance of Second Amendment rights, and there is also my own individual history of negative experiences that have given me unique perspectives on what it means to live a good life relative to the Second Amendment. It is also important to note that in the thwarting of our expectations of what we might experience or understand, we also experience our own finitude. That is, in our continual experiences we are made aware that certitude of understanding is a mistake. To quote Gadamer: "Experience is the experience of human finitude…In it all dogmatism,

47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., 351.
which proceeds from the soaring desires of the human heart, reaches an absolute barrier."\textsuperscript{49} In experiencing our finitude, we become aware of our own historicity; we understand that our certitude is an illusion.

Returning again to the central concerns of this dissertation, in dialogue about competing visions of the good wherein one must be preferred over the other, we must be confident that we understand each option thoroughly if we are to make a wise choice. However, in order to understand a competing vision of the good thoroughly, we have to consider it fully, i.e., we must be willing to accept that our own vision is wrong; we have to open ourselves up to the possibility of negative experience as defined above. The above discussion of Gadamer’s theory, however, primarily deals with negative experience as it might be encountered with objects (physical objects and specific concepts) and not necessarily with other contemporaneous human beings in dialogue. To better grasp what understanding other people's views through negative experience might look like, I turn to Gadamer's discussion of the hermeneutic circle and the fusing of horizons.

\textit{The Hermeneutic Circle}

Although we might acknowledge the historical forces that shape our understanding, we must also acknowledge we always understand through concepts. That is, there is a fore-structure to our understanding, a concept Gadamer borrows from Heidegger. Given this fore-structure, we cannot methodologically eliminate the historical effect of understanding in order to find Archimedean objectivity in the same way the physical sciences attempt to do. Rather, just as the thwarting of an expectation requires

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
that we had an expectation to begin with, our understanding takes the same route. For example, speaking of textual interpretation, Gadamer says,

A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges from the text. Again the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there.\(^{50}\)

In other words understanding properly understood is not a thing but a process, just as experience. To understand something is to work out the tension between our own expectations of what a text means and the inevitable breaking-through those expectations when we encounter a line from the text that counters our expectation. Gadamer continues:

> every revision of the fore-projection is capable of projecting before itself a new projection of meaning; rival projects can emerge side by side until it becomes clearer what the unity of meaning is; interpretation begins with fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones. This constant process of new projection constitutes the movement of understanding and interpretation.\(^{51}\)

Here we hear echoes of the earlier discussion in which the experiencing consciousness acquired “a new horizon within which something can become an experience for him.”\(^{52}\)

This is important to my argument because it begins to describe how one's understanding of another's vision of the good is not the mere definition or description of that vision--a cognition that does not change our own understanding of the good. Rather, as I understand another's vision of the good, more of my own vision is revealed to me as my own fore-conceptions are made present and worked through. In other words, understanding, in its movement among fore-conceptions, fore-projections, and negative

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 269.
\(^{51}\) Ibid.
\(^{52}\) Ibid., 348.
experiences calls into the foreground one's own fore-conceptions. That is, the planks in
our framework of understanding become apparent to us.

An analogy from the physical world might help here. We all carry on throughout
our day without thinking-through how it is we turn a doorknob or how it is we pick up a
cup or drive our cars. We do not think out-loud or in our head, for example, "First I must
open the door to my car. I must lift that handle and then pull the door. Then I must sit in
the seat and place my key in that opening there…" We just do it, often while thinking
about other things. It is only when, for example, my door does not open for me as it
usually does that I cognize the door and that my assumptions about how it works are
brought into the foreground. Did I do something wrong? Did I try to open it like the door
of my partner's car? Our background understanding of the door is foregrounded through
the thwarting of our expectations.

To show the truth of Gadamer’s claims regarding the unconscious projection onto
the words of another, we return to the written word of another person. Gadamer offers us
the example of someone who writes and receives a letter. When we read a letter, we read
it from the perspective of our prior relation to that person. We read it through that
person's eyes as we understand them. When I receive a letter from my wife, for example,
I do not read it as though it is from a stranger. I can hear her voice and read more than
what the words merely state: I hear what those words say. This is not to point out
negative experience of interpretation but rather how it is we always already take an
interpretive stance when we read another's words. When I read the letter from my
spouse, I assume that what she is saying is true, because I know her not to deceive. I
make epistemological assumptions about what it is she is telling me in the letter; I have
what Gadamer calls *prejudices* in the way I comport myself to the claims in the letter. The same is true for conversing with my spouse or my friends. I hear what they are saying in a way I might not were I to be having the same conversation with a stranger or with an enemy.

These prejudices are not inherently detrimental. In terms of ethical understanding, it seems quite reasonable to acknowledge that we have prejudices in the way we see visions of the good life. On the other hand, the implications of Gadamer's theory is not that we should all entrench ourselves in our visions of the good and say, "well, we all have prejudice, so let's not bother to understand ourselves or others differently." Rather, prejudices themselves are not *a priori* bad or good. However, they *are* productive in that they allow us to make sense of things. Whether the sense we make is something we wish to hold on to or let go of is another matter.

Prejudices are the constitutive pieces of the totality of fore-conceptions, and they too are part of historicity. Moving away from the modern notion of the self as a core being and recalling the notion of historically effected consciousness, Gadamer tells us,

> History does not belong to us, we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the reality of his being.*

Ethical understanding, then, which requires us to open ourselves to the revision of our own vision of the good, by extension requires us to open our selves up to revision. As discussed in the previous chapter, we do not exist independent of our ethical horizon. Moreover, this ethical horizon does not belong to us but we belong to it. It existed prior

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53 Ibid., 278. Emphasis original.
to being brought up in it. My own upbringing in a Melkite Catholic home had--ney, has--
formative consequences on my understanding of the world. Although I do not practice
Catholicism today, many of these understandings remain in the background, hidden from
conscious view, until I encounter others with differing views. Ask Americans why
democracy is good, and most will look at you as if you are questioning an unwritten rule.
In fact, it largely is one. It is taken as the starting point of most American political
discourse--a prejudice of Americans. This remains a prejudice until an American learns
of other ways of constituting and running government in other parts of the world--
whether other democratic forms of government like in France or Germany or other forms
of government altogether, e.g., communism, fascism, or anarchism--and the prejudice is
foregrounded through the thwarting of understanding. Through this thwarting, one gains
a fuller understanding of what democracy means in America. One's understanding of
one's own ethical horizon is broadened by considering the validity of other political
systems, as is the understanding of other political systems also broadened. What is to be
learned here is that ethical understanding is not one-sided in that it is merely the
understanding of another’s point of view. It necessarily asks us to understand better our
own view. In order to understand our ethical horizon better, we must foreground our own
prejudices, those deeply held fore-conceptions that shape our fore-projections about our
ethical horizon and about the others.

It is important to note that we cannot better understand our fore-conceptions by
willing the foregrounding of prejudices, just as we cannot methodologically eliminate our
fore-projections. Nor can we know in advance which prejudices are productive and lead
to understanding and those that will lead to misunderstanding. The only way to
foreground a prejudice and thus be on the way to fuller understanding is through the
provocation and challenging of those prejudices by something to foreign or from us. As
Gadamer says,

Foregrounding (abheben) a prejudice clearly requires suspending its validity for us. For as long as our mind is influenced by prejudice, we do not consider it a judgment. How then can we foreground it? It is impossible to make ourselves aware of prejudice while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but only when it is, so to speak, provoked…What leads to understanding must be something that has already asserted itself in its own validity.54

That is, we can only foreground our prejudices by having them provoked into the
foreground by competing claims that we consider valid and against which we suspend the
validity of our own claims. In the context of ethical dialogue, this leads not to the
usurping of one horizon over another or the containment of understanding to the logos,
but rather to the fusing of horizons.

Fusing of Horizons

I've already been employing the term horizon in the discussion of ethical
understanding, and I've used it to mean the framework of understanding through which
our actions, as preferred actions, are intelligible to us. Gadamer employs this term as
well to mean something similar:

The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a
particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking of the mind, . . . a person
who has no horizon does not see far enough and hence over-values what is nearest
to him. On the other hand, "to have a horizon" means not being limited to what is
nearby but being able to see beyond it. A person who has a horizon knows the
relative significance of everything within this horizon, whether it is near or far,
great or small.55

54 Ibid., 298.
55 Ibid., 301-02.
Yet when we speak of understanding another's horizon, this should not mean that, as Gadamer describes, "when we have discovered the other person's standpoint and horizon, his ideas become intelligible without our necessarily having to agree with him." In such a case, he says, "the person understanding, as it were, stopped trying to reach an agreement. He himself cannot be reached. By factoring the other standpoint into what he is claiming to say, we are making our own standpoint safely unattainable." Consider the following example: a friend and I are engaged in a conversation about whether the aim of education should be for workforce development or for democratic participation. In this conversation I interpret his claims as arising out of his political party affiliation. Because I am not of the same political party, I only hear his claims in order to criticize them. In this case I "understand" my friend's horizon, but by saying, in effect, "that's your horizon, and I have a different horizon", the possibility of agreement is precluded. In taking this stance, I do not allow his claims to challenge my own; I dismiss the possibility that they have something to say to me, and I forestall the foregrounding of my prejudices.

Gadamer explains this point a slightly different way when he says of understanding a text, "It is only when the attempt to accept what is said as true fails that we try to 'understand' the text, psychologically or historically, as another's opinion." For example, I pick up John Dewey's *Democracy and Education* and, rather than ask what relevance it might have for today or consider how his ideas might challenge my own, I immediately give up on attempting to accept his claims as true and then study his work as mere historical artifact, analyzing what he has to say only as remaining within

56 Ibid., 302.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., 294.
the context of his time. I might explain away all of his claims because of the rapid changes in society or the common educational practices at that time. I think to myself that John Dewey was just a product of his time, and because this is a different time nothing he says can really be true to me or are relevant to schools today. That is, this 'understanding' is an understanding that does not speak to me but that I keep at a distance, safely away from any provocation and foregrounding of my own prejudices.

This kind of bad understanding is perilous for ethical understanding in a liberal democratic society. As Gadamer explains, "Acknowledging the otherness of the other in this way, making him the object of objective knowledge, involves the fundamental suspension of his claim to truth." In other words, by objectifying the other in such a way when we do not allow the other's claims to foreground and challenge our own prejudices, we immediately relegate the other's understanding and elevate our own; our understanding of others' visions of the good becomes condescension. True understanding requires not the maintenance of separate horizons, but their fusion; and in the fusing we do not erase difference by one horizon extinguishing but rather each comes to understand differently.

There is a problem with translating the fusion of horizons to ethical understanding across traditions, however. On Gadamer's view, "The anticipation of meaning that guides our understanding of the text is not an action of subjectivity; it is determined instead by a common bond that links us with the tradition." In other words, understanding the claims of another is determined by the shared prejudices I have with the other over the

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59 Ibid., 303.
subject matter, and these shared prejudices are the prejudices that bind two people together in a tradition. Yet this is a problem for ethical understanding, because the problem of ethical understanding I am concerned with is predicated on the idea that people can understand across ethical traditions. Although Gadamer seems to say that understanding is determined by prejudices shared within a tradition, I do not believe Gadamer means this to imply understanding is precluded should there not be shared prejudices. Take, for example, the debate between Gadamer and Jürgen Habermas. Gadamer takes up a critique of the Enlightenment in *Truth and Method* and what he calls its "prejudice against prejudices". Gadamer descends intellectually from the Heideggerian tradition, whereas Habermas descends more recently from the project of the Enlightenment, and each one's philosophical tradition rests on fundamentally different assumptions. Nonetheless, both engaged in a discussion on the scope of hermeneutical reflection and the ability of reason to transcend its framework of understanding--its own prejudices. So, although Gadamer certainly saw his work as distinct from the Enlightenment tradition, this did not mean that conversation and the possibility of understanding across those traditions was *a priori* nullified by virtue of the conversation taking place across differing traditions.

We might be able to understand how dialogue across traditions fits within Gadamer's theory by also looking to Gadamer's debate with Derrida, who, rather than centering his philosophy on the unity of meaning and the possibility of agreement as Gadamer does, centers his philosophy on irreconcilable difference and the multiplicity of meaning. Derrida's position seems to adequately describe the fundamental differences that occur across traditions, wherein the absence of shared prejudices precludes any
possibility of the unity of meaning. Yet Gadamer says in the exchange between him and Derrida that one goes beyond one's understanding and the limits of any current constraint language plays on one's interpretation of the world by engaging with those who think differently. As I explained earlier, what is required for hermeneutic experience as experience is precisely the radical difference of the other that, as Deborah Kerdeman says, pulls us up short. Gadamer says,

What we find happening in speaking is not a mere reification of intended meaning, but an endeavor that continually modifies itself, or better: a continually recurring temptation to engage oneself in something or to become involved with someone. But that means to expose oneself and to risk oneself. Genuinely speaking our mind has little to do with a mere explanation and assertion of our prejudices; rather, it risks our prejudices—it exposes oneself to one's own doubt and to the rejoinder of the other. Who has not had the experience—especially before the other whom we want to persuade—of how the reasons that one had for one's own view, and even the reasons that speak against one's own view rush into words. The mere presence of the other before whom we stand helps us to break up our own bias and narrowness, even before he opens his mouth to make a reply.61

This position about engaging with those who think in different traditions can be reconciled to his claim that our anticipation of meaning is guided by our common bond to tradition. When speaking across traditions, our anticipation of what the other person will say or does say to us is undoubtedly guided by our historicity and by our tie to the traditions that have formed our thought to the point of the encounter. Yet this does not mean that there are two unbridgeable horizons, as Gadamer tells us when he says his own contribution [to hermeneutics] is the discovery that no 'language of metaphysics', not even what Heidegger called the 'language of metaphysics', represents an unbreakable constraint upon the thought if only the thinker allows himself to trust language; that is, if he engages in dialogue with other thinkers and other ways of thinking.62

62 Ibid., 23.
What we see here is that the possibility of ethical dialogue across ethical traditions, and, so to speak, across ethical horizons, is not precluded by Gadamer's theory of hermeneutic experience. Moreover, it is important to remember that the very fact that I engage in dialogue with someone else presumes at first that understanding can take place and that I can be understood as well as understand the other.

In speaking of Gadamer's encounters with Habermas and Derrida, I am transitioning from understanding and the fusion of horizons as it is conceived in Gadamer's theory of hermeneutic experience vis-à-vis texts within a tradition to the specific case of dialogue with others. Dialogue is a central concept in Gadamer's development of the theory of hermeneutic experience. In fact, he says,

> What characterizes a dialogue, in contrast with the rigid form of a statements that demand to be set down in writing is precisely this: that in dialogue spoken language--in the process of question and answer, given and taking, talking at cross purposes and seeing each other's point--performs the communication of meaning that, with respect to the written tradition, is the task of hermeneutics.\(^63\)

In other words, the task of hermeneutics is to enter into dialogue with a text. Yet even though Gadamer draws from Platonic dialogue as a model of hermeneutic experience, Gadamer returns to dialogue in order to see it with this new understanding.

Gadamer describes his return to dialogue when he states that in his hermeneutic reorientation of the dialectic he "tried to hold fast to the inexhaustibility of the experience of meaning" derived from "the central significance of finitude" in Heidegger's thought.\(^64\)

That is, the reorientation of dialogue was towards the central significance of finitude and, by extension, the centrality of negative experience to understanding. In order to

\(^{63}\) ——, *Truth and Method*, 361-62.  
\(^{64}\) ——, "Text and Interpretation," 25.
understand what this hermeneutic reorientation of dialogue might say for the case of ethical dialogue specifically, I turn to Gadamer's discussion of the Platonic dialogue.

First, Gadamer turns to Platonic dialogue as a model for understanding the "logical structure of openness that characterizes hermeneutical consciousness". Recall that through experience one's understanding of an object changes. This change in understanding presumes that we are open to the possibility of understanding differently; that is, we have an open question towards what the object is or is not. This orientation requires that we open ourselves up to risk our interpretive prejudices, and such an orientation is in contradistinction to orienting oneself to a question only to prove oneself right, as Gadamer points out when he says,

…in the Platonic dialogues there is a critical distinction between authentic and inauthentic dialogue. To someone who engages in dialogue only to prove himself right and not to gain insight, asking questions will indeed seem easier than answering them. There is no risk that he will be able to answer a question…In order to be able to ask, one must want to know, and that means knowing that one does not know.”

This does not mean that in not knowing one waits for the other to tell him what one should know, as Gadamer expresses when he says,

If a prejudice becomes questionable in view of what another person or a text says to us this does not mean that it is simply set aside and the text or the other person accepted as valid in its place... In fact, our own prejudice is properly brought into play by being put at risk.

In being conducted by the subject matter, one must accept that one's aim is not to use language as a tool to transfer knowledge from one to another--similar to what Paolo Freire calls "banking" knowledge. Such a position would require an attitude that one

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65 ———, Truth and Method, 356.
66 Ibid., 356-7.
67 Ibid., 298-99.
controls his subject matter and exerts his power over language in order to promulgate that knowledge. As we have seen, in negative experience it is our finitude that we encounter—the very lack of control over our understanding and the limits of our understanding.

Rather than the transfer of knowledge from one party to another, one opens one's self up to the subject matter, which is seen through the claims of one's interlocutor, and through one's own own fore-conceptions, which are foregrounded by the claims of the other. The working out of these claims of validity provides the participants a greater, fuller understanding of the subject matter.

In conversation, Gadamer says, one allows oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners on dialogue are oriented. It requires that one does not try to argue the person down but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion. Hence it is an art of testing. . . . Dialectic consists not in the art of arguing (which can make a strong case out of a weak one) but the art of thinking (which can strengthen objections by referring to the subject matter). 69

In ethical dialogue, for example, if we are to ask what it means to live a good life, we ask questions of the other in a way in which we are not already assuming that what they will say is wrong or incorrect. Rather, we ask a question in hopes that the answer helps us understand the subject—in this case the good life—in a new way. We test our own understanding by engaging with the understanding of others.

To fully understand what the good life is and to open ourselves up to others' questions, we have to do more than merely repeat what another says; we go beyond "merely re-creating someone else's meaning." 70 Moreover, understanding what another says does not mean trying to transpose ourselves into the other’s position insofar as to

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69 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 360-1.
70 Ibid., 368.
psychoanalyze it or to say “I know why you think that”. This is just another form of objectifying the other in such a way to distance the other's claims. We are not trying to know the other’s experiences in order to explain the other's position as much as we are trying to better understand the subject matter that stands before us in conversation. As Gadamer tells us, "To understand what a person says is…to come to an understanding about the subject matter, not to get inside another person and relive his experiences (Erlebnisse)." For example, the task of ethical understanding is not to understand that people have a different vision of the good life and, echoing an earlier example provided by Kunzman, to be more ‘understanding’ by providing someone a religious holiday or the opportunity to pray three times a day while at work. Moreover, understanding is not an exercise in empathy (understanding someone else’s previous or current experiences, so to speak) so that we can better understand how “those” people live in order to accommodate them. Rather, we ask how their vision of the good life might make us think differently about our own. Dialogue is an activity through which one can be confronted with one's finitude and as such undergo negative experience (Erfahrung) that generates new understanding of ourselves and the world. One's own particular experience in this sense cannot be an object that is understood in dialogue if understanding is to take place. Rather, experience as negative experience is that towards which dialogue necessarily aims. Only through it and through the fusing of horizons that accompanies that experience do we come to a fuller understanding of what it means to live a good life.

\[71\] Ibid., 385.
Language in Gadamer's Hermeneutic Theory

All understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of language that allows the object to come into words and yet is at the same time the interpreter's own language.72 -Hans Georg Gadamer

The fusing of horizons is a dialogue, and it results in negative experience. Yet the structure of this dialogue also is derived from a conceptualization of it that depends on the logos. Contrary to its common rendering as rational thought, though, logos is understood by Gadamer as language itself. We humans are given the gift of language and with it a sense of the future. Gadamer points out that, from the Aristotelian perspective, asking questions about what is right and wrong is necessarily done so with an eye towards the future. Were we to cease accounting for the future, we would regress to reacting only to immediate desire and pain; we would return to the animal. Moreover, Gadamer points out, what we choose as useful is not good in itself but takes us towards that which we find as ultimately good. To think of it from the opposite direction: once we have a sense of the future that takes us beyond mere immediate animalistic desires and threats, we immediately open up the deliberation of what is right and what is wrong. This deliberation, in turn, points towards some vision of what is good and of what future is the best. Ethical dialogue, then, requires the use of language, because any vision of the good is predicated on a language that gives that vision meaning.

More generally, language is the medium of understanding. But again, a problem arises with this assertion in the case of ethical understanding, specifically in this case when dialogue occurs across two languages. If people are to engage in dialogue about a subject, they must be certain they are speaking of the same thing, and a concept in one

72 Ibid., 390.
language might not exactly map over onto the concept in another. Earlier we discussed the problem of understanding across intellectual traditions or with those who think differently, because any dialogue about the good life or what it might consist of, or which visions are preferred and which are not, presumes a common language. That is, we must be able to trust that we are talking about the same thing if we are to trust that some kind of agreement can be reached. Yet the world is rich with idiom and metaphor, and when conversations take place across linguistic boundaries, each in which exist distinct metaphors and idioms, and even words, the question arises whether two people can always be sure they are speaking of the same thing. What happens, for example, if what is understood as a vision of the good life is constituted by concepts unknown to the other-concepts that exist only within the language of the one interlocutor?

To come full circle with the introduction of this chapter, we make present to each other what is preferable and what is not through the use of language, and language provides the possibilities of thought, in both limiting and productive ways. We undergo negative experience through the medium of the physical world when, for example, all of a sudden our car door does not open as it we expect it to. But from the particular context of interpreting what another person says, the context of hermeneutic experience, the medium is language. Given that language is the medium of hermeneutic experience, and given the productive and limiting power of language, is there any hope to find a common meaning in dialogue across completely different languages?

Strong stances in postmodern philosophy, namely those of deconstruction, would likely argue not. For, their prejudice is that even within a shared language, the possibility
of a unified meaning in language is assumed impossible. Yet Gadamer gives us indication of his response to this claim when he says,

Every conversation presupposes a common language, or better, creates a common language. Something is placed in the center, as the Greeks say, which the partners in dialogue both share, and concerning which they can exchange ideas with one another. Hence reaching an understanding on the subject matter of a conversation necessarily means that a common language must first be worked out in the conversation...in a successful conversation they both come under the influence of the truth of the object and are thus bound to one another in a new community.73

In other words, when I engage in a conversation I do so on the presumption that I am speaking about the same object as the person with whom I have a conversation. I also presume that we can have a conversation about that object, and in order to have a conversation, we must share a language. Also, the object of understanding creates the language in which it needs to be understood. In other words, the object itself determines the language in which it is understood through the conversation itself. This is not only true of those having a conversation within the same language-world but also those having a conversation across language-worlds. Even if the two members of a conversation live in separate life-worlds, the possibility of a shared language is not precluded. As we will see, the very fact that people can live in two language-worlds shows us that foreign languages are not entirely incommensurable language systems. And if in the extreme case of foreign languages can be overcome, then language games within any given language can be overcome.

To begin the discussion on the problem of dialogue across language-worlds, Gadamer makes the distinction between the conscious and technical task of translation and the act of fluent speaking in a foreign language. In the latter case, the foreign

73 Ibid., 371.
language is only foreign insofar as it is not the first language. When one speaks fluently in another language, without thinking or searching for a word any more than she would in her own language, there can be true understanding in the foreign language. Gadamer describes it in this way:

For you understand a language by living in it—a statement that is true, as we know, not only of living but dead languages as well. Thus the hermeneutical problem concerns not the correct mastery of language but coming to a proper understanding of the subject matter, which takes place in the medium of language. Every language can be learned so perfectly that using it no longer means translating from or into one's mother tongue, but thinking in the foreign language. Mastering the language is necessary precondition for coming to an understanding in conversation.  

It is with this view that he says, "where there is understanding there is not translation but speech," Yet our problem of understanding across language-worlds is not solved. He later explains,

Even in these extreme situations where it is necessary to translate from one language into another, the subject matter can scarcely be separated from the language. Only that translator can truly re-create who brings into language the subject the text points to; but this means finding a language that is not only his but is also proportionate to the original.

We see two points being made here. The first point is that there are things readily speakable in one language and seemingly ineffable in another—what can be talked about in any given language is tied to the productive and limiting powers of the language itself. What is discussed cannot transcend language; it is in language. Gadamer explains:

When a person lives in language, he is filled with the sense of the unsurpassable appropriateness of the words he uses for the subject matter he is talking about. It seems impossible that other words in other languages could name the things equally well…The agony of translation consists ultimately in the fact that that the original words seem to be inseparable from the things they refer to, so that to make a text intelligible one often has to give an

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74 Ibid., 387.
75 Ibid., 386.
76 Ibid., 389. Emphasis added.
interpretive paraphrase or it rather than translate it. The more sensitively our historical consciousness reacts, the more it seems aware of the untranslatability of the unfamiliar.\textsuperscript{77}

What Gadamer is saying here is that as objects or understanding exist within the language in which they are described and discussed, there seems to be a gap unmediated by anything short of one being fluent both one’s mother tongue and the foreign language. Yet to come to this conclusion is to miss the point of translation.

The second point is that the translator finds a language that is his and also that of the text. What is important is not that one agonizes in the act of translation, but that one can learn another language in which to live and through which to understand the objects of that language. That is, at some point, the gap is overcome and the bridge established. It does not happen from the mere technical translation, for example, with a German-English dictionary, but happens through the process of learning the language.

This point is counter-intuitive in that the bridge is actually strengthened in the process of growing unfamiliarity across languages. For example, when one first starts learning a language, one looks for one-to-one correspondences between words one knows in one's mother tongue and those words in the foreign tongue. As the learner's understanding grows, especially when the learner becomes accustomed to using foreign idioms well, the differences of one's own language and the foreign language become apparent. The foreign language is first wholly taken as a different articulation of one's own language, then one starts to live in the other language \textit{qua} other language as the learner understands it as \textit{other}. What is left when one starts to see the foreignness of another language (and not just its words) is not an abyss, but the domain of interpretation.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 403.
and thus of understanding. The work in this domain, Gadamer says, “is always meaningful,” and the hermeneutical experience “is the corrective by means of which the thinking person escapes the prison of language.”

It is precisely the strangeness of the other language, whether our own which is historically distanced (my attempt to read Old English, for example), or a foreign language, or different “languages” in our own language—the languages of lovers, the languages of religious groups, the languages of youth that always evolve ahead of their elders—that allows us to think anew about our own understandings. When such foreignness is encountered (and in the case of the foreign language, this occurs as one learns the language better), our own understandings start to become foreign to us. If we take the extreme example of foreign languages again to make the point clearer, when we see our own language from the lens of another, we see its own peculiar contours and powers that make objects of understanding visible to us.

Conclusion

Gadamer's theory provides us with a conceptualization of understanding as dialogue. According to Gadamer, understanding is dialogue and through it our horizon is transformed. One’s horizon of understanding lays out the possibilities of one’s knowing another. One's ethical horizon is constituted by the prejudices that inform our preferences for one way of life other over another--our vision of the good. To engage in the hermeneutic experience, according to Gadamer, is to open the fundamental assumptions about the world, and ergo one’s self, to the possibility of transformation.

78 Ibid.
Understanding does not mean that we take hold or possess our understanding of another's visions of the good life as a piece of knowledge to keep at a distance from our own foreconceptions, but that we must put at play is our very being itself. In framing dialogue in this way, Gadamer's theory avoids both the possibility of self-immurement and of ethnocentricity in ethical dialogue. Gadamer's theory also clearly requires the *logos* and experience in his account of dialogue. In short, Gadamer's theory meets all criteria for and adequate account of ethical dialogue.

This brings us to the transition to the following chapters. In what follows I explore further the idea that our prejudices are challenged and what happens when those prejudices involve our vision of the good our self-understanding is challenged. In the event that we confront a radical challenging of our prejudices in dialogue--that those core beliefs with which we shore up our selves are called into question--we face the possibility of our consciousness being radically altered and of our world collapsing, much like the removal of a few bricks of a foundation can cause an entire edifice to fall. As such, to engage in ethical dialogue requires us to stand steadfastly in our fear of such an outcome.

It would make sense that the appropriate virtue that is required in such experiences is that of courage; as Walter Brogan points out, “To be courageous is to stand resolutely in the face of the possibility of no longer being.” Yet before we can start discussing what it might mean to be courageous in dialogue from the perspective of hermeneutic experience, we must first explore what ethical implications lie within the theory of hermeneutic experience. In doing so, we might better align our conceptualization with the ethical parameters given. It is at this point that I turn from

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discussing the dynamics of *dialogue about ethics* to the *ethics of dialogue*, specifically to the virtue of courage.
CHAPTER 3

DEATH AND DIALOGUE

All doctrines, all politics and civilization exurge from you,
All sculpture and monuments and anything inscribed anywhere are tallied in you,
The gist of histories and statistics as far back as the records reach is in you this hour--and myths and tales the same,
If you were not breathing and walking here where would they all be?
The most renowned poems would be ashes . . . . orations and plays would be vacuums.\(^{80}\)

--Walt Whitman

In the previous chapter, I showed how Gadamer's theory of hermeneutic experience satisfies the criteria necessary for a full account of dialogue across difference: it requires both experience and language and does so in a way the requires the transformation of horizons, this transformation requires us to put our own prejudices at risk. When we place this understanding of dialogue into the context of ethical dialogue, our own way of life is challenged, our presumptions of what constitutes a good life and why one values one life over another are brought into the foreground. As such, any doctrine of equal worth is thwarted, because we must acknowledge that any way of life is a preference--a articulation of a judgment of unequal worth. Finally, the requirement that one's prejudices are brought into the foreground and challenged adequately meets the criteria of precluding self-immurement, especially in the case of ethical dialogue.

In ethical dialogue, wherein our vision of the good is under discussion, radical prejudices can be called into question and thus the discussion can lead to the challenge of the very core of our self-understanding. In this chapter we will see how the putting into

play of prejudices can become an outright placing of one's self at risk and can evoke an aggressive response as if one faced a mortal threat. To show this, I examine in greater detail the intertwining of one's self-understanding with the prejudices that comprise one's ethical horizon. First, I look at the relation between self-understanding and what Jonathan Lear calls "the field in which occurrences occur" in order to outline what I will call the death of self. Then, turning to Gadamer's hermeneutically reoriented conceptualization of dialogue, I bring together the death of self with the play of prejudices that comprise the self in dialogue in order to show how death anxiety is a real factor in dialogue about one's ethical horizon, especially in the context of cross-cultural dialogue. This finally leads me to contend that courage is the appropriate quality for an interlocutor who aims to participate in dialogue across cultural difference. The next chapter will work out an aretaic conception of what I call the courage of dialogue.

The Death and Self-understanding

To introduce the conversation on death, I ask the reader to think about more readily accessible experiences than that of death. If I remember a past experience when I met up with friends and enjoyed myself, then when I imagine another possible time when I will meet up with my friends, I might also start to feel that warmth and joy. However, if I imagine a time when I might physically die, it might bring up feelings of panic or

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81 This is not to claim death anxiety is a necessary factor in all dialogue (although it is a latent possibility given the unpredictability of the activity), just as fundamental transformation is not necessary in all dialogue. However, I am speaking specifically of ethical dialogue conceptualized herein, which requires the calling into question fundamental prejudices about the good and thus about what makes a life worth living. This, in turn, is to call into question how one understands oneself and how one lives. The purpose of this chapter is not to argue that all dialogue or transformation is threatening. Rather, I am attempting to explain a very real and specific phenomenon--aggression--that occurs in cases where dialogue breaks down, and I attempt to do so in a way that communicates to the reader the reasonableness of conceptualizing courage as a virtue for dialogue.
anxiety, and yet I have not had any experience that would allow me to have any emotional understanding of what the end of my physical life would entail.

Few would disagree that they cannot ever remember meeting their own physical demise in the past, whether they believe in past lives or not, and there are not multiple variations on one's physical demise; one is either dead or not (aside from any science-fiction story about the half-dead). How then do we understand something we have never experienced? From what experience do we extrapolate? Human beings are anxious about death, yet this means we have some sense of what death entails for us. This can only be if we think of the object of our anxiety--death--as more than just the mere physical terminus of our body. I contend that we understand death, colloquially understood, only insofar as we understand what it is not: existence.

Although we are not always meeting the complete and totalizing end of our existence in the same way as we meet it when our biology expires, we nonetheless have an understanding of what it means to have possibilities closed down and no longer possible for us. We lose pieces of ourselves all the time, when we change jobs, move across state lines, lose a loved one, etc., and the end of our physicality is the loss of the totality of our self, totally and once and for all. In other words, what is colloquially known as death--our biological terminus--is also our final existential terminus. Put differently, our physical finality mandates our complete and final existential finality. Our biological finality does not frighten us because of the end of our biological functions in themselves. It frightens us only because what that finality means for who we are and what we can become. Our fear of mortality is not physical; it is at root existential. In other words, one's understanding of one's physical demise is wholly an understanding of
the ultimate end of our existential life, and we understand the ultimate end of our existential life through common encounters with similar although less final encounters with existential finitude.

It is important not to mistake what I am saying here. I am not arguing that the death we encounter in an identity crisis is the same exact event as the death of our body, just as I would not argue that a paper cut is the same as cutting one's finger off completely. Yet whether the event is a paper cut or severing the finger all the way off, cutting is involved in both. This does not mean that if I get a paper cut I know what it means to lose my finger—to try to write without my finger or to pick up a bottle of beer without it. Yet I do know what it is, in some small way, to have my finger cut. Likewise, whether the death of self prior to our biological terminus of the ultimate death of self at our biological terminus, dying is involved in both. As such, death, colloquially understood, is implicated.

One might object by saying that we know to fear of our mortality by living through the death of those we love. To some degree this is correct, although it is not the death of the other that we experience; that is, we obviously are not the ones dying. Nonetheless, the death of a loved one is a loss, not just as loss in our physical surroundings but also and more importantly as an existential loss. There is truth in the saying that we lose a piece of our selves when we lose a loved one. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty says, "We do not understand the absence or death of a friend until the time comes when we expect a reply from him and when we realize that we shall never again receive
Who is it that shall give me comfort when I need it? Who now will sit and converse with me at dinner? It is not through the mere physical absence of our friend that I know death, but rather I know death because with the disappearance of the friend I am forced to change how I am in the world and who I relate to: my existence shifts. The shift in my existence that I undergo because of my friend's death could be strong enough that I see myself as changed. I am no longer who I was; the old me is "dead". It is not coincidence that English has the metaphors "a part of me died" or "it was the death of me". Even when we say, for example, "my car died" or "my pen died" we mean that the car no longer really is fully a car, the pen no longer fully a pen, in both cases because each ceases to function in a way that makes it what it is. The intelligibility of these metaphors is the commonality of meaning: something that was no longer is. Maintaining the use of the term death to express existential finitude maintains the meaning of this and other metaphors that employ the concept.

Because we have no understanding of our physical demise other than as an analytic definition such as “all humans meet a terminus of their physicality,” the only understanding of death we can have that might evoke anxiety about death would have to be a projection from experiences we’ve had already of facing non-being. That is, if we imagine our demise as that end which is the end of all ends, we can only get there through the projection of an experience we already have and extrapolate it to its extreme end. In projecting ourselves into that moment of our fantasy in which what-we-are ceases to be, we are thrown into the abyss of the unknown – we imagine the impossibility of imagining, we think about the impossibility of thinking, we project our self into being

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that which is the impossibility of being our self. It is in these moments that our fear of mortality surfaces even though we face no immediate physical threat.

To illustrate this point further, I turn to Heidegger's conception of death with the help of Taylor Carman's analysis, and I want to work somewhat backwards down the path of Carman's analysis. In the colloquial sense of the term, death is a thing that exists outside of us. We see others die, or we see others who are dead. However, this is no way to truly understand what death is, for reasons I pointed to above. To explain this, Carman makes the distinction between death as a possibility and death as something that exists categorically. As Carman puts it:

Indeed my own death is precisely not categorically possible for me, since we have no notion of what it would be for it to be categorically actual for me, and what cannot be actual is (by definition) not possible. I encounter my own death nowhere in my environment, neither in skeletons and graveyards nor even in the deaths of others close to me, but solely in my immanent relation to my own being-in-the-world—which is nothing at all like categorical actuality.83

Put simply, my own death, in the colloquial sense, cannot be known to me, because death itself precludes anything from becoming actual for me. Once our biological systems shut down, we can no longer be anything--an artist, a parent, an academic. We are, quite simply, nothing; or rather we are not. We exist as nothing more than a corpse to others. In the colloquial sense of the term death, we meet the ultimate impossibility--the fact that nothing more is possible for us.

When we imagine death, we imagine the impossibility of existence. That is, when we imagine death in front of us, we imagine the ultimate no-longer-being-able-to-be-there; we imagine the impossibility of our possibilities. This projection is grounded in an understanding of encounters with impossibility we have on a much smaller scale in

everyday life, like the change in who I am that occurs when I realize the impossibility of ever seeing my friend again. Another way to look at it is when one chooses to be a husband, Carman tells us, one chooses not to be "a cloistered monk"; by choosing to be a student, one chooses not to be an autodidact or a dropout. That is, in choosing to live one life, the other life becomes impossible, first because each life might be mutually exclusive with the other, as Carman's examples show, or the sheer number of possibilities that have shut down behind me as I've lived my life make it less and less possible for me to take up another.

For example, at some point I left the field of physics and entered the field of education. Who I was before was largely defined by my activities as a student of physics. I programmed a computer system for a scientific apparatus, helped my professors sort research data, and tutored for an introductory physics course. I then entered the field of education as a high school physics teacher. Slowly, my activities lead to new questions, which lead me further into the field of education, specifically in philosophy of education, until I ended up in a graduate program in that field. Now, as I write this, my “being-a-physicist” becomes less and less a possibility as time moves me forward and as my thinking and activities become more and more absorbed into the world of education. Seamus Mulryan the physicist is near death, if he has not already passed into oblivion. My ability to go “back there” is a near impossibility.

More generally and moreover, possibilities define me positively, and, as Carman says, “impossibilities must be what define me negatively. They are what or who I am

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84 Ibid.
not, or more precisely cannot be."\textsuperscript{85} This constant closing down of possibilities is dying. So long as we exist by embracing possibilities, we also embrace impossibilities, and as such we are dying as long as we exist. As Carman puts it, “To say that we are always dying is to say that our possibilities are constantly closing down around us.”\textsuperscript{86} In other words, death is not an event. It is the "essential finitude of projections and the constant closing down of possibilities."\textsuperscript{87} On this view, death is a limit, a boundary. It is the changing aggregate of my impossibilities that ever attends my constant choosing of one possibility over another. Death is not finality but rather finitude, although finitude is expressed as finality when one dies (existentially or physically). Death in this sense is the finitude of our projections, just as our mortal end is the finitude of our biological functions. The difference between understanding death from the biological perspective as opposed to the existential perspective is that in the biological sense finitude is relative only to one unchanging event: biological finality. From an existentialist perspective, on the other hand, finitude is ever-present and constantly constrains and consumes possibilities until our existential finality. We might meet an existential finality in the course of an identity crisis, wherein, because we have not met our physical finality, we can regenerate a new existence. Our biological finality makes death (understood existentially) totalizing. Taken with the above claims that our fear of death has to do with non-being and not the mere cessation of biological function, the existentialist perspective of death does not usurp the biological understanding but rather subsumes it into a richer, fuller understanding. When I speak of confronting death in the following pages, I am speaking not of the event of our biological terminus; I am speaking of an

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid. Emphasis original.  
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 282.  
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 283.
existential finitude that is shared with biological finitude: non-being. I choose not to speak of finitude at this point for the same reason I wouldn't say, "a little part of me met its finitude."

Death from an existential perspective is further explicated when Carman says, "To say that Dasein is always dying is to say you can be dying, or even dead, precisely when you are in good health and in the middle of a career, a marriage, a life."\textsuperscript{88} William Blattner provides the explanation that "one is dead as, say, a student, when being a student no longer matters to one. The meanings that once structured one's life as a student, the possibilities that once beckoned, and the demands one felt have become inert."\textsuperscript{89} Here we see an intimate relationship between the death of one as a student and the death, so to speak, of the self-understanding of being a student. That is to say, when the meanings that structure my life no longer function to do so, then not only do those structures die but so too do I die. I might in a benign way find that being a student no longer matters to me and I drop out or become an autodidact. Or I might have the rug pulled out from underneath me when, for example, although being a student matters to me, I cannot pay for or otherwise gain admittance to a university in order to open up the possibilities of being a student. I might even find that in the middle of the course of being a student, such insurmountable obstacles present themselves and kill off me-as-student in an indifferent and absurd way only Fortuna can appreciate.

Such an understanding of human existence gives us a workable explanation for how we might understand the mood of death, the terror of facing it, without having ever directly experienced it. If we maintain the perspective that we are always dying, that we

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 284.
are always experiencing the closing down of possibilities around us, we have an understanding of how aspects of ourselves might die off. This process is called into view when we have a major decision to make, when we "cut off" one direction of unfolding our possibilities and we feel great anxiety over the decision.\textsuperscript{90} We know that in some sense we must say goodbye forever to a set of possibilities that were once open to us and bereave the death of that self, as it were.

In choosing one direction over another, we choose possibilities that open up one set of goods to pursue instead of another. Do I sacrifice my career for a family or my family for my career? Each major decision is major because it can radically alter our possibilities of leading a good life--decisions about money, work, family, and friendship. Most would rarely agonize over whether to purchase sharp cheddar or extra sharp cheddar or whether one works day labor for one outfit instead of another in the same way one agonizes over marriage or a career choice. Although we are constantly dying insofar as possibilities are always closing down around us, we become consciously aware of this when we are confronted with decisions that affect our ability to lead a good life.

So although I cannot know what my ultimate demise will be like in its totality, it is understood through the projection of this existential experience into the future and into its final and totalizing form: not being able to go anywhere or be anyone at all. Ever.

The Self and the Cultural Field

We experience parts of ourselves dying off when we make decisions that we know can radically change the course of our lives. In each case, the possibilities of what

\textsuperscript{90} The etymology of the word decide comes from the Latin decidere, which means “to cut off”.
we might become is shaped. If we return briefly to the example of my identity being a reflection of what it means to "be a physicist", we might see that the self, as an entity, is largely made intelligible to us through the activities in which we engage. The activities and the meanings given to them are constitutive of what I will call the cultural field. Through it, we make sense of who and what we are. However, I do not mean to merely limit the cultural resources of self-intelligibility to what profession or job or vocation one takes up, however important this might be in American culture. Rather, I mean to say that self-understanding occurs through any combination of cultural resources available to one--language and concepts, practices, institutions, etc.

Most important to ethical dialogue is language, for, as Gadamer says, it is what opens up the future to us and in so doing makes manifest what is right and wrong. As beings who have language, and who use that language to make meaning of our world and ourselves, our lives extend beyond the mere life-and-death struggle that plays itself out in the rest of the animal kingdom. The world we live in is composed of concepts beyond those that have immediate physical representations, for example, courage, justice, truth, beauty, etc. Mediating between the purely physical and the purely abstract are the social constructs--the interplay of abstract and physical concepts that motivate, empower, and limit our actions with each other. Who we are and how we makes sense of ourselves beyond mere biochemical reactions is contingent on abstract concepts without clear physical representations. We make sense of our selves as persons who live in particular ways, and that sense-making is bound by the possibilities language and cultural norms (positively or negatively) provide for us.
Although I might choose to be a father instead of a monk and through that choice press forward both into my possibilities as well as my impossibilities, there are cases where death is so pervasive that possibilities seem to be nowhere. The situation is not such that I merely can choose to be one thing or another; I cannot choose to be anything because there are no choices available to even be made. This is not merely being dead as a student or being dead as a cloistered monk and also being something else in its place. The death I am now speaking of is death in such a totalizing form that it is only rivaled by one's physical terminus. I face the real possibility of being nothing at all.

This phenomenon is illustrated well in Jonathan Lear's analysis of the destruction of the Crow Nation in *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*. Lear describes not only how our self-understanding is tied to our ethical horizon, but also how one’s self can suddenly become unintelligible when that ethical horizon falls apart. Through the death of central practices in the culture of the Crow, the members of the Nation itself lose the primary sense of who each one is. Even more important to this dissertation is that the death of the Crow is brought about through inter-cultural contact.

It is a sentence uttered by Plenty Coups, the last great Chief of the Crow Nation that expresses this succinctly: “When the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened.”® Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*, 2.

Plenty Coups does not mean that literally the physical world froze when he says that nothing happened, but nothing of significance happened. The disappearance of the Buffalo symbolized the disintegration of the Crow's way of life, and when the Crow could not do what made them distinctly Crow, even mere happenings were meaningless.
The buffalo went away because of the encroachment of Whites and *their* ways upon the Crow ways of life. For example, take the practice of war and of counting coups. In traditional Crow life, “war was not the concern of a class nor even of the male sex, but of the whole population . . . most characteristic was the intertwining of war and religion . . . war exploits became the chief content of prayer. Training for war began in childhood.”

One of the primary means by which The Crow asserted their existence was in battle through the planting of coups-sticks. The Crow warrior was required to plant coups-sticks in the ground to symbolize that the land in which they were planted was Crow land, and the warrior was obligated to defend the coups-sticks with his life. After the battle, it was customary to recount coups; that is, the stories were told of how coup-sticks were planted and defended. Each planting and defense was considered an act of bravery. Interestingly, one of the bravest acts in defending territory--of counting coup--was the act of hitting one’s enemy with one’s coup-stick prior to inflicting harm in order to demand recognition of the Crow's territory as such from the other side's forces. Through this activity of hitting the enemy with a coup-stick, The Crow affirmed that they existed and that those with whom they battled recognized their existence.

This changed when Whites outlawed warring between tribes. What followed was that the acts that depended on warring, like counting coup, could not take place; counting coup became impossible. This had a profound effect on the Crow Nation as a whole, as essential to the Crow's existence was the success or failure of planting coup-sticks. When this was no longer a possibility, the possibility of asserting the existence of The Crow was eliminated, even though they were physically alive. Even central cultural practices

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92 Ibid., 12.
that depended on war and remained as a possible activity, like the Sun Dance, “a prayer for revenge” that was naturally saturated with military episodes, nonetheless lost their meaning. That is, even though one might still learn the steps and call it the “Sun Dance,” the Sun Dance itself in all its richness has gone out of existence. What is left is merely a façade to a vacant structure. The outlawing of war led to what Lear calls “a breakdown in the field in which occurrences occur.” With it, members of the Crow lost the ability to make sense of their own individual lives, as their lives were richly constituted by the cultural practices that they shared as Crow. If central to what it means to be a Crow revolves directly or indirectly around warriorship, then to outlaw war is to eliminate the possibility of being a Crow at all. To return to Plenty Coups' statement about nothing happening, the buffalo's disappearance signaled the encroachment of another culture's way of life and with it the demise of their own. With the breakdown of the field in which they made sense of themselves as Crow Nation, their ability to make sense of who they were as a people and as individuals disappeared.

What we see in these illuminating examples by Lear is that to reshape cultural symbols, rituals and narratives is to reshape the resources used to make the self intelligible and ultimately to reshape the self itself. To eliminate cultural resources is to eliminate selves by eliminating the field in which selves have any intelligibility. Through legal and military threat, the Crow were forced to change their ways to the point at which their very selves became unintelligible to them, and such acts were done because their way of life was unacceptable to the American government. Self-understanding for the Crow became impossible.

93 Ibid., 36.
94 Ibid., 34.
The Terror of Death

The above illustration shows that one’s self can become unintelligible in the destruction of cultural resources one uses to define one’s self. When this is considered alongside the stance that we understand our demise as a projection of everyday impossibilities, then it follows that the more robust and totalizing these impossibilities become the more one might feel the terror of one’s demise. In short, the loss of one's cultural field is intimately tied to death, because with such a loss we lose our possibilities for being anything intelligible and thus of anything at all.

From this perspective, we protect the ideas, symbols, and practices that represent and give meaning to possibilities in order to ensure their survival. Not surprisingly, we see conflicts over ideas about how to lives one's life in the same way we do over the activities of living themselves. Ernest Becker writes,

And so [Otto] Rank could say, “Every conflict over truth is in the last analysis just the same old struggle over . . . immortality.” If anyone doubts this, let him try to explain away the life and death viciousness of all ideological disputes. Each person nourishes his immortality in the ideology of self-perpetuation to which he gives his allegiance; this gives his life the only abiding significance it can have. No wonder men go into a fit of rage over fine points of belief: if your adversary wins the argument about truth, you die.95

The first assertion above is that one's self-understanding is tied into cultural artifacts like symbols, practices, and ideas, and as such, when those are called into question our self is called into question. Or, in other words, if the guiding lights by which we lead our lives die, we die. This claim points to a phenomenon we have all seen: arguments escalating to or beyond the point of rage over ideas that are fundamental to how one constructs one’s

95 Becker, Escape From Evil, 64.
life, e.g., religion, politics, or economics. The common wisdom of never talking politics or religion at a social event is not the advice of quacks. Hidden within this wisdom is the understanding that challenges to our fundamental beliefs are challenges to our lives *en toto*. There is no immediate mortal threat, and yet we react as though there is. The becoming unintelligible of a self is the disappearance of the narrative of the self – it is a direct confrontation with death. As Erich Fromm rightfully notes, it is normal to expect destructive tendencies "as a reaction to attacks on one's own or other's life and integrity, or on ideas which one is identified with."96 The loss of cultural resources can lead to a confrontation with death.

Taken from a slightly different angle, when death is brought into our awareness, we might reactively seek out those known ideas, symbols, and practices that allow us to exist as we understand ourselves. Fearing we might no longer exist, we attempt to reinforce those things that provide the possibilities of our existence. In fact, studies in Terror Management Theory, which arose out of Becker's work, show that “when reminded of death, test subjects do indeed react aggressively towards those who are different, and positively towards those who are similar.”97 When death looms, we look to those who are most similar because they share in the ideas and practices that define us. Whether we understand the problem from the angle that death anxiety drives us to seek those who share similar beliefs, or from the angle that the loss of cultural resources induces death anxiety, we cannot have one without invoking the potential for the other.

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It is not only that we live through culture but also culture that lives through us. Take, for example, Becker's observation that "Culture means that which is supernatural; all culture has the mandate to transcend the physical, to permanently transcend it."\(^98\) Dewey corroborates the observation that culture transcends physicality when he points out it is this quality that gives education its purpose:

> Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life. Every one of the constituent elements of a social group . . . is born immature, helpless, without language, beliefs, ideas, or social standards. Each individual, each unit who is the carrier of the life-experience of his group, in time passes away. Yet the life of the group goes on.\(^99\)

Individuals are born into a culture, they carry its practices through time, and they die, while others who have been born into the world carry it on. Yet what these observations point to is that although culture transcends physicality, culture nonetheless depends on it. If the human species were to be wiped out, so too would humanity's practices; and so, culture lives through human activity as much as human activity is given meaning through culture.

The observation that culture transcends physicality is important to the idea of immortality structures, which are central to Becker's theory. The fact that culture transcends physicality means that it transcends mortality, and Becker contends that the drive for humans to create and maintain culture is for the sake of transcending death. We participate in a culture that not only fundamentally provides the resources for us to make sense of our lives, but these resources, and in a sense, pieces of ourselves, live on beyond our physical demise. As such, the symbolic structures of our culture provide a way of conquering death and becoming immortal.

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\(^98\) Becker, *Escape From Evil*, 64.
This might best be seen if we think about the drive some people have to have children so that they might pass on the habits of mind, the social dynamics, and the values cultivated through family relationships; one lives on through one's children, not only in biologically in DNA but culturally as well. A more abstract but still substantive example is that of an enduring piece of art or literature or scientific discovery that forever changes the way people see the world. To make such an impression on the world is to live on in it long after one's death.

The departure I want to take from Becker and Terror Management Theory stems from Becker's reliance on ideology structures and from the explanation that the drive to create such structures is a means of denying our own death. To Becker, immortality structures are those things in which we participate and from which we draw meaning, and they are immortal because they live on after we are gone. Moreover and more importantly, if those structures are threatened, so is our immortality. I am taking a slightly different tack. It is not my aim to explain why we create ideology structures, nor is it to argue that we defend them for the sake of some temporally distant event when we meet our demise and thus take comfort in the fact that we still in some way live on.

I agree with Becker that threats to this cultural field do often lead to aggression and sometimes escalate to physical violence. However, my explanation of why this happens differs. To Becker, the violence stems from our inability to face the totality of our physical demise, and the focus is on the drive to create and defend things that live on past our demise. However, I am not concerned with the drive to protect what happens after we perish but with how we face our own existential death in the here-and-now.
Death and Ethical Dialogue

Becker's challenge to us to explain why people go into fit of rage when debating about politics or religion points to the fact that one does not need to face a physical threat in order to fly into a fit of rage. Yet the destructive tendencies referenced by Becker and described by Fromm are not restricted to politics and religion, and it is not because the subject is politics or religion as such. What causes one to react violently is the challenge to ideas one takes as central to how one constructs and makes meaningful one's life. Take the person who gets angry when someone else calls their political party a bunch of liars, cheats, and philanderers. That same person might be completely uninterested in a debate on whether mathematical objects are human constructs or Platonic entities. Yet another person might have the opposite reactions to these debates, have no reaction to either, or have a strong reaction to both. One might have to win any and every argument regardless of content, because one believes one is smarter than everyone else. In defending the idea that one is smarter than everyone else, any possibility of being wrong is at root the possibility that one might cease to exist and with it all narratives tied to the assumption that one is smarter than everyone else.

What matters to the individual is inextricably tied up with how one understands one's world, one's self, and one's place it. This self-understanding is constituted by evaluations about how one does and ought to live one's life. As Kunzman explains,

The self is not merely a string of attachments or evaluations. Rather, the various identifications that arise over a life's course contribute to a broader framework within which we stand to evaluate the world around us. . . . Our selves . . . are inextricably linked with--and in many ways defined by--our various ethical
commitments (and the projects that form them) as they comprise a broader framework.\textsuperscript{100}

This brings us back to the crux of the problem: one's ethical horizon is not the totality of one's cultural field, but it is the guiding light that gives it meaning in so far as it gives justification for why we live the life we do within the constraining and shaping power of that field. The observation that Becker makes regarding arguments over religion and politics gives credence to this in that religion and politics are for many rooted in visions of what it means to live a good life. Ethical horizons, being the evaluative framework by which we carry out our lives and as such understand ourselves, is the foundation of our existence. In an argument about them, participants carry out a life-and-death battle that will determine whose ethical horizon is worthy of existence.

Although the threat to one's ethical horizon does not necessarily constitute the disintegration of one's cultural field \textit{en toto}, any radical threat to one's ethical horizon is ultimately a threat to one's life.

If ethical understanding, from the perspective of hermeneutic theory, is to transform our own ethical horizon and in the process put at risk certain fundamental prejudices, then we must admit that ethical understanding requires us to withstand a confrontation with death. More specifically, when we engage in dialogue in such a way that we allow for the transformation of our own horizon of understanding, and when that dialogue is one in which our vision of the good (a vision fundamental to how we understand and orient our lives) is challenged, the possibility of violence is heightened, especially when dealing with differences that exist across broad cultural gaps. This leads

me to make two claims. The first is that we risk the destructive tendencies Fromm describes when we truly allow the other's claims about the good to challenge our own vision of the good. The second follows from the first: if we value ethical understanding as a good to be pursued for its own sake or, for example, the sake of a pluralistic democratic society or of cosmopolitanism, then we must also value the ability to face death well for the sake of such understanding; we must value courage. In the next chapter, I take up the task of exploring what it means to be courageous in dialogue.
In chapter 2, I discussed the merits of hermeneutic experience as a model for ethical understanding, properly understood, in relation to what I see as the failure of dialogical models that rest too heavily on language or on experience. I also showed how Gadamer's theory meets the criteria of avoiding the pitfalls of assuming equal worth and self-immurement. In the previous chapter, I took discussion of this last criterion further in examining the central role death plays in ethical understanding from the perspective of hermeneutic experience. I then claimed that if we take ethical understanding as a good worth pursuing we must then, by extension, take courage as a virtue necessary for that pursuit. That is, ethical dialogue requires an ethics, and central to that ethics is courage.

Gadamer does not offer an explicit ethics of dialogue and understanding, although I think it is fair to say that we might interpret the implicit ethical dimensions of, and requisite virtues for, hermeneutic experience. When we develop this implicit ethics more fully we see the need for an areteic conception of courage as a virtue for understanding.

The Ethical Dimension of Gadamer's Theory of Hermeneutic Experience

There are two major points I want to make regarding the ethical dimensions of Gadamer's theory. The first is to show that there is a required quality of consciousness

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for understanding to take place: openness to negative experience. The second is that this quality, when exercised, takes the shape of an Aristotelian virtue insofar as it requires (a) an interdependent relationship between universal and particular, and (b) the striking of a mean between two extremes.

The Openness of Hermeneutical Consciousness

Although Gadamer does not talk about the virtues associated with understanding in an explicit way, he does talk about how one should be when understanding. Ethical virtues have traditionally been considered part and parcel to one's character, it is important to note that Gadamer is not referring to the idea of character as a solid and predictable "thing". To this point, he says, "When I speak of Bewußtsein [consciousness]--for example, of wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein [effective-historical consciousness]--it is not to espouse Aristotle or Hegel. What counts is knowing that consciousness is not a res, a thing."102 Nonetheless, in an essay on "the possibility of philosophical ethics," Gadamer states that "we should orient ourselves towards Aristotle" and later describes what is generally considered one's "character" in Aristotle's Ethics as one's being:

Moral action is not right by reason of the fact that what is thereby brought into existence is right; rather, its rightness lies primarily in ourselves, in the 'how' of our conduct, in the manner in which the person who 'is right' does it. It is also true, on the other hand, that in our moral conduct, which depends so much more on our being than on our explicit consciousness, we ourselves are drawn forth as well--as we are (and not as we know ourselves).103

Here, Gadamer is making moves from the ontic to the ontological, from a virtue as a thing that is possessed to a way one is. On the one hand, virtues are not potentialities

102 Gadamer, "Letter to Dallmayr," 100.
in one's character that might or might not act. On the contrary, the very nature of the disposition is that one *does* act in a certain way. On the other hand, virtues are also not the products of action in the same way we can say a potter is "right" when he creates a good cup or vase. The virtues then are not things possessed that determine how one how one *might* be, and they are not the products of how one does, but rather the virtues are how one *is*--they are determined in respect to one's being.

The transition from an areteic ethics that is developed with respect to a thing known as "character" to one that is developed with respect to being is seen in Gadamer's theory of hermeneutics in the concept of *hermeneutical consciousness*, which Gadamer develops to explain the "how" of one's being in understanding. The conceptualization of hermeneutical consciousness rests on the idea of negative experience explained in chapter 2 as well as Aristotle's concept of *phronesis*.

Hermeneutical consciousness is distinguished from the methodological consciousness seen in the carrying out of scientific understanding. Because hermeneutic experience is negative experience, Gadamer says hermeneutical consciousness is that which "culminates not in methodological sureness of itself, but in the same readiness for experience that distinguishes the experienced man from the man captivated by dogma."\(^{104}\)

In other words, hermeneutical consciousness is open to further (negative) experiences. On the other hand, the aim of natural science "is so to objectify experience that it no longer contains any historical element . . . through methodological procedure."\(^{105}\) In other words, the aim of natural science is to methodologically eliminate the subjective,

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\(^{104}\) *Truth and Method*, 355.

\(^{105}\) Ibid., 342.
which is considered extraneous to understanding any object of scientific inquiry. This is
done to create certitude of understanding.

Yet in undergoing negative experience through understanding, Gadamer says,

only something different and unexpected can provide someone who has
experience with a new one. Thus experiencing consciousness has reversed its
direction--i.e., it has turned back on itself. The experiencer has become aware of
his experience; he is 'experienced.' He has acquired a new horizon within which
something can become an experience for him.  

This is the exact opposite of the experience of scientific inquiry. In the case of human
understanding one's prejudices are put at risk. As such, one becomes aware of one's
experience and of one's finitude of understanding. Through this, one experiences in a
new way, which is the transformation of one's horizon of understanding.

Hermeneutical consciousness, then, is the consciousness that properly
understands, cannot be willed, and has particular qualities like openness. Hermeneutical
consciousness is experienced consciousness, and as such it has come to be by undergoing
experiences in a particular way, for certainly there are those who do not stand in
hermeneutical consciousness and might become "captivated by dogma". To put it in a
slightly different way, hermeneutic consciousness does not come about by nature; one
becomes hermeneutical consciousness by undergoing experiences that shape one's
perceptions in such a way that one remains ready for experience. Certainly, being ready
to undergo experience--being open--is a necessary comportment that renders experience
possible. Thus, part and parcel of hermeneutical consciousness is the "openness of
experience to new experience."  

\footnote{Ibid., 348.}

In the context of ethical understanding, in seeking to

\footnote{Ibid., 346.}
understand what is good, hermeneutical consciousness is open to a negative experience that challenges one's understanding of the good.

One might object at this point to say that an openness to the negative experience of understanding sounds like an intellectual virtue while I am arguing that the moral virtue of courage is the appropriate virtue for understanding. However, although hermeneutic understanding is an intellectual activity, it is also moral because it necessarily involves relating to others. As such, the intellectual virtue can exist only insofar as it is exercised in a moral context.

To explain, being excellent in moral wisdom, *phronesis*, is an intellectual virtue; yet, *phronesis* has a quality that sets it apart from the other intellectual virtues. To be wise in moral matters is not the same as to be wise in matters such as mathematics (*episteme*, or "systematic knowledge") or in the matters of making pottery (*techne*, or "technical expertise"). In moral matters, one only has moral wisdom if one also utilizes it appropriately. One cannot have the ability to reason well about moral matters on one hand and then choose not to follow them on the other. In other words, according to Aristotle, the non-rational part of the soul, namely the appetitive and desiring part, must obey the rational part in moral matters:

. . . in the soul there too is something besides reason, opposing and going against it. How it is different is of no importance. But this part too seems to participate in reason, as we have said: at any rate, in the self-controlled person it is obedient to reason--and in the moderate and courageous person it is presumably still readier to listen; for in him it always chimes with reason.110

109 Ibid., VI.1.1140a30-40b10.
For the rational side of the soul to reason well is to be intellectually virtuous, and it would seem that to obey that reason well is to be ethically virtuous. Yet Aristotle makes an even stronger claim: in the courageous the non-rational always chimes with the rational. In other words, there is no autonomous command on one side and willful obeying on the other. As Joseph Dunne astutely observes:

What differentiates it [phronesis] from the other four intellectual virtues (techne, nous, episteme and sophia) listed and discussed in book 6, however, is precisely the intimacy of its relationship with ethical virtue. Indeed with phronesis the whole distinction between ethical and intellectual virtues becomes strained.¹¹¹

We can further understand the blurring of the distinction between ethical and intellectual in phronesis by first looking to Gadamer's rendering of moral hexis, often translated as disposition, which he says "is meant not for a capacity for being this or that, like knowing and understanding are, but instead an ontological category like nature, a 'thus and not otherwise.'"¹¹² Gadamer draws attention to this detail in order to distinguish Aristotle's position from a Kantian one in which there is autonomous moral reason on one hand and willful action on the other. On Gadamer's account, I have the capacity for knowing, and I have the capacity for understanding. But dispositions are not universal capacities to act rightly such that practical reason operates autonomously from the actions of the will. Aristotle puts it this way:

it is not just the disposition according to correct prescription, but the disposition accompanied by the correct prescription, that constitutes excellence . . . neither is wisdom sovereign over intellectual accomplishment, or over the better of the two rational parts, any more than medical knowledge is sovereign over health; for it does not employ it, but rather sees to it that it comes into existence, so that it prescribes on its behalf, not to it.¹¹³

¹¹² Gadamer, Hermeneutics, Religion, & Ethics, 31.
Character traits are not something that can be “had” or possessed; they are implicit to one’s very existence. One does not have courage; one just is courageous, in the same way one does not have generosity; one is generous. What this means is that any ethical virtue is by necessity also part and parcel of the intellectual virtue of phronesis. Only the other intellectual virtues can be autonomous from how we relate to others (ethical) because they are virtues that exist independently of relating to others. The only intellectual virtue that tells us how to be with others is phronesis, and it is inextricable from the ethical virtues.

Arete of Understanding

For Gadamer, hermeneutical consciousness is the preferred way of orienting oneself in interpretation and understanding, and openness towards negative experience is necessary condition for hermeneutical consciousness. It is not only that Gadamer posits a "good" way of being towards otherness when understanding, but he also provides an account of the dynamics of understanding, or, in other words, how hermeneutical consciousness is as it is understanding. Gadamer does this primarily in two ways: (a) describing the activity of understanding as the activity of application and (b) describing the activity of understanding as participating in a parallel to the I-Thou relationship.

Understanding as Application

Gadamer sees the fundamental problem of hermeneutics as the problem of application. He tells us that

in both legal and theological hermeneutics there is an essential tension between the fixed text--the law or the gospel--on the one hand and, on the other, the sense arrived at by applying it at the concrete moment of interpretation, either in judgment or in preaching. A law does not exist in order to be understood historically, but to be concretized in its legal validity by being interpreted. Similarly, the gospel does not exist in order to be
understood merely as historical document, but to be taken in such a way that it exercises its saving effect. This implies that the text, whether law or gospel, if it is to be understood properly--i.e., according to the claim it makes--must be understood at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application.\textsuperscript{114}

In short, a text is always approached with a particular question arising from a particular situation, and the text is understood in such a way as to make claims about the situation from which the question arises. When a court makes a legal judgment, it does so in reference to established laws, which are historical in the sense that they were established previously. However, their historical dimension does not mean that they are irrelevant to the case. The case \textit{must} be judged in light of the laws if it is to be a court of law to begin with. Moreover, the laws do not outline what judgment should be rendered in all possible cases. The law is a general, universal guideline that must be applied in specific, concrete cases existing in a unique time and socio-political environment. The task of a theory of hermeneutics is, then, to consider "the tension that exists between the identity of a common object", for example a given law, "and the changing situation in which it occurs," the specific case that must be considered and for which a judgment must be rendered.\textsuperscript{115}

This kind of knowledge about the law is not the same as the knowledge of mathematics, wherein we know that in every case--in every time, in every society, and in every judgment--2+2=4. Certainly, the Supreme Court of the United States often makes decisions that are not unanimous. Differing understandings of how the law should be applied and what bearing a law has on a given situation leads to divergence of legal opinion. However, interpretation is also not the knowledge of technique, wherein one

\textsuperscript{114} Gadamer, \textit{Truth and Method}, 307-08.  
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 308.
applies a series of rules about how to interpret the law and the specifics of a given case, and then renders a decision from that.

It is the uniqueness of the required knowledge-through-application that causes Gadamer to turn to Aristotle. In the section of *Truth and Method* dedicated to "the hermeneutic relevance of Aristotle," Gadamer is specifically attracted to Aristotle's concern with reason and knowledge, not detached from being that is becoming, but determined by it and determinative of it . . . Criticizing the Platonic idea of the good as an empty generality, he asks instead the question of what is humanly good, what is good in terms of human action . . . the equation of arete with logos . . . is an exaggeration . . . The very name 'ethics' indicates that Aristotle bases arete on practice and 'ethos'.

What Gadamer is saying is that on Aristotle's account the good is not something to be found independent of action and in the sole domain of reasoned discourse. What it means for someone to be virtuous, to be good, is predicated on an understanding of what is good practice, i.e., what is generally considered right action for whatever activities that person engages in. Moreover, what right action might be in any instance is necessarily conditioned by the context in which the person must act. This stands in contradistinction to determining what is good universally in all cases.

To these points, Gadamer describes *phronesis* as a mode of knowledge that could no longer be based in any way on a final objectifiability in the sense of the physical sciences. [Aristotle's critique of Plato's idea of the Good and the Aristotelian concept of practical knowledge] described, in other words, a knowledge within the concrete situation of existence.

That is, *phronesis* is a "self-knowledge" distinct from theoretical knowledge (*episteme*) akin to mathematics and distinct from technical knowledge (*techne*) akin to the craft

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116 Ibid., 310-11.
117 Ibid., *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 201-02.
making.\textsuperscript{118} Also, what right action is in any case is not something that, once known, can be applied in all cases. As such, it is not something that can be learned wholly independent of the experience that requires it. Knowledge of right action is possible only as it is conditioned by the particulars of the situation. As Gadamer reminds us, the actor is always already involved in moral and political context and acquires his image of the thing from that standpoint . . . [the] knowledge that can be taught [independent of experience]...are only valid as schemata. They are concretized only in the concrete situation of the person acting.\textsuperscript{119}

Recall in chapter 2 I criticized language-centered theories of dialogue because of the way in which they allow one to keep others' claims at a distance, treating them as objects of knowledge rather than as beliefs that live within the actions of the other and that are presumed to have something to say to oneself as much as to challenge one's own understanding of the good and of oneself. In Gadamer's turn toward Aristotle, he affirms the stance that ethical understanding is understanding that occurs through its application to concrete situations. By extension, to understand another's ethical horizon one must open oneself up the possibility that one's own ethical horizon is misguided and that it might be transformed though understanding.

To Gadamer, Aristotle's critique is important in the way it conceptualizes knowledge of how to act as something necessarily conditioned by what is perceived as the situation in which one must choose his actions. This hermeneutical significance of Aristotle--the significance of applying knowledge conditioned by the situation--allows Gadamer to rethink the method of application in the human sciences. What follows from the Aristotelian standpoint is that an abstracted method of application in the social

\textsuperscript{118} ibid., 314.
\textsuperscript{119} ibid., 318.
sciences cannot be developed and applied universally to achieve some objective reality. Gadamer points out the social sciences are concerned not with *episteme* or *techne*, but with human beings and their understanding of themselves. As such, " . . . the problem of method [in the social sciences] is entirely determined by the object--a general Aristotelian principle . . . " Ultimately, Gadamer says that Aristotle's analysis "offers a kind of model of the problem of hermeneutics." That is, just as the moral actor applies a universal moral concept to a particular situation wherein "application did not consist in relating some pregiven universal to the particular situation", so, too, the interpreter "must relate the text [as a universal] to his particular situation if he wants to understand at all."  

Thus, it is clear that Aristotle's analysis of moral knowledge plays a pivotal role in Gadamer's thinking through the problem of hermeneutics. Indeed, Aristotle's analysis is a model for thinking through the problem. This is not to say that hermeneutical understanding is ethical knowledge. The only claim Gadamer makes about the role of moral knowledge in hermeneutics is to say, "admittedly hermeneutical consciousness is involved neither with technical or moral knowledge, but these two types of knowledge still include the same task of application that we have recognized as the central problem of hermeneutics." He likewise says that the problem of method is relevant not only to the task of interpretation in general but also to moral reflection.  

Two things can be said at this point. First, from the Aristotelian perspective, moral knowledge involves the task of application. That is, to understand a moral concept

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120 Ibid., 312.  
121 Ibid., 380.  
122 Ibid., 313.  
123 Ibid., 311.
is to carry it out in practice. This has direct implications for the question of ethical understanding as more than mere cognition, acknowledgement, or tolerance of other ethical horizons. Second, and more to the point of this chapter so far, Gadamer's discussion of hermeneutics is derived in part from Aristotle's theory of ethics. Gadamer does not claim this means hermeneutics is concerned with ethical understanding en toto. However, I think it is fair to say that understanding the good is in the domain of hermeneutical understanding. Moreover, Gadamer seems to give clear indication of the right way to engage with otherness when he draws from the I-Thou relationship as "the parallel to the hermeneutic experience."\textsuperscript{124} We turn to this next.

\textit{The I-Thou Relationship as the Parallel to Hermeneutic Experience}

Although Gadamer stays away from tying philosophical hermeneutics to any form of philosophical ethics \textit{per se}, the ethical implications of philosophical hermeneutics is hardly hidden.\textsuperscript{125} He claims,

\begin{quote}
A person who does not admit that he is dominated by prejudices will fail to see what manifests itself by their light. It is like the relation between I and Thou. A person who reflects himself out of the mutuality of such a relation changes this relationship and destroys its moral bond. \textit{A person who reflects himself out of a living relationship to tradition destroys the true meaning of this tradition in exactly the same way.}\textsuperscript{126}
\end{quote}

Gadamer clearly believes it is wrong to destroy tradition by treating it as an It and not a Thou. The openness to tradition that Gadamer claims is necessary for hermeneutic experience has, he says, a real analogue in the I's experience of the Thou. He describes that relationship thusly:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 355.
\textsuperscript{125} See, for example, Smith, \textit{Hermeneutics and Human Finitude: Toward a Theory of Ethical Understanding}.
\textsuperscript{126} Gadamer, \textit{Truth and Method}, 354. Emphasis original.
\end{flushright}
Belonging together always means being able to listen to one another. When two people understand each other, this does not mean that one person 'understands' the other. Similarly 'to hear and obey someone' (auf jemanden hören) does not mean simply that we do blindly what the other desires. We call such a person slavish (hörig). Openness to the other, then, involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so.127

So, hermeneutic consciousness relates to the texts of one's tradition in the same way an I relates to a Thou, allowing for the possibility the Thou's claims might be true. We are not to go to one extreme whereby we understand the Thou as a "form of self-relatedness" whereby "one claims to know the other better than the other understands himself."128 By understanding the other in this way, "by claiming to know him, one robs his claims of their legitimacy."129 On the other hand, we must ensure the other does not do the same to us. In hearing the Thou, one stays away from faltering too far on the side of blind acceptance on one hand and sheer dismissal on the other.

It is not just that I find it impossible to read these passages from Gadamer without hearing a claim to what is the right way to comport one's self toward a Thou and towards tradition. In addition to Gadamer's reliance on the concept of phronesis to help him describe the dimension of application of interpretation there are echoes of Aristotle's mean, as the interpreter must find his or her way between two extremes if the moral bond shall not be broken. One must not merely accept unreflectively the truth of what her interlocutor claims. One also must not keep the claims of her interlocutor at a distance, serving to undermine the interlocutor's ability to challenge her own claims. This balance between unreflective acceptance of another's claims and utter denial of the same is a mean that must be struck between the two extremes.

127 Ibid., 355.
128 Ibid., 353.
129 Ibid., 354.
To briefly review, hermeneutical consciousness requires a steadfast openness to negative experience that is undergone in understanding. This openness of understanding is not meant to be a denial of the legitimacy of one's own claims. Rather, understanding takes the form of the I-Thou relationship, one in which those engaged in understanding must hit a mean between being slavish and robbing the other of the power of the other's claims.

As we can see, hermeneutical consciousness requires a quality that fits squarely with an areteic ethics. More specifically, though, the openness towards experiencing one's finitude is an openness towards death, and, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, this openness requires courage. Of course, following Gadamer, it would be a bad interpretation to rip courage straight from the pages of Aristotle and claim it for our own. If we are to draw from Aristotelian ethics, and if courage is to make any sense in the context of hermeneutical consciousness as it is played out in dialogue, specifically dialogue around ethical understanding, we must make sense of the dimensions of courage first articulated by Aristotle. Before addressing the question of how this courage of dialogue might be understood, I will quickly sketch the four primary dimensions of courage as articulated by Aristotle. These four dimensions will guide the remainder of the chapter.

Aristotle describes courage as the intermediary state relating to fearing and being bold. However, he is careful not to say that the person who is courageous is someone who stands at the intermediary position in all cases. Although there is some resemblance, he says, fearing loss of reputation, poverty, or disease is not the fear (and fearlessness) of courage. Moreover, although the courageous person faces fear rightly, facing fear rightly
is not in all cases courage. Courage is facing rightly the fear of death, and not just any
death, but death in war: "Death under what circumstances, then? Or is it under the
finest? Such deaths are deaths in war; for then the danger is greatest and finest."¹³⁰

Moreover, he says,

In the primary sense, then, the courageous person will be said to be the one who is
fearless about a fine death, or about sudden situations that threaten death; and
those occur in war are mostly of this sort—the situations in which people really
show courage are those in which one can put up a fight…¹³¹

Aristotle contrasts this with facing death in a non-courageous way:

Dying to escape from poverty, or sexual passion, or something painful, is not a
feature of courage but rather of cowardice; for it is softness to run away from
things because they are burdensome, and the person in this case accepts death not
because it is a fine thing to do, but because he is running away from something
bad.¹³²

Courage is facing one's fear of death rightly and because it is a fine thing to do, and the
greatest and finest danger is found in war. As such, courage is most clearly seen in the
warrior. So, Aristotle here conceptualizes courage as relating rightly to the fear of mortal
death, and the warrior is the person who can most fully act with courage.¹³³

In addition to the criteria that (a) to be courageous one must relate to death rightly
and (b) the warrior is the person who can most fully exercise courage, courage is (c) an
intermediary between two extremes, as with all excellences. For courage, "the cowardly
person, the rash one, and the courageous one all have to do with the same things, but
relate to them in different ways; for the first two display excess and deficiency, whereas

¹³¹ Ibid., III.6.1115a30-b5.
¹³² Ibid., III.7.1116a10-15.
¹³³ Aristotle nonetheless says that just because one is a warrior in battle one might not be courageous. See ibid., III.8.1116b5-25.
the third is the intermediary and is as one should be. The coward "is afraid about everything", and the rash person "goes to excess in being bold about what is fearsome."

Finally, just as all virtues are the intermediary between excess and deficiency, each virtue is a universal conditioned by the particular circumstances in which it is exercised. We do not know what courage will look like in all cases. We have a general understanding of what it consists of. Yet the particular context that calls for courage, in doing so, also conditions what it means to be courageous in that situation. We do not come to understand courage by mere analytic definition, in the same way we cannot learn to ride a horse by receiving verbal instructions on how to do so. Moreover, exercising courage one rightly does not make for being courageous. Each horse is different, and if we imagine each social situation as a new horse, we never quite ride the same horse twice. Yet with practice, we come better at tuning into the unique attributes of the horse and adjusting accordingly.

In asking whether courage makes sense in the context of dialogue about ethical understanding, we must be sure to make sense of each of these three dimensions of courage, one of them general to any areteic virtue including courage, and two of them specific to courage itself. I will attend to them in the following order: (a) the object of fear being one's physical demise, (b) courage as an intermediary between cowardice and rashness, and (c) the warrior as the exemplar of courageousness.

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134 Ibid., III.7.1116a5.
135 Ibid., III.7.1115b25-16a5.
The Object of Fear Being Death

If the understanding of our physical demise is only intelligible to us through those things we have already witnessed or experienced, as I described in chapter 3, then the translation of courage from that of physical demise to existential death becomes a translation not only for the purposes of this study but a translation necessary to accommodate any understanding of courage. There has already been good work done on conceptualizing courage for the existential realm by Paul Tillich, for example, who examines the courage to be as the ability to affirm one’s self in the face of non-being. As such, his work provides ample ground on which to develop an existential understanding of courage.

Tillich claims that courage and anxiety are interdependent, and that anxiety is the state in which being is aware of its possible non-being. 136

Courage does not remove anxiety. Since anxiety is existential, it cannot be removed. But courage takes the anxiety of nonbeing into itself. Courage is the self-affirmation “in spite of”, namely in spite of non-being. He who acts courageously takes, in his self-affirmation, the anxiety of non-being upon himself…Anxiety turns us towards courage, because the other alternative is despair. Courage resists despair by taking anxiety unto itself. 137

On Tillich’s view, when anxiety strikes, rather than being courageous, we might turn towards despair and choose suicide to affirm our ontic, physical non-being, or we might affirm meaninglessness by giving up on the task of meaning, or we might affirm condemnation by refusing to act and refusing to place ourselves at risk of guilt. To Tillich, courage allows us to move in the opposite direction from these. In the case of dialogue, when I face the uncanniness of self-unintelligibility, the pervasive fear of

137 Ibid., 66.
nothingness that might arise when one acknowledges that fundamental prejudices are at risk, the prospect that I become not-I and emerge as an “I” that I cannot anticipate, then I take grasp of that anxiety, own it as mine, and affirms myself in spite of it. In other words, I do not set anxiety as something apart from me to be destroyed, and I do not turn away from those things because they evoke anxiety. In order for me to affirm myself, I must accept the anxiety that accompanies any situation that calls for my self-affirmation. To do otherwise is to fail to affirm myself.

There is an interesting tension that arises when we think of the courage to be as something that would be helpful in conceptualizing the courage of understanding. In understanding, the two poles on either side of the intermediary are that of being slavish and that of robbing the other's claims of their legitimacy. In the former case we clearly fail to affirm ourselves through the delegitimization of our own claims. In the latter case, however, we affirm ourselves too strongly and in so doing destroy the conditions for the other to affirm herself. Leaning only on the exercise of self-affirmation does not take into account the other dialogical partner. An excess of self-affirmation could be the denial of the existence of the other. Thus, Tillich's conceptualization of courage does not entirely speak to the situation of dialogue. Although it seems that Tillich offers us an idea of the person who does not act “in spite of non-being” as the one who cowers from anxiety, he does not offer us an idea of the person who rashly or recklessly faces anxiety. Such a conceptualization fails to interpret courage in such a way as to maintain one of its original dimensions--of having excess as well as deficiency.

The courage of dialogue is the courage to face anxiety, but it must also withstand anxiety in order to maintain the integrity of both dialogical participants. Courage must be
the self-affirmation that does not destroy the other in exercising itself, but maintains the space for others to also affirm themselves. In the dialogical case, the act “in spite of” is not self-affirmation, but rather is an act that allows for the self-affirmation of the other at the same time as one’s self. In spite of our anxiety about confronting death, we do not cowardly hide from it, demanding the other relinquish her claims to truth or running from the dialogue altogether. Nor do we rashly seek out a reversely asymmetrical dialogical relation where the other denies our own claims and wherein we cope with anxiety through self-destruction. In order to avoid the problem of over-running our self-affirmation if we keep Tillich’s conceptualization of courage, we would need to argue the interdependence of self and other such that to affirm one’s self requires the affirmation of other. This topic will be taken up later when I develop the poles of excess and efficiency by drawing from Erich Fromm and from Jessica Benjamin as read through Chris Higgins. Before I do that, though, I will examine work already done on existential and ontological courage in order to better position myself within the discourse.

Justen Infinito borrows from Tillich's analysis to conceptualize what she calls "ontological courage," which "is accepting the responsibility for the person one will become by assenting to the project of one's education and the inevitable changes one will suffer." In a sense, ontological courage is the commitment to one's formation in the face of pressure to merely be one of the herd; it is the courage to be authentically one's own. To break away from the herd though is not reason to then impose one's own way of being onto others. Instead, drawing from William Desmond, she states, "with courage, we respond to the solicitation of the other seen not as an intrusion but as an invitation to

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appreciate the full disclosure of being." In other words, we do not see the others as hindrances to our development. Rather, their otherness opens up the opportunity for us to appreciate the possibilities of being that we draw from to make ourselves our own.

In addition to this ontological courage, Infinito offers two other forms of courage: existential and moral. Existential courage is "risking the security of an essential or unalterable self in efforts to envision, experiment, fashion, produce, test, apply, judge, and practice alternative ways of being." That is, once we break from the crowd, we must not become content with settling on one, unalterable and essential self. Existential courage thus requires ontological courage; one must commit to transformation in order to undergo the process of continual transformation. In other words, ontological courage is required to engage in activities that might lead to transformation yet without the promise of transformation, and existential courage is required when faced with the undeniable challenge to one's essential understanding of one's self in which one is revises one's notion of one's self.

Finally, through the exercise of moral courage "one sustains commitments to specific ideas, habits, desires, and ways of being", which Infinito says requires moral courage. These commitments come into being through the continued exercise of existential courage, and in doing so with the required others who thus shape our commitments, moral courage is "the courage to be with." If we courageously risk the security of an essential self, this must be tempered with a commitment to be with others,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[139] Ibid., 213.
\item[140] Ibid., 214.
\item[141] Ibid., 214-5.
\item[142] Ibid.
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and in being with others, we must accept that there is a shared ethos among those who share ways of being.

Infinito's work allows us to see how courage might take different particular meanings within specific contexts. However, it is not entirely clear why these are different kinds of courage instead of different articulations of the same courage. In order to exercise ontological courage, one must have an understanding of what one must face in exercising existential courage. That is, if I am to truly be courageous in the ontological sense, I must be courageous existentially. For, I cannot be ontologically courageous if I do not have some fear of what possibilities are opened up for me in doing so. My understanding of the possibilities in exercising ontological courage are one and the same as the understanding of possibilities that open up for me when I exercise existential courage. In both cases, I must face the anxiety of the unintelligibility of my self, the moving forward into the unknown of existence and of who I am or will be. For example, let us assume I am a Christian and I am going to a workshop in Buddhist Ethics. Let us assume that in that workshop, I perceive a conflict between the ethics of Buddhism and the ethics of Christianity. The mere fact of me attending the seminar does not make for ontological courage, as I can very easily hold any claim that challenges my worldview at a distance. In order for me to exercise ontological courage, I must attend the meeting knowing I face the possibility of revising the narrative of my self. Yet, this is exactly the same possibility I face in what Infinito calls existential courage. Whether I am in the act of revision or face a more distant possibility of it, the anxiety I face is the same. In both cases, I move forward into the unknown, not knowing how significant any revision I take up will affect my understanding of my self.
Thus what Infinito calls ontological courage and existential courage I see as one and the same. Additionally, her conceptualization of moral courage has a different aim than the concept of courage I am developing. To her, moral courage is not what is required to let go of one's ethical framework but rather to sustain it. So, while existential courage requires ontological courage on Infinito's view, the exercise of moral courage requires a simultaneous relegation of both existential and ontological courage. For, one cannot at the same time revise one's ethical commitments at the same time one sustains them. Therefore, to be courageous in one sense (existentialist or ontological) requires me to not be courageous in another (moral).

Infinito is right to point out that there is a dynamic between giving up one's commitment and maintaining it. However, I do not think the conceptualization of multiple courages explains this dynamic clearly. Rather, we must go back to Tillich, who "unites both [ethical and physical] meanings of the concept of courage,"\textsuperscript{143} because to keep with an Aristotelian understanding of courage, there must be one categorical courage (making it universal) that nonetheless articulates itself in different particular circumstances (what it means to be courageous in any give situation might vary). One might say in Infinito's defense that clearly ontological, existential, and moral courage are all different particular articulations of courage. This might be true, but the conceptualization of the universal concept is never proffered. In Tillich's analysis, for example, the ethical, physical, and spiritual articulations of courage still nonetheless fall under the courage to be--the courage to face non-being. Yet Infinito posits three articulations of courage without conceptualizing any unifying concept of courage itself.

\textsuperscript{143} Tillich, \textit{The Courage to Be}, 2-3.
Put into a question, how can I be sure that what she calls courage in each specific domain is in fact courage? What conditions exist in each domain that lead her to use this term?

So far, I interpreted the first dimension of courage: facing death. I argued that one's understanding of physical death can only be made sense of from the projected extrapolations of one's already known experience in confronting non-being. This takes place primarily in confronting the unintelligibility of our selves, the breakdown of the narrative in which we make sense of ourselves, or, as Lear calls it, the break down in the field in which "occurrences occur". Thus to face our own physical demise is, as one can only understand it: our own experiences with existential finitude taken to its ultimately end--the possibility of my permanent impossibility.

There are two questions left unanswered. The first is how courage is striking the mean between excess and deficiency within the context of dialogue. Second is how we might make sense of the Ancient Greek warrior as the exemplar of courage in the twenty-first century. Once the dynamic between excess and deficiency is articulated below, I will better be able to explain not only the dynamic between universal and particular but also how this dynamic accounts for the self-regulation of courage against its own dogmatism. The following discussion also sets the ground for discussing the dimension of warriorship.

Courage as an Intermediary Between Cowardice and Rashness

The mean of courage does not immediately translate into the context of dialogue. To Aristotle, being courageous is exemplified in the warrior's ability to face the fear of his demise, not to shirk in cowardice, nor to charge the enemy with rashness or
thoughtlessness. If we were to crudely graft this onto dialogue, being courageous would mean that my enemy, she who threatens me, is the person with whom I am to engage in dialogue. Either she is right or I am right. I cannot cower in fear of this confrontation; I must boldly attack until I am recognized as correct, lest I admit defeat. But this would only undermine the very aim of dialogue as it is broadly understood. In fact, from the Gadamerian standpoint, dialogue allows for the negative experience that thwarts our expectations and transforms us: "To reach an understanding in dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were." ¹⁴⁴ That is, we assert our point of view in the service of being transformed in our understanding about that which we are asserting our point of view. Recall that this view of Gadamer's is grounded in an understanding of human relations--one of I and Thou:

...to experience the Thou truly as a Thou--i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us. Here is where openness belongs. But ultimately, this openness does not exist only for the person who speaks; rather anyone who listens is fundamentally open. ¹⁴⁵

For Gadamer, dialogue is a possibility for hermeneutic experience and as such does not merely involve assertion, but also reception. However, one should not mistake reception for the mere reconstruction of what another says in such away that we cognize it but do not allow it to make a claim on who we are and how we understand the world. The mean of dialogue is to strike a balance between asserting and listening, where listening implies allowing what another says to make a claim on us and, by changing the way in which we understand the world, potentially transform us. To be courageous, then, might mean to

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 355.
face the fear of the unintelligibility posed to our selves through the claims of the other. Yet this does not mean that we keep another's claims at a distance, disempowering them from transforming us, nor does it mean unreflectingly accepting as true what the other says. The mean of dialogical engagement is to listen without being slavish and to assert our own claims while accepting the fact that the other's might be right. Gadamer's account sets the conditions of understanding, but it does not account for the psychodynamic forces that compel someone to close off to a Thou or to relate to it as an "It". For this, we turn to Erich Fromm.

*Fromm's Self-assertive Aggression*

Fromm sheds light on the distinction between a dialogically productive assertion and an aggressive domineering one that fails to recognize the other's claims. In *The Anatomy of Human Destruction*, Fromm contends that psychoanalytic theory best accounts for human aggression,\(^\text{146}\) and that

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\text{psychoanalysis is essentially a theory of unconscious strivings, of resistance, of falsification of reality according to one's subjective needs and expectations ('transference'), of character, and of conflicts between passionate strivings embodied in character traits and the demands for self-preservation.}\(^\text{147}\)
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Two types of aggression explored by Fromm are germane to this study: defensive aggression and a pseudo aggression he calls "self-assertive aggression," both of which fall under his category of "benign aggression."\(^\text{148}\) Benign aggression in Fromm's understanding is

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\ldots\text{a response to threats to one's vital interests; it is phylogenetically programmed; it is common to animals and men; it is not spontaneous or self-}
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\(^{147}\)Ibid., 109.

\(^{148}\)Ibid., 113-24, 212.
increasing but reactive and defensive; it aims at removal of the threat, either by destroying it or by removing its source.\textsuperscript{149}

Benign aggression has a clear cause and is in clear response to something. This stands in opposition to malignant aggression, which Fromm says is
destructiveness and cruelty, is not a defense against a threat; it is not phylogenetically programmed; it is characteristic only of man, it is biologically harmful because it is social disruptive; its main manifestations—killing and cruelty—are pleasureful without needing any other purpose; it is harmful not only to the attacked by also the attacker. Malignant aggression, although not an instinct, is a human potential rooted in the very conditions of human existence.\textsuperscript{150}

This kind of destructiveness runs counter to self-preservation because in being socially disruptive and taking pleasure in cruelty, one destroys not only that which threatens but also that which gives sustenance. This kind of aggression will be excluded from the discussion on courage, because malignant aggression is independent of the particulars of a situation. Fear is not a determining factor in malignant aggression. Malignant aggression shows neither boldness nor fearfulness: it serves pleasure.

On the other hand, benign aggression is relevant to this study because it is in relation to a threat. To understand the difference between defensive aggression and self-assertive aggression, Fromm draws our attention to the root of the word aggression—"\textit{aggredi}, from \textit{ad aggre} \ldots which means 'to move (go, step) forward.'" He also points out that the obsolete English verb "'to aggress' is an intransitive verb," meaning one could not "be aggressive" in the sense it has today (i.e., at someone or something as an object of aggression).\textsuperscript{151} In other words, it might not make sense to say today, "I aggress towards my goal." From this reflection on aggression, Fromm reasons that "to be aggressive, in its original meaning \ldots can be defined as moving forward toward a goal without undue

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 212.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 214. Italics original.
hesitation, doubt or fear." It is "a basic quality required for many life situations, such as the behavior of the surgeon and of a mountain climber and in most sports...he can pursue his aim with determination and without being deterred by obstacles." This is what Fromm calls "self-assertive aggression".

At first glance, this might seem like an appropriate way to think about the motivation of self-affirmation in understanding. If we consider this with the goal of "understanding" as Gadamer defines it, we might come to a useful understanding of the assertiveness necessary in dialogue. Surely, if understanding is my goal, I should move forward without hesitation and fear. I am able to assert my own claims in response to another's claims and when necessary hold my ground.

Self-assertive aggression is also a quality necessary for those in the military facing an enemy, lest "an attacking soldier who lacks [self-assertive aggression] will easily retreat." So, Fromm warns us, "one must differentiate between aggression with the aim to damage and the self-assertive aggression that only facilitates the pursuit of a goal, whether it is to damage or create." If a person engages an interlocutor in dialogue, then we can likely assume that person is not going into it with an ulterior motive of damaging or harming the other in ways consistent with malignant aggression, and in dialogue, one cannot comport oneself towards the other as an enemy to be defeated in battle. Instead, if one enters into dialogue in good faith and, through the challenging of one's prejudices, cannot withstand the anxiety of facing the unintelligibility of one's self, one risks moving into a state of defensive aggression, wherein one is motivated by the

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152 Ibid.
153 Ibid., 218.
154 Ibid., 219.
155 Ibid.
need to destroy a threat or its source. Moreover, if the goal of understanding is to undergo negative experience, evoked from our interlocutor's claims and transform who we are, then self-assertive aggression must be kept fully in check with its ability to render the others' claim impotent.

When one falls out of the self-assertive aggression required in dialogue, one removes the threat, either by withdrawing from the discussion or by inflicting enough harm towards the other as to neutralize or altogether 'destroy' the threat. To this point, Fromm says, "man has a vital interest in retaining his frame of orientation. His capacity to act depends on it, and in the last analysis, his own identity. If others threaten him with ideas that question his own frame of orientation, he will react to these ideas as to a vital threat."

We can see why this might be the case if we think back to Lear's description of the coupling of the intelligibility of one's self to the field in which occurrences occur.

The self-assertive aggression described by Fromm, as it is exercised in dialogue is the courage to face the possibility of the unintelligibility of one's self. To cower in fear of that anxiety is to collapse into the extreme of withdrawal or slavishness on one hand or the defensive aggression on the other. Again, malignant aggression falls outside of the dynamic of dialogue altogether, having no aim other than to destroy without any stake in defending one's interests. Yet although courage and self-assertive aggression are related, it would be a mistake to say they are the same.

To help explain, I return to Tillich's description of the *courage to be*. In all three types of anxiety laid out by Tillich--ontic, spiritual, and moral--courage is defined as the self-affirmation articulated in each of these domains. Universally, "[c]ourage is the self-

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156 Ibid., 223.
Certainly self-affirmation and self-assertiveness share a likeness and perhaps a necessary relationship. The courage to be shares self-assertive aggression's moving "toward a goal without undue hesitation, doubt or fear." On Tillich's view, courage requires self-affirmation as a goal, and as such self-affirmation might come concurrently or as a product of self-assertion. Tillich's courage makes the very specific requirement that it take the anxiety unto itself "in spite of nonbeing." In doing so, it certainly requires self-assertive aggression. Yet although the courage to be is quite confidently a self-assertive aggression in Fromm's terms, it cannot be that all self-assertive aggression is courageous; for courage requires the specific goal of affirming one's being in the face of anxiety, and self-assertive aggression only requires a goal exclusive of destruction for the sake of destruction, whether that goal is in the service of self-affirmation or not.

Fromm and Tillich together offer a way to consider the driving force of courage in dialogue as that which overcomes obstacles to affirm one's existence. However, both Fromm's and Tillich's ideas leave open the possibility of destruction of the other. For Fromm, it is acceptable to think of self-assertive aggression as something that destroys, so long as that destruction is pursued for the sake of some goal outside of the destruction. For Tillich, courage is the self-affirmation "in spite of". However, an excess of self-affirmation could be the denial of the existence of the other, and by extension the legitimacy of the other's claims. Such excess destroys the possibility of understanding.

The regulation of self-assertion in dialogue is found in recognition. That is, if I truly recognize as valid the claims of the other, I preclude the possibility of denying my

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interlocutor's existence (in essence annihilating them) by dismissing them in an overreach of my self-assertion. Moreover, my assertions are equally invalidated if I destroy the very person who can validate them. Chris Higgins offers the following scenario describing a breakdown in recognition and its effects on the validation of claims:

Teachers feel recognized by students whose work demonstrates understanding of assignment or course, and respond with feedback that is recognizing. Students often feel misrecognized by grading and return the favor by misrecognizing course evaluations . . . each backs away . . . the vital dance between assertion and recognition breaks down and each is left asserting in an unsatisfying manner . . . [losing] the opportunity to feel confirmed in who they are and be challenged to grow by seeing themselves in different eyes.\textsuperscript{159}

This description by Higgins clearly asserts that one's existence is confirmed through the validation of one's claims by another, and that this only comes by also validating the other's "eyes", i.e., the horizon of understanding through which those claims are recognized. Quoting Jessica Benjamin in The Bonds of Love, Higgins describes this dynamic as a dialogue:

"As life evolves", Benjamin suggests, "assertion and recognition become the vital moves in the dialogue between self and other"; certainly there are times when we find a balance or rhythm in this dialogue . . . At the same time, it is often the case that this dialogue lacks vitality, say, when we exchange hollow pseudo-recognition; and it may break down altogether in a cycle of mutual negation and even louder, but empty assertions.\textsuperscript{160}

The psychoanalytic concept of recognition gives us a richer understanding dialogue--one that includes regulating self-assertion away from dismissing the claims of the other. Fromm, Tillich, and Higgins together offer us the following understanding of courage in dialogue: the ability to withstand the anxiety of the unintelligibility of the self in order to affirm one's existence within the dynamic of self-assertion and recognition.


\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 302.
To sum up, the courage of understanding is the courage to withstand anxiety. In withstanding anxiety and exercising self-assertiveness, one must maintain the integrity of both dialogical participants as interlocutors. In other words, each interlocutor cannot start off from a position that robs one's own or the other's claims of legitimacy. This self-assertiveness is a self-affirmation that does not destroy the other in the act of affirming but rather maintains the space for others to also affirm themselves. In the dialogical case, the act “in spite of” is not self-affirmation, but allowing the self-affirmation of the other at the same time as one’s self. In spite of our anxiety about confronting death, we do not cowardly run from it demanding the other relinquish her claims to truth nor run from the dialogue altogether. Nor do we rashly seek out a reversely asymmetrical dialogical relation where the other denies our own claims and we face anxiety in a fit of self-destruction. In order to avoid this problem while keeping Tillich’s conceptualization, we need to require an account for the interdependence of self and other such that to affirm one’s self requires the affirmation of other, and this is done through the psychoanalytic concept of recognition.

All of that said, the defining examples of courage by Aristotle and of self-assertive aggression by Fromm are those of warriors and soldiers. The warrior or soldier as commonly understood has an existence that stands in opposition to dialogue, and so we must ask whether courage can be fully developed while maintaining this relation to warriorship.
The Warrior as the Exemplar of Courage

To Fromm, self-assertive aggression is what allows the soldier to attack without easily retreating. Yet it is not the same aggression that seeks to destroy for the sake of destruction; self-assertive aggression requires a goal outside of damage and destruction itself. To Aristotle, the warrior's courage is towards a goal outside of damage and destruction: it is toward the aim of achieving what is fine.\footnote{Aristotle, \textit{Nichomachean Ethics}, 1115b10.} What makes the warrior the definitive example of courage is not so much war itself but that war brings to it the greatest amount of danger and with it the greatest risk of death. Moreover, from the Aristotelian standpoint, it is the greatest risk of death in achieving something fine. Recall that it does not make so much sense for someone to be courageous to face death if they choose it as an escape.

It would seem, then, that Aristotle's courageous warrior requires what Fromm calls self-assertive aggression, even if the warrior's goal is to defeat his enemy and in the process possibly destroy property and life. Moreover, the courageous warrior, even if he seeks to destroy his enemy, does not do so for the sake of destruction alone and therefore cannot be motivated by malignant aggression. So, there is some temperance to the warrior.

Fromm implicitly requires temperance of self-assertive aggression, but it should be noted that the notion is not entirely lost on Aristotle, either. To explain, to Aristotle, "the things that occur in the soul fall into three kinds: affections, capacities, and dispositions."\footnote{Ibid., II.5.1105b20.} The last of these, the dispositions, are the excellences,\footnote{Ibid., II.5.1106a10.} and "the excellence of a human being too will be the disposition whereby he becomes a good...
human being and from which he will perform his own function well.\textsuperscript{164} In the list of affections, Aristotle lists both anger and fear and places them one right after the other (and boldness follows fear). I do not think this is coincidence, for pity and envy are listed together, as are friendliness and hatred. Moreover, recalling the discussion on Becker, fear can easily lead not just to anger but rage. The point of all of this is to say that in order to perform his function well, the warrior must exercise the excellence of courage. Yet courage is the particular relating to fear. And fear can lead to anger. In order for the warrior to be courageous he must not succumb to the blind rage or anger that might lead him to be excessively bold. The passion that tempers anger is gentleness, which to Aristotle is an excellence of the passions.\textsuperscript{165} He says, “To gentleness belongs to the power . . . not to rush hastily into vengeance, not to be easily stirred to anger . . . To bravery belongs slowness to be scared by the apprehension of death . . .”\textsuperscript{166}

In the case of understanding, one faces existential death but in so doing must not be easily stirred into anger. Thus both of these excellences, gentleness and bravery are required in order to successfully act courageously in dialogue. To develop this notion of gentleness further, and to make more robust connection to warriorship, I turn to Tibetan Buddhist tulku Chögyam Trunpa.

Trungpa says the following about fear and death in \textit{Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior}:

From the coward’s point of view, boredom should be avoided, because when we are bored we begin to feel anxious. We are getting closer to our fear.

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., II.5.1106a20.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 1250a43.
Entertainment should be promoted and any thought of death should be avoided. So cowardice is trying to live our lives as though death is unknown.\textsuperscript{167}

Here, we see intimations of the existential courage developed above. If the coward avoids death, then the courageous confronts it. The wisdom of the Shambhala teachings, according to Trungpa, do

not belong to any one culture or religion, nor does it come from West of East. Rather, it is a tradition of human warriorship that has existed in many cultures at many times throughout history.

Warriorship here does not refer to making war on others. Aggression is the source of our problems, not the solution. Here the word “warrior” is taken from the Tibetan \textit{pawo}, which literally means “one who is brave”. Warriorship in this context is the tradition of human bravery, or the tradition of fearlessness . . . When we are afraid of ourselves and afraid of the seeming threat the world presents, then we become extremely selfish.\textsuperscript{168}

The writings of Trungpa in this text are aimed at describing the cultivation of warriorship, and central to warriorship is courage--the virtue needed to ultimately move from withstanding fear to moving beyond it. The fearlessness of the courageous warrior in the Shambhala tradition is also coupled with gentleness. The warrior is courageous enough to annihilate the causes and conditions of aggression, but does so gently at the same time. From the point of view of the Shambhala tradition, the warrior courageously faces his fear gently, whether it is the fear of the dark night of the soul or the fear of confronting your life partner or colleague on a serious disagreement. The warrior can face the fear of situation, whether it stems from one's own actions or the actions of others, and face that fear, "step on fear", such that fear can be conquered. In so doing, one does not unwittingly destroy the very world in which one lives in reacting to that fear.

Trungpa puts it this way:

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\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 9-10.
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If you don't work with a situation properly, you might hurt someone, which is the mark of cowardice and impatience. People kill an enemy on the spot because they feel they can't be bothered, which is the mark of laziness; because they hate someone so much they want to see them die, which is a mark of arrogance; or because they would like to strike a person dead, which is a mark of aggression. The warrior, pawo, would never do that. Challenges are the working basis. That is why we have a world. If you slaughter everybody in the whole world, you have nothing left to work with— including your lover. There's nobody left to play with or dance with.¹⁶⁹

To Aristotle, the warrior’s enemy is another human being, a mortal threat, whom must be killed lest the warrior be killed. To Trungpa, the warrior’s enemy is the seeming existential threat of the world, and the warrior deals with this enemy powerfully and fearlessly yet also gently.

Shambhala warriorship provides us an example of how the traditional warrior cultures can offer insight into the courage of dialogue, but the selfishness or the working with one’s situation in the present Trungpa refers to do not readily made sense in the courage of dialogue. One indication is that the opposite of Trungpa’s courage would be the flight out of the here and now, and escape from working with our situation, as it is. Such a movement in dialogue would be the flight from the potential of self-annihilation that is found in our radical engagement with the world and others' claims on it and into certitudes of meaning, into the selfishness that closes us off from the penetrating claims of an other and creates a static, dogmatic world. It is the flight from what Tillich would call spiritual anxiety towards the creation of certitude in systems of meaning, where, he says, “man’s power of asking is prevented from becoming actual . . . and if there is a danger in it becoming actualized by questions asked from the outside [one] reacts with

fanatical rejection.” Likewise, the selfishness that Trungpa speaks of articulates itself in the excessive self-preservation that robs the other of the legitimacy of the other's claims, because we are afraid of what the truth of those claims might mean to our self-understanding.

From the Shambhalian perspective, then, one can speak of the courage of the warrior without evoking the aggression of making war on others. Instead, Trungpa draws from traditional warrior culture to create a contemporary vision of warriorship from a more phenomenological and existential source. Such a conceptualization can be made sense of in the context of dialogue regarding the confrontation with death, the gentleness of engagement with threats, and of not fleeing from the potentiality of self-annihilation.

To sum up, Aristotle’s conceptualization of courage takes place within the context of a warrior in battle and refers specifically to the fear of facing one’s mortal demise. However, this does not line up to the courage of dialogue, which exists outside of the life of the traditional warrior and is existential as opposed to physical. Trungpa addresses the dimension or reinterpreting courage for the particular context of dialogue by creating a discourse of warriorship that draws from traditions of warriorship but also refers to existential qualities of the warrior’s courage to face death without not collapsing into the dichotomy of destroy or be destroyed. Instead, warriorship from this perspective is a tradition of gentleness towards oneself and other. The three specific dimensions of courage have been contextualized for understanding. However, if I demanded that courage be interpreted for the task of understanding then I must allow that courage of understanding itself stands to be revised. That is, if courage is needed for understanding,
and understanding demands one put one's prejudices at risk, then it is quite possible that
the very concept of courage itself is revised in the transformation of one's ethical horizon.
I now briefly return to Lear's discussion of the Crow to illustrate this point.

Courage as a Cardinal Virtue for Understanding

As I explained earlier, when the world of the Crow collapsed, so did the members'
understanding of what it meant to be a Crow. One of the primary activities of the Crow,
and one in which their concept of courage gained its meaning, was the planting and
defending of coup-sticks. When this activity par excellence of courage was no longer an
activity that could be carried out, the concept of courage itself was called into question.

Lear contends that being courageous involves taking risks, but that those risks are
only intelligible within a certain framework of understanding. Yet one must be
courageous when the understanding of courage itself is put at risk, for the courageous
person will "take a risk on the framework itself."171 This, Lear tells us, is exactly what
Plenty Coups did:

Plenty Coup has to risk inadvertently taking himself and his people down a
shameful path—at a time before the framework in which shame could be evaluated
was firmly established... Thus Plenty Coups had to take a risk on what would
come to count as courage in these radically altered circumstances.172

The Crow culture was enveloped by practices pertaining to war. In the course of
the cultural demise of The Crow, those practices lost their meaning, and by extension so
did the concept of courage. For Plenty Coups to lead his people down this path rather
than, say, lead the Crow on a suicide mission to battle the Whites required him to make a

171 Lear, Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation, 112.
172 Ibid.
choice; and although no path seemed ideal, he preferred to lead his people toward cultural revision. In risking the framework of intelligibility for courage and for The Crow, Plenty Coups exercised courage in a way he might not have previously considered. Plenty Coups faced the loss of self-understanding, a loss that is a death--not just of his self understanding but also of the ethical framework within which the members of his nation understood themselves, and he faced the fear that accompanied this death in a way that was not rash or cowardly. The conclusion Lear comes to regarding courage is stated thusly:

\begin{quote}

courage is the capacity for living well with the risks that inevitable attend human existence . . . In different times, in different cultures, there may be different risks; but as long as we are alive and human, we will have to tolerate and take risks. The courageous person is someone who is excellent in taking those risks.  
\end{quote}

These risks are necessary to human beings because we both care about and desire the good and we also are finite beings who make mistakes and whose conceptual frameworks often fail us. In order to cope with the bumping up against our finitude, driven by our desire, we need courage. If we take seriously what Lear is saying, we must accept it as inevitable that our visions of the good are not infinite. If we have any hope of working with our finitude without lapsing into defensive aggression that tries to hold onto fantasies of the infinite, of the immortal, then we need courage. As living a good life and encountering our finitude are central phenomena to existence, courage is a cardinal virtue for it. Moreover, if our vision of the good is put at risk specifically in ethical understanding, then courage is one of its cardinal virtues. In sum, the courage of understanding not only allows for understanding but itself must be open to the risk of understanding.

\footnote{Ibid., 120-21.}
Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that an Aristotelian ethics is compatible with Gadamer's theory of hermeneutic understanding and that courage is a virtue of understanding. However, courage from an Aristotelian perspective has specific qualities: it must concern itself with the fear of death, it must relate to that fear as an intermediary between excess and deficiency, and the defining examples of courage are of the warrior. I then interpreted these dimensions for the context of understanding. Tillich helped transition courage from a virtue dealing with physical demise to a virtue that deals with existential non-being. Tillich's conceptualization does not provide us with a way to think of the second dimension of courage--of an intermediary between excess and deficiency. For this task, I turned to Erich Fromm, who provides us with the concept of self-assertive aggression as a way to think of affirming one's self without excess. Jessica Benjamin via Chris Higgins provides the concept of recognition in order to tie the possibility of one's own self-assertion to the self-assertion of another and thus requires the existence of another in order to exist oneself. In order to work with the warrior as the definitive example of courage I turned to Chögyam Trungpa, who helps us understand warriorship not only as an existential enterprise, but also as one that is defined by both fearlessness and gentleness. Finally, I returned to Lear's analysis of the Crow to illustrate how courage itself can be put at risk and how ethical dialogue requires courage as a cardinal virtue. With this richer concept of the courage of understanding, I now explore the pedagogical implications of this new conceptualization.
CHAPTER 5

CULTIVATING COURAGE

But if, poor fellow, you are subject to resentment, pity, envy, and fearfulness, and spend every day bewailing yourself and the gods, how can you continue to say you have had an education?¹⁷⁴ —Epictetus

Having completed the conceptualization of the courage of dialogue (which is one and the same as the courage of understanding from a hermeneutic perspective), I am left with the final task of this inquiry: to examine how one might learn to be courageous in this sense. In chapter 2 I contended that Gadamer's theory of hermeneutic experience, which demands we confront our finitude, is best suited for the situation of ethical understanding. In chapter 3, I showed that this confrontation with our finitude is a confrontation with death and as such invokes the same psychological response as one experiences when physically threatened; to engage in dialogue requires us to cope with death anxiety. As such, courage seems to be an appropriate virtue for understanding and by extension ethical understanding. I showed in chapter 4 that there is a latent Aristotelian ethics in Gadamer's theory of hermeneutics and conceptualized the virtue of courage accordingly, as an Aristotelian virtue and as a virtue for understanding, along the dimensions of (a) confronting death, (b) being an intermediary, and (c) resting on the warrior as the definitive example being courageous.

In this chapter, I will discuss how one might learn to be courageous, and I take the following path in describing the pedagogical implications of this study: first, I outline the

conditions for learning courage—a space of practice and the presence of exemplars.

Second, I show that the humanities are a, if not the best, way to ask questions and engage in dialogue about the good, for they serve well to challenge our understandings of the good. In this way, they provide the most appropriate subject matter through which to open up the existential space that requires courage. Third, I turn to the Platonic dialogues to illustrate how Socrates is not only an exemplar of courage but also someone who helps create the existential space in his interlocutors necessary to practice courage. Finally, I contend that the American public schools are currently incapable of teaching courage.

Understanding Courage: The Dialectic Between Universal and Particular

Considering we are discussing how one learns Aristotelian virtues vis-à-vis a hermeneutic conceptualization of understanding, it is important to first acknowledge Aristotle's stance on learning concepts and Gadamer's answer to it. Recall that to Gadamer understanding is concretized in application, just as moral concepts like courage or generosity are concretized in action. Here is Aristotle's description, found in the *Posterior Analytics*, of how one comes to a know a universal concept by experiencing particular instances of it:

> From perception comes memory, as we call it, and from memory experience; for memories that are many in number from [sic] a single experience. And from experience, or from the whole universal that has come to rest in the soul (the one apart from the many, whatever is one and the same in all those things), there comes a principle of skill and of understanding -- of skill if it deals with how things come about, of understanding if it deals with what is the case.\(^\text{175}\)

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Aristotle’s point is that we come to understand the universal thing from a repeated exposure to particular instances of that thing; from perception comes memory, and from memory experience. A simple example of this is a child who is first shown a book. The object is pointed to and the parent says “book”. The child then might go to a block, and, being similar shape, point to it and say “book”. The child is corrected in incorrect instances and praised in correct instances. It is only after repeated exposure to particular books that the child comes to understand the universal “book”. Moral experience is likewise accumulated and moral knowledge follows. Aristotle continues:

Thus the states neither belong in us in determinate form, nor come about from other states that are more cognitive; but they come about from perception—as in a battle when a rout occurs, if one man makes a stand another does and then another, until a position of strength is reached. And the soul is such as to be capable of undergoing this.  

Although correct that repeated perception of an object allows us to understand that object as exemplifying a concept (e.g., a book), from the perspective of Gadamer's theory of hermeneutic experience there is a fundamental problem with this account. Gadamer's problem with this analysis, at least insofar as it can speak to the hermeneutic experience, is that "it starts from the wrong assumption, namely that before fleeing the army was standing fast." Gadamer's criticism here is that although Aristotle's inductive reasoning takes the formation of a universal concept from the accretion of experiences, it assumes that the universal concept exists prior to the experiences themselves. That is, Aristotle's account does not account for the historicity of consciousness or the contingency of language.

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176 Ibid., 100a10.
177 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 347.
Furthermore, although Gadamer concurs with Aristotle's description of the "birth of experience as an event over which no one has control", he takes issue with the assumption that it is through this universality of experience that the true universality of the concept and the possibility of science comes about. Thus the image illustrates the way unprincipled universality of experience (its accretion) eventually leads to the unity of the arche (which means both command and principle) . . . What concerns Aristotle about experience is _merely_ how it contributes to the formation of concepts.\(^{178}\)

Whereas for Aristotle experience takes as its emphasis the accretion of memories into an experience, which, in turn, provides the understanding of a concept, for Gadamer experience, as negative experience, takes as its emphasis how concepts are thwarted. In other words, Gadamer's emphasis is on how concepts are falsified, not formed.

Yet as we have seen, there is a difference between concepts that exist independent of human action and those that are concretized within it. As such, there are some important differences between this example and how a child learns a concept like courage. A book is a physical object that usually follows fairly standard dimensions and qualities. Once a child understands what a book is, the concept varies little from situation to situation, and few would ever disagree whether an object is, in its physicality, a book.\(^{179}\) In the social world, on the other hand, the perceiver interprets actions of others to determine the meaning a situation, and once the situation is apprehended, its particulars condition how one understands what it would mean to be courageous in that situation. Moreover, the appropriate interpretation of a situation requires an

\(^{178}\) Ibid. Emphasis added.

\(^{179}\) I acknowledge that the advent of the e-book complicates this point. However, I think the question of whether or not an e-book is, in fact, a book proves the point that there is a consensual understanding of what a book is generally. It is quite possible that that understanding will be modified and that e-books will be subsumed into the concept of book such that there is no distinction when one says "book".
understanding of the ethos of a culture to know how particular actions will be interpreted or responded to; what an action means in one group of people at one time and in one situation could mean something entirely different in another situation or to a different group.

Take, for example, the virtue under consideration in this dissertation: courage. Courage is a universal concept—a concept that can be applied across many situations—yet its application is contingent on the situation at hand. As such, what it means to be courageous in any given situation is determined in part by the situation itself, and that situation is embedded in an ethos. In the case of dialogue this can easily been seen through the lens of cultural communicative styles. In some cultures, open conflict is considered the appropriate way to deal with differences of opinion; in others such open conflict can be embarrassing or insulting. What is courageous assertion of one's claims in one culture is aggressive bullying in another.\footnote{The poor New Yorkers who are seen as aggressive by Midwesterners only because they openly speak their minds, and the poor Midwesterners who think they are likewise being attacked! We might also point to expected communication styles across generations, genders, and socioeconomic classes.}

So, to understand what it means to be courageous requires a sophisticated understanding of those with whom one finds oneself. To those who have traveled to foreign cultures, I should not expect disagreement in claiming that when first assimilating to an ethos, one observes those who act well in that ethos and one mimics their behavior and speech. Slowly, the effort of this mimicking diminishes, and one almost seamlessly knows what the right thing to do in any given situation is. Learning what it means to be a virtuous person in an ethos requires a form of training, and the excellences of character that constitute the virtuous person must be trained through the process of exercising them. To wit, Aristotle says, "excellence of character results from habituation—which is in fact
the source of the name it has acquired [ethike], the word for 'character trait' [ethos] being a slight variation of that for habituation [ethos]. . . none of the excellences of character come about in us by nature.\textsuperscript{181} Certainly, it is no coincidence that education programs called "character education" aim to teach children how to exercise or name certain virtues, like truthfulness, honesty, kindness, etc., with the aim that they not merely know those virtues as abstracted knowledge but can exercise them well, too.

Joseph Dunne explains the relation between experience and understanding of the virtues thusly:

‘experience’ signifies an achieved state that is the fruit of universalizing and consolidating meaning of many previous discrete impressions . . . Now when a person is experienced we might say that the virtue through which he or she exploits that experience or puts what has been learned to work . . . is phronesis . . . phronesis does not ascend to the level of abstraction or generality that leaves experience behind. It arises from experience and returns to experience . . . And the more experience is constructed in this way, the more sensitive and insightful phronesis becomes—or, rather, the more the experiencer becomes a phronimos.\textsuperscript{182}

The phronimos--the person so experienced that she knows which virtues to exercise, how to exercise them, and why they are exercised in nearly every particular situation is someone who has good character. The relation described above between experience and understanding is the reason a child cannot be a phronimos--one who wisely exercises the virtues; the child does not yet possess the experience to interpret a particular situation well and thus know what is right action for that situation. For example, at first a child might somewhat capriciously and with broad strokes enact courage in play and imagination, lacking any real experiences on which to exercise the virtue. Then, as she gains more experience, she comes to understand the universal thing

\textsuperscript{181} Aristotle, \textit{Nichomachean Ethics}, II.1.1103a15.
\textsuperscript{182} Dunne, \textit{Back to the Rough Ground}, 292-3.
(courage) from repeated experiences that call for it. In other words, the more experience, the greater the understanding.

Moreover, we cannot learn a moral concept by pointing to a physical object and saying "there is an example, and here another." Ethical truth exists in the language we use to give meaning to action. P. Christopher Smith puts it this way:

Now, if Gadamer is right, ethical truth is given to us in the language we speak. Consequently, we do not uncover ethical principals in acts of autonomous critical reasoning; rather we learn them just as we learn the rest of the world that our language conveys to us. We come to participate in ethical truths as a cultural tradition of customs transmitted, like language usages.\textsuperscript{183}

In other words, the moral concept only exists in the moment of action, which is given meaning through one's cultural traditions, and so the learner understands a moral concept first and foremost from the \textit{phronimoi}. Exercising a virtue is not the same as exercising a sense like sight, for the latter is given to us by nature and the former is not. Thus, the learner must have some model or models in accordance with which she can assess whether or not she is doing right and with whom one can learn to deliberate well. Thus, moral concepts are always culturally bound, but this does not preclude understanding across traditions, as I discussed in chapter 2. Additionally, Smith explains, this is not to say that one blindly accepts what is customary, since coming to participate in ethical truths is a process that presupposes language \textit{and} custom, \textit{logos and ergon}, a process that will . . . not depend on \textit{mimesis} alone, of course, for, as we know, deliberation (\textit{bouleuesthai}) and reasonableness (\textit{phronesis}) are also essential.\textsuperscript{184}

As we can see, one understands the excellences of character through their practice and by looking to those who exercise them well. Yet to exercise the excellences requires more

\textsuperscript{183} Smith, \textit{Hermeneutics and Human Finitude: Toward a Theory of Ethical Understanding}, 183.  
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid.
than just a knowing *(phronesis)* what a situation calls for in terms a particular virtue. In order to know what a situation calls for requires, ethical reasoning is necessary, and ethical reasoning is reasoning well about things that can be other than what they are: *bouleuesthai*. Deliberation about what right action is in a given case requires stopping that about which one deliberates, or at least providing space from it, in order to consider possible actions. This requires control over one's impulses. As Walter A. Brogan says when discussing Aristotle,

> The virtuous person is able to see the parameters of a situation, the excess and the deficiency, and choose what to do within this broader context of understanding; thus our natural tendencies and leanings are not allowed to distort our judgments or decisions about what to do in a given situation . . .

This in turn requires openness to options, a lack of immediate compulsion . . .

Brogan's mention of compulsion deserves attention within the aims of this dissertation. In the case of the courage of dialogue, there is a clear and understandable compulsion to aggression when questions of the good are brought existentially close to one's self.

The implications of this tendency towards aggression for schools are great. The first is that character education and the development of practical wisdom for courageous acts requires exercising courage in situations that call for it. Most character education curricula today concentrates merely on the rational and provide little, if any education outside of the intellectual. Take, for example, a Character Counts lesson plan titled "Peace Partners." This lesson discusses cultural conflicts in other parts of the world, and the teacher is to "emphasize the importance of different cultures to learn about others'...

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point of view. Say: It takes courageous, long-term commitment to resolve cultural prejudices. Of course the mere fact that the student knows that resolving conflict takes courage does not mean the student has developed such courage or even knows what it means to act courageously. The lesson then states students should be assigned to different rival groups and paired with historical enemies. Although such an exercise has pedagogical value, that value does not lie in teaching the child the courage to overcome prejudice, especially when the possibility of the student to take up his own prejudices is explicitly precluded in the exercise. In this exercise the student plays someone other than himself, and interacts with someone doing the same. The lesson places students in situations completely alienated from and extraneous to their immediate environment and social life. It is more like actors on stage than an authentic coming-to-an-understanding in dialogue.

Any character education worthy of the name must provide for experiences in which one can exercise those virtues and witness their exercise by those who can exercise them excellently. By extension, any education that seeks to teach the courage of dialogue requires not only the education of an excellence of practical wisdom but also of the excellences of the passions that accompany them. That is, we cannot shy away from bringing the emotional dimensions of education into the classroom explicitly; character education rightfully understood cannot exclude emotional education. Also, there must be exemplars in accordance with whom the student might measure her actions upon deliberation and reflection. Finally, there must be someone to guide the student in deliberation and reflection: the phronemos.

\[188\] Ibid.
All of this is to say that to learn any virtue is to shape one's character through practice and in accordance with exemplars of the virtue.\textsuperscript{189} It should be clear by now that moral virtue is not something that is concretized in method or an unmediated relation to universal reason that allows us to see clearly what courage is in all cases. On the contrary, what is courageous in one situation might be reckless in another or cowardice in yet another. Because the particulars of any given situation are never exactly the same, one has to make a judgment about what constitutes courageous action in any situation in which courage is required. Thus, the requirement of practice for the cultivation of virtue is necessitated by the fact that one comes to better understand the virtue one is exercising through experience.

In what follows, I explore the current and future possibilities for teaching courage in public schools.

The Humanities and the Cultivation of Courage

Learning the courage of dialogue requires an existential environment in which to practice. It seems appropriate to ask what subjects are best suited for teaching courage. Recall that dialogical courage is exercised when one finds fundamental prejudices put at risk, and, through such putting of one's prejudices at risk, one puts one's self at risk. The fundamental prejudices that define who one is are fundamentally those prejudices that define how we act and, by extension, what good life in accordance with which we aim to live. These risks are taken for the sake of understanding.

\textsuperscript{189} Aristotle, \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, 1103a15ff.
Martha Nussbaum argues persuasively that literature and the arts play a central role in understanding others by cultivating what she calls narrative imagination, "the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from one's self, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have." Narrative imagination, she contends, is an important capacity to develop in a multinational interdependent world, because understanding the world from the point of view of the other is essential to any responsible act of judgment, since we do not know what we are judging until we see the meaning of an action as a person intends it, the meaning of speech as it expresses something of importance in the context of that person's history and social world . . . our students should attain the ability to decipher such meanings through the use of imagination.

Nussbaum recognizes that students' moral imagination could atrophy, "according sympathy to the near and familiar, but refusing it to people who look different. Enlisting students' sympathy for distant lives is thus a way of training, so to speak, the muscles of the imagination." Yet Nussbaum misses something crucial here. She seems to attribute the lack of sympathy to those who are different to mere laziness and to atrophied muscles of the imagination. But as we have seen, there are powerful psychodynamic forces that might lead to the immediate compulsion towards aggression or cowardice. What needs to be trained is not sympathy, but courage. One cannot exercise sympathy towards that which threatens without first being able to work with one's anxiety and the impulses it drives.

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191 Ibid.  
192 Ibid.
The resistance to exercising sympathy towards those who are different has very much to do with the pain that can be encountered when one confronts one's finitude. Deborah Kerdeman illustrates this well when she describes how through literature one can be "pulled up short", which she describes as the pain when events "we neither want nor foresee and to which we may believe we are immune interrupt our lives and challenge our self-understanding in ways we cannot imagine in advance of living through them."  

Kerdeman recounts how journalist David Denby encounters King Lear thirty years after a previous reading. Denby sees something entirely new in the text, and, in doing so, about himself—not just about his thinking, but more importantly about the self-deception exposed by the fear evoked in him when reading the text. It is not just the change in thinking about the text that is important, says Kerdeman, but also the confrontation with the limits of being human. She says,

Cognitive surprise [which changes thinking alone] assumes we can function, even when our beliefs are mistaken. When we are pulled up short, our sense of who we are and what we can do is derailed on a more fundamental level. We may think we are open to unforeseen events; being pulled up short exposes us to ways of being open we cannot fathom on our own.

Take, for example, the questions Theodore Sizer and Nancy Sizer suggest might be evoked in a student's reading of Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird:

How could people so blatantly discriminate against black people and their white defenders? The question is a good one but perhaps one particular to who we are today. Did Americans respond to Lee's story in previous decades with similar moral outrage? If not, why not? Are we all slaves to the received mores of our

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194 Ibid., 213.
own times? And why did Lee choose this story? Was it her intention to present a morality tale?\textsuperscript{195}

These questions push us to think about the finitude of our own understanding. If we are slaves to our received moral content, then how can we be certain that what we find good today will tomorrow be thought of otherwise? How much are our own understandings of the good really our own, and how do we grapple with the possibility that our understanding of the good is not infinite?

As we can see, literature can provide the means by which we open the existential space to exercise dialogic courage. Yet the opportunity to confront finitude and exercise courage is not limited to literature or to the arts. More broadly, the humanities offer opportunities in the exercise of dialogic courage. Philosophy, for example, offers instances wherein students must confront cogent arguments against core beliefs they have about the good life, yet it is rarely taught in public schools.\textsuperscript{196}

We might ask, why only the humanities? why not the social sciences? The quest for understanding the good through the humanities is quite different than that of the social sciences. From the hermeneutic perspective, ethical questions are defined by and answered within one's own cultural traditions. The social sciences, on the other, aim to provide answers that transcend the cultural. They seek to answer questions of the good from a perspective that precludes negative experience, and they fail to see the concepts used to interpret actions as being inextricably bound by one's culturally constrained understandings.


\textsuperscript{196} Although, people like Matthew Lipman do argue for philosophy in schools. See, for example, Matthew Lipman, \textit{Philosophy Goes to School} (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1988).
Other than the above examples in literature of how we might ask questions about the good and bump up against our own finitude, consider teacher candidates in education programs. These students often enter their certification programs without ever calling into question their vision of a good teacher, and we can assume that they are entering the field because they believe that they can lead a good life as a teacher. However, if students read a humanist work that wages a critique on the education system wherein teachers are likened to slave masters who do more psychological harm to children than chattel slave masters (such as the critique levied by John Holt),\(^1\) they not only have their own understanding of the role of teacher called into question, but they must grapple with whether or not teaching as they imagined it is still consistent with what they believe to be a good life, or whether they must think their understanding of a good life altogether.

The mere content of the course is not enough, though. As mentioned previously, the possibility of confronting one's finitude might lead one to disengage or only superficially engage or perhaps respond aggressively, never really putting one's self at risk. It is all too easy to keep the claims of the text or story or of other students at a distance, paying them mere lip service. The student who shuts down in these ways might very well be holed up in a near ironclad defense mechanism. However, just as a trustworthy parent might lead a child terrified of water into the ocean by going in first, patiently coaxing the child to make one more step into the deep, so too can a teacher help a student overcome the fear of robustly putting one's self at risk, whether through the exercise of narrative imagination or through cogent argumentation and questioning that leads students to a state of uncertainty about the good. Placing the student in front of the

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Learning Courage through Dialogue

Socratic questioning is not new to educational theory and pedagogy. Socratic questioning is central to Nussbaum's educational program, in which such questioning is the means of critiquing one's self and one's own tradition, and it leads to the development of the rational capacities of the mind. Socratic questioning is also central to the philosophy of Paideia schools, which are grounded in the educational philosophy of Mortimer Adler. In Paideia schools, questioning is an essential technique for deepening a student's understanding of ideas as well as developing rational powers.

Socratic questioning does not only develop the ability to question tradition, deepen one's understanding of one's self and of ideas, or develop the rational powers of the mind. It also aims at the moral. Nussbaum rightfully points out that the demand Socrates makes on his interlocutors is an urgent practical necessity, if political deliberation is ever to have a dignity and consistency that make it more than a marketplace of competing interests, that make it a genuine search for the common good. Or, as Socrates himself says, "Remember that it is no chance matter we are discussing, but how one should live."
In other words, Socrates engages his interlocutors out of political necessity to search for a common good. Socrates himself says that he "alone practice[s] the art of statesmanship", aiming "for what's best."\(^{201}\) Additionally and important for ethical understanding, he reminds us that this is shared work;\(^ {202}\) it requires having others who can help us see the limits of our understandings.

In a diverse democratic such as the United States, such a search is always underway, and Socratic questioning provides an excellent model of engaging in that search, because it allows the opportunity to fully call into question any vision of the good and to preempt dogmatism. However, the search for the common good involves more than the intellectual deliberation about how one should live, and the end of Socratic questioning is more than the development of deliberative powers. As Alasdair MacIntyre observes, Socratic questioning is at root moral education, and Socrates understands that moral education, if it is to happen at all, must start at a place where we realize we know nothing about morality:

\[\ldots\] Socrates is too often pictured by Plato as driving his interlocutors into an exasperated fury, and that is scarcely a convincing method of moral education. But infuriating someone may indeed be the only method of disturbing him sufficiently to force him into philosophical reflection upon moral matters . . . Socrates' method is both more intelligible and more justifiable if it is understood at securing a particular sort of change in the hearers rather than arriving at a particular conclusion. . . . So the discovery of one's own ignorance survives as the one well-founded moral aim.\(^ {203}\)

Recall that the search for the good requires acknowledging one's own ignorance. Yet one must be able to confront the possibility that one is ignorant about matters of the good. As


\(^{202}\) Ibid., 527C-D.

I contended earlier, questions about the good inevitably force us to put our selves at risk. Socratic questioning forces a confrontation with finitude and demands that one is able to withstand the anxiety of death in order to have any productive possibility of changing one's self, one's traditions, or the ideas one thinks one knows with certainty. The change MacIntyre speaks of is a change in the hearer himself, and the changes to the hearer's self cannot be separated from the changes in the hearer's beliefs. In challenging accepted tradition, Socrates challenges his interlocutors' self-understanding. The existential crisis invoked by Socrates and the powerful reaction to it can be seen in several Socratic dialogues and even more powerfully seen in the paramount expression of the death anxiety Socrates induces: the annihilation of the threat in the murder of Socrates by the city-state of Athens.

In what follows, I look to three Platonic dialogues to show how Socratic dialogue can provide the existential space to learn dialogic courage and to illustrate three possible responses to such questioning. The first response, found in *Meno*, is to undergo the moral education Socrates leads which leads to a change in his interlocutor. Second, found in *Protagoras*, is to covertly avoid the existential reach of Socratic questioning, merely going through the motions, engaging perfunctorily in the dialogue, only to then to leave unchanged. Third, found in *Gorgias*, is to overtly avoid reach of Socrates' questioning. In this last case, Socrates' interlocutors avoid engaging in the dialogue in such a way that Socrates finds it necessary to declare the real possibility that he could be put to death for his activity.
In the *Meno*, Socrates' interlocutor expresses the pain of confronting the finitude that Kerdeman describes, and his interlocutor also seems to undergo the change that MacIntyre describes. First, notice Meno's outright perplexity when he tells Socrates,

. . . you are exactly like the flat sting-ray that one meets in the sea. Whenever anyone comes into contact with it, it numbs him, and that is the sort of thing that you seem to be doing to me now. My mind and my lips are literally numb, and I have nothing to reply to you. Yet I have spoken about virtue hundreds of times, held forth often on the subject in front of large audiences, and very well, too, or so I thought. Now I can’t even say what it is.204

Meno does not choose to compare Socrates to the numbing effects of alcohol or an analgesic. Rather, he comes Socrates to an animal that numbs by the painful act of stinging. Also telling is Meno's expression of uncertainty of who he is. He was a student of the sophist Gorgias and considers himself an expert on matters of virtue; now he cannot say he knows anything about such matters. Socrates clearly aims to loosen the certitude of his interlocutor's beliefs, and the feelings that accompanies discovering one's ignorance, at least in issues that are central to one's self-understanding, are pain and numbness.

The threat of Socrates' questioning is also evidenced by a statement of Meno's host, Anytus. Anytus leaves the dialogue with these final words: Socrates is "too ready to run people down. My advice to you, if you will listen to it, is to be careful. I dare say that in all cities it is easier to do a man harm than good, and it is certainly so here, as I expect you know yourself."205 It is worth noting that the cantankerous Anytus appearing in this dialogue is the same Anytus who proposes Socrates be put to death at his trial.206

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204 Plato, "Meno," 80A-C.
205 Ibid., 94E.
206 See Edith Hamilton's preface to ibid., 353.
Anytus's anger is important in fully grasping Socrates' affect on Meno. In the end of the dialogue, Meno offers a bit more than the typical responses offered earlier in the dialogue which consist generally of a challenge to what Socrates is saying or the terse responses of yes, no, certainly, that is right, that is so. The second to last line in the dialogue for Meno is: "And it looks as if you are right--though our friend Anytus may be annoyed with you for saying so," to which Socrates replies, "I can't help that. We will talk to him some other time."207 This is a telling aside. Meno shows enough concern over Anytus's anger with Socrates to bring it up, and although he knows that such a position would anger his host, Meno openly agrees with Socrates. Then, in the last lines of the dialogue Socrates tells Meno,

On our reasoning then, whoever has virtue gets it by divine dispensation. But we shall not understand the truth of the matter until, before asking how men get virtue, we try to discover what virtue is in and by itself. Now is time for me to go, and my request to you is that you will ally the anger of your friend Anytus by convincing him that what you now believe is true.208

The dialogue begins with Meno approaching Socrates to ask whether virtue can be taught. In the end, Meno has been shown that such a question cannot be answered until one knows what virtue is. Thus, whatever notions Meno had of virtue to begin are no longer, and Meno is left with knowing that he does not know what virtue is: he has acknowledged his ignorance about virtue through confronting his finitude. Socrates feels confident enough in Meno's ability to stand courageously in the space of not-knowing that he encourages Meno to bring Anytus to the same conclusion. Yet this would require

207 Ibid., 99E.
208 Ibid., 100B.
Anytus to face his own finitude: he must teach Anytus to undergo negative experience. Meno has learned the courage of dialogue and is now asked to teach it to another.209

Socrates is not always as successful in morally educating his interlocutors as he is with Meno. Meno is brought to the point of questioning the foundation of his beliefs about the world and himself, and he is changed enough in the remainder of the dialogue to continue to engage in Socratic activity with a host who is already perturbed. In the Protagoras, one the other hand, we see a similar acknowledgement of the threat of Socrates' questioning by his interlocutor, but one that does not lead to an acknowledgement of his ignorance. This is an important case because it points to the possibility that one might successfully resist even when a phronimos is present to help coax the other. In the end, the learner must be willing.

Protagoras claims to be a Sophist and educator.210 He seems to know that he might be in for a rigorous questioning, and Protagoras wants to ensure the survival of his beliefs throughout the dialogue. In this case, admittedly, Socrates does not push Protagoras to the point of exasperation as he did with Meno. Nonetheless, Protagoras' defensiveness is palpable when, later in the dialogue, he refuses to converse on Socrates' terms, likening it to "adopt[ing] the method chosen by my opponent."211 Were he to acknowledge his ignorance, his reputation as a knowledgeable and persuasive sophist would be undermined.212 Nonetheless, by the end of the dialogue Socrates seems to win Protagoras' admiration for his keenness, skill, and exposition. Protagoras declares, "I say

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209 I am indebted to Chris Higgins for the interpretation that Meno learns the courage of understanding.
211 Ibid., 335A.
212 By Socrates' account, Protagoras says that a sophist is "as the name implies, one who has knowledge of wise things." ibid., 312C. To be shown that one is not knowledgeable is to show that one cannot be a sophist rightly named.
now that I should not be surprised if you became one of our leading philosophers. Well, we will talk of these matters at some future meeting, whenever you like . . .”

Protagoras is willing to listen to what Socrates says, having won credibility, but Protagoras' engagement seems perfunctory when, for example, near the end of the dialogue he says, "You seem bent on having your own way, Socrates, and getting me to give the answers, so I humor you . . ." Nonetheless, surviving the engagement with Socrates, Protagoras seems to be unchanged and he understands the Socratic quest as an entertaining activity rather one that requires risk and pain. In this case, Socrates attempts to open up the existential environment to practice courage but fails vis-à-vis Protagoras' ability to keep Socrates' claims at a distance. Either Socrates does not care about not reaching Protagoras, at least at that time, or he is unaware that Protagoras has evaded Socratic moral education. Protagoras resists, and for whatever reason Socrates stops working with him.

There is a second way in which an interlocutor might evade confronting his finitude, a way that exemplifies the reactivity described by Becker. In the Gorgias, it is not Socrates' interlocutor who becomes exasperated, but Socrates himself. In this dialogue, Callicles resist openly, and Socrates, meeting failure in his usual methods, says “throughout the time of our argument we have never ceased returning in circles to the same point in a constant failure to understand each other’s meaning.”

Whereas Protagoras will at least humor Socrates, in this case Callicles stubbornly asserts himself, continually arguing rhetorically with Socrates in order to avoid confronting his own ignorance. Socrates then makes one final push. To help Callicles

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213 Ibid., “Protagoras,” 361E.
214 Ibid., 360E.
215———, "Gorgias," 517C.
overcome this obstacle, Socrates tells Callicles and the other interlocutors present that they must engage in the life Socrates leads if they wish to avoid torment in the afterlife. In other words: suffer now or suffer a worse fate later. The judgment after death is terrifying, as Socrates explains,

... those who have been guilty of the most heinous crimes and whose misdeeds are past cure--of these warnings are made... [they are] literally suspended as examples there in the prison house in Hades... and I think that most of these warning examples are chosen from tyrants and kings and potentates and politicians, for these... are guilty of the greatest and most impious crimes.\textsuperscript{216}

Here Socrates seems to be very sharp. If you do not lead an examined life, if you do not submit yourself to the uncertainty provided through dialogue, you will suffer in the afterlife. Moreover, any pain they will suffer by undergoing the education offered by Socrates will be nothing when compared to the torture they face in the afterlife for choosing to remain ignorant of their ignorance.

The adeptness with which both Protagoras and Callicles avoid confronting their ignorance demonstrates the clarity with which they implicitly know the stakes, and they successfully avoid confronting the nothingness, in one case covertly and the other overtly. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty says of those coping with the death of someone close to them,

just as the subject, in psychoanalysis, knows what he does not want to face, otherwise he would not be able to avoid it so successfully... we turn from those areas of our life in which we might meet this nothingness, but this very fact necessitates that we intuit them.\textsuperscript{217}

By avoiding in two distinct ways the moral education Socrates offers them, Protagoras and Callicles avoid turning themselves towards the nothingness of not-knowing. As

\textsuperscript{216} Ibid., 525C-D.
\textsuperscript{217} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{Phenomenology of Perception}, 93.
such, although Callicles might seem courageous for fighting fiercely with Socrates, he tries to destroy the threat of Socrates claims and in so doing demonstrates his inability to confront the anxiety that lies in acknowledging the legitimacy of Socrates' claims.

An important aside here will show us two things: Socrates knows that his work as an educator invokes death anxiety in his interlocutors, and Socrates clearly states that what he offers is not just an education about things moral but a moral education as well: the change in the hearer of which MacIntyre speaks. On the first, Socrates says in the Gorgias that if he were brought into court he would expect to be put to death. It is not a surprise to Socrates when, ultimately, this turns out to be the case. Nonetheless, Socrates tells his interlocutors that he does not fear death, because he will not have done evil. As such, when he finds himself in court he will not be concerned with "winning favor" (as presumably the Sophists do). Rather, he aims to live and die as well as he can and asks others to join him:

I exhort all other men thereto to the best of my power, and you [Callicles] above all I invite in return to share this life and to enlist in this contest which I maintain excels all other contests, and I reproach you in your turn because you will not be able to help yourself when trial and judgment takes place.

The practice of winning favor is far from the practice of understanding. Winning favor is not concerned with confronting one's finitude or undergoing negative experience. It is quite the opposite. Socrates is clear that this is not a good life; in fact he seems to indicate that it is an evil one. The good life is a life of acknowledging one's ignorance, of engaging with others in ethical understanding to seek the common good. It is also

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218 Plato, "Gorgias," 522D-E.
219 Ibid., 521E.
220 Ibid., 526E.
important to note that part and parcel of being courageous for Socrates is seeking to educate others in being courageous.

We turned to Socrates in order to resolve the problem that studying the humanities alone is not sufficient for cultivating courage. Our own anxieties and those of others can make it too easy to keep others' claims at a distance. Indeed, Protagoras and Callicles are able to do so even in the presence of the exemplary questioner himself. The Socratic dialogues teach us that the confrontation with finitude does not always come to fruition, but with the help of a model questioner and seeker of the good one can, like Meno, come to discover one's ignorance, and, in so doing, undergo the necessary changes to begin to seek out the limits of one's understanding--to develop courage.

It should be clear by now that Socrates is more than just an educator of courage; he is an exemplar of it. In fact, he could not be an educator were he not also an exemplar of what he teaches. His education occurs through dialogue, and were he not to be exemplary in discovering his own ignorance, he would be unable to lead others to confront their own. The only thing Socrates seems to know is that he knows nothing, and were it to be any other way, a successful dialogue would lead his interlocutor to confront his own ignorance only so the interlocutor could be built up to believe whatever Socrates believed, rather than to dwell in the space of uncertainty and confront death.

Finally, it is important to point out that Socrates uses poetry to answer questions about the good in his dialogue with Protagoras so that we get a window into how Socratic dialogue uses the humanities as subject matter. Protagoras begins by asking Socrates

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221 It might be objected that in Book X of the Republic, Socrates is content with the expulsion of poets in the ideal state, and thus it is incorrect to say poetry is an appropriate subject for Socratic dialogue. However, the poet Socrates specifically discusses in the Republic is Homer, and what Socrates takes issue with is that Homer, as a poet, attempts to teach people to be moral by telling tales of exemplars. Homer is
whether two passages of Simonides are consistent, and Socrates says that they are. Then, Protagoras points out a crucial distinction. In the first passage, Simonides says that to become hard is noble. In a later passage of the poem, Simonides says he disagrees with Pittacus, who says that to be noble is hard. Both, Protagoras says, cannot be true. For how can Simonides say it is hard to become noble and yet disagree with Pittacus that it is hard to be noble?²²²

Socrates responds by interpreting Simonides differently, making the distinction between to become noble and to be so. According to Socrates, Simonides is saying that "to become noble is hard, though possible, but to be so is impossible."²²³ Here, Socrates claims that one cannot be categorically good, i.e., one not cannot be good; one can merely be on the way to being good--becoming good. So, the two passages are clearly consistent. If one cannot categorically be good, then of course it would be a mistake to say that it is hard to be good, because being good is a state reserved for the gods.²²⁴ For how can it be difficult to be what one cannot be in the first place?

Socrates continues: "to be a good man--continuing good--is not possible, but a man may become good, and the same man bad . . ."²²⁵ Here we read that we cannot become categorically good, yet we can orient ourselves towards good at any time, just as we can we can become bad at any time, too. That is, at any point, we are becoming good or becoming bad. It should not be surprising that the ideal is held out of reach for the

²²² Ibid., 344D.
²²³ Ibid., 344E.
²²⁴ Ibid., 344C.
²²⁵ Ibid., "Protagoras," 344D-45C.
human in Socrates' (or Plato's) eyes. As such, just as one cannot categorically and continually be good, one cannot categorically and continually be bad. Nonetheless, how one orients one's becoming is not left to mere chance, and, as Socrates tells us through Simonedes and also in his conversation with Callicles, we can, with effort, choose to become good. In this example, we are witness not only to ethical education through a dialogue about virtue--the opening up the existential space to exercise courage, but we also see how it might practically happen through the interpretation of a commonly accessible work.

We might ask at this point how Socratic dialogue can help us in the day-to-day instruction on our schools. Although teaching methods like Socratic Circles have made their way into public education as a means of integrating discussion about complex ideas in a text among other things, we typically do not see teachers wandering the halls of the school enticing or goading students into dialogue. In the Socratic dialogues Socrates is a participant and the teacher; in Socratic Circles, for example, the teacher takes a more benign role as mediator, observer, and meta-analyst of the conversation. In such progressive pedagogical methods in today's teaching conditions, the teacher still must be someone who knows--an authority--because she would still be obligated to move students toward specific measurable outcomes of learning--demonstrating specific knowledge or skills. In other words, Socratic Circles are co-opted not for the aim in which they might be best exercised--the cultivation of courage--but rather for helping students come to a predetermined understanding of whatever is being discussed or to develop skills that will be tested on the measure that they can help a student know with certainty. The testing
regimes that dominate public schools fly in the face of the aim of Socratic dialogue: not *knowing* but rather *not*-knowing.

So, in order to help us explore whether a true form of Socratic dialogue might have a place in school, I return to Gadamer. Recall that the concept of dialogic courage developed in this dissertation is grounded in Gadamer's theory of hermeneutic experience. In describing the hermeneutic relation one has toward another, Gadamer sets it in opposition to that of the teacher-pupil relationship. This requires us to ask whether something grounded in hermeneutic theory can be adequately supported within the teacher-pupil relationship. It is this question I turn to last.

**Socrates and the School**

Up to this point in the chapter, I showed how the cultivation of courage requires an existential space in which to practice it and an exemplar of courage--a *phronimos*. I contended that the humanities offer the best subject matter to develop courage of understanding because it is in these subjects that we can ask questions about the good and as such provide the opportunity to confront death and practice courage. Yet the subject matter alone is not sufficient, because it is too easy to keep the claims of another at a distance, and I turned to Socrates to show how an educator might help a student cultivate courage as well as to show how poetry might be used to teach courage. This leaves us with the question of whether or not a Socratic educator has any possibility of existing in American schools. To answer this question, I once again return to Gadamer.
In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer sates that the teacher-pupil relationship is a reflective form of the effort to dominate.\(^{226}\) This claim is made within a discussion of the conditions of understanding and the modes of relating that undermine it—the teacher-pupil relationship being one of them. This relationship is one of domination because it is considered to be “an authoritative form of welfare work,” by which Gadamer means a relationship in which one claims to know what one needs in advance—or claims to understand one in advance—and thus it “functions to keep the other person’s claim at a distance.”\(^{227}\) As such, the other person is robbed of any power to make a claim to truth about himself or his world.

For example, when mental health patients are transferred between care providers, the new care provider is often given a chart that includes the patient’s history and diagnosis. The new care provider reads the chart and its accompanying notes about the individual’s behavior or the conversations previous providers had with the individual. Thus, the patient is already “understood” to be someone or something prior to saying her first word to the new provider. The dynamic is such that the patient's claims about her health are distorted by being made to fit within the pre-given diagnosis and narrative provided in the chart.\(^{228}\) There is no coming to an understanding about the patient in which the patient participates equally.\(^{229}\) The provider-patient dynamic within mental health care can also be seen in the sphere of public policy towards the poor, whereby


\(^{227}\) Ibid.

\(^{228}\) I don’t think Gadamer would have disagreed altogether with Foucault’s analysis of the history of the mental health system, either. My use of the mental health system as an example, however, is not meant as a criticism of the justification of such a form of domination or the form in which it appears as much as merely an example of the particular asymmetry of welfare work.

\(^{229}\) Gadamer says that “[w]here a person is concerned with the other as individuality—e.g., in a therapeutic conversation or the interrogation of a man accused of a crime—this is not really a situation in which two people are trying to come to an understanding” (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 387.).
legislators argue over “what the poor need”—be it housing, jobs, welfare or the revocation of it, welfare to work programs, funding for homeless shelters, etc. Rarely are the poor directly asked what it is they feel would help them out of their plight and then offered it through legislation.230

Similarly, in the teacher-pupil relationship as it exists in American K-12 education students are told what they will be learning by virtue of their grade level, which is correlated with their age and which is to reflect the presumed intellectual capacity and stage of cognitive development of the student. Students often are further categorized by curriculum tracking (vocational track or college preparatory track, to name a few) or, in the classroom itself, by ability. State standards lay out exactly what will be taught to students every year in every class, and pre-known and pre-formulated theories of the human development of the individual are imposed onto students en masse. Thus, the student has little claim to the truth of his learning needs, as age, testing, and schooling personnel largely determine them. The active powers and interests of the student are not what drives the curriculum, but rather the student's interests are used to manipulate the student into a curriculum developed before his arrival and one that is indifferent to him.

This relationship is institutionalized structurally in the case of curriculum tracking. Curriculum tracks inherently limit a student's course offerings by providing a sequence of courses such that once one is in a track it becomes difficult to get out. For example, once one is in language arts classes developed for the vocational track, one will,

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230 The implication is that the State as a permanent institution of professional governors is an institution of domination. One must also consider that even when the poor do have a direct voice, through a letter or through a lobby group, the reality of the poor’s world is such that what they say is radically alien to those who have never undergone such circumstances. I was amazed when I read of a State legislator trying to live off of food stamps for a day and being so surprised at how nearly impossible was the task! How far removed one must be from the reality of the poor to not know how far a dollar goes in a grocery store!
with every year that passes by, be less able to take college-prep language arts courses. These tracks do not run parallel; they are divergent. Moreover, one cannot, for example, be in a college preparatory senior level high school physics course and also in a vocational sophomore-level language arts class. In a curriculum track, sequences of coursework are demanded such that students’ particular strengths and weaknesses are denied their claims of legitimacy outside of any allowable variability within a track.

Another way in which the student is robbed of his claims about the subject matter occurs within any curriculum track: the naïve student's claims are almost always wrong in light of the expert teacher’s claims. Of course, one could claim that this is necessary for teaching subjects like the physical sciences, mathematics, spelling and grammar—in teaching those things that could not be anything other than what they are, as Aristotle would say. However, in moral matters, in asking questions about the good, human understanding is finite, and we do no service to students by teaching them to relate to such questions as though answers to these questions are final, and our knowledge of them infinite. In moral matters, the teacher's expertise is not episteme but phronesis. The teacher, being a phronimos of understanding stands in the role of Socrates with his interlocutors. So, contrary to didactic instruction on moral questions, Gadamer asserts that in conversation, the subject matter must act as that which continually levels the relationship between two partners, if understanding is to take place. By the asymmetry

231 Surely teachers are conscious of the different abilities and weakness of their students, however, the student rarely is ever allowed claim to them, and students are still held to the tasks at hand—the particular state objectives laid out for that grade level. Rarely do we see students who take different subjects at different grade levels—math at 4th grade, reading at 3rd grade and science at 5th grade.

232 This criticism is consistent with Gadamer’s criticism of authoritarianism: “True authority does not have to be authoritarian” (Gadamer, Truth and Method, 374f22.), because a teacher can be an authority on a subject, that is, someone with exceptional familiarity, without being authoritarian insofar as not allowing other’s claims to adequately challenge his views.

233 This is discussed in greater detail below.
demanded by the absolute authority of the teacher on a subject matter, teaching hides the I-Thou relationship in favor of a technical one; the subject matter is a means to another end--what Freire would call the banking of pre-determined subject matter into the student’s brain--and not the end of conversation itself. Such a dynamic, prevalent in American schooling, is an impossible one for teaching courage. It goes against any possibility of the development of hermeneutic consciousness, because it requires the pupil to doubt her claims before she even speaks them. Such a dynamic cannot teach courage; it can only teach cowardice.

Current forms of contemporary schooling lie within only one (narrow) way of conceiving of education, however, and this narrow understanding of education demands the hard asymmetry of the teacher-pupil dynamic. It makes sense that the kind of teaching that is constrained by K-12 schooling might lead Gadamer to make his critical claim about teacher-pupil relationship. Yet we might open up the possibility for teaching the courage conceptualized in this dissertation by providing a broader conception of education. A broader concept of education will in turn provide a broader understanding of the relationship between teacher and student. To do so, I specifically turn to the Gadamer's discussion of Bildung. I primarily turn to the concept of Bildung, because it is a central concept in the development of Gadamer's theory of hermeneutic experience insofar as it describes negative experience. Because Gadamer's theory starts with the concern over the interpretation of hermeneutic texts, Bildung helps him describe the way in which we encounter foreignness and of others through language and the process by

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234 Under the normal teacher-pupil relationship Gadamer might say that the student knows-this or the student knows-that about the subject matter, but he would not say that the student has understood the material. The student is precluded from acting as a Thou, an other which can says something that challenges one’s claim to truth.
which we are changed in the encounter through the process of understanding. As I have shown, this encounter is not limited to historical texts within one's tradition but can enter the present in contemporaneous dialogue across traditions and languages; the understanding of texts is just one way in which Bildung takes place.

Bildung is a noun that most directly translates to formation, and it was tied to conceptions of self-formation, education, and cultivation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.\(^{235}\) It is both a process and a product, much in the same way we can use the word education, although Gadamer tells us that Bildung is considered more the result of the process of becoming than the process itself.\(^{236}\) Unlike the way the process of education is thought of in America—a finite thing one does and then is done with, Bildung is a never-ending process of coming into our cultural environment. It is the development of person through the medium of that person's distinct language and culture.\(^{237}\) Bildung cannot something that can be reduced to a technocratic means to an end. As Gadamer says, “Bildung is not achieved in the manner of a technical construction, but grows out of an inner process of formation and cultivation, and therefore remains in a state of continual Bildung.”\(^{238}\)

Bildung is part of who we are as humans. Gadamer writes, "Every single individual who raises himself out of his natural being to the spiritual finds in the language, customs, institutions, of his people a pre-given body of material which, as in


\(^{236}\) Ibid., 10.

\(^{237}\) In this way Bildung resembles the Greek conception of paideia. However, as seen below, Gadamer rejects the *a priori* telos associated with the Hegelian conception of Bildung, which was indebted to the paideia's teleology of the ideal human. See also ibid., 9.

\(^{238}\) Ibid., 10. The translation of *Truth and Method* I use does not italicize "Bildung". However, for the sake of consistency and because "Bildung" is a foreign word, I add italics to the word when quoting Gadamer's use of it.
learning to speak, he has to make his own." Gadamer is saying here that every person is born into a conceptual world, and the individual must claim for himself a unique combination of the dimensions of the world into which he is thrown. For example, every culture has a limited number of ways of saying what one is. In America, one can claim to be an academic, a physician, a carpenter, a banker, a homemaker, etc. Not only do individuals claim to be one of these (or a combination of one of these), but one generally does so in a unique way. Many people may claim to be a father, but not all fathers are the same. Each claims the role of father in his own way. Similarly, and more broadly, each person claims language in his own way through speech. For example, I find it particularly impressive that comedian Frank Caliendo is not only able to imitate the intonation patterns of individual voices but also their speech patterns—in language and body. The comedic dispositions of the impersonated are re-presented in his act. The only way we viewers can recognize such a talent for imitation is by the very fact that each person uses language in a way that is uniquely her own.

Gadamer continues: "Every individual is always engaged in the process of Bildung and in getting beyond his naturalness, inasmuch as the world into which he is growing is one that is humanly constituted through language and custom." The naturalness to which Gadamer refers here is that of being an animal in an environment. He juxtaposes the environment to which an animal reacts with the world in which humans respond. When Gadamer speaks of the world which is humanly constituted through language and custom, he speaks of a world that is in language, and that language

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239 Ibid., 13. It is important to note that Gadamer takes the stance that “we can acknowledge that Bildung is an element of spirit without being tied to Hegel’s philosophy of absolute spirit” (ibid.).

240 Ibid.
is that through which customs find their existence—which is not the same as the environment in which an animal finds itself.  

So, *Bildung* is what makes us human and is the process of learning to take ownership, through language, of the world of customs and institutions in which one finds oneself. As such, *Bildung* includes making the world in new ways; we must recreate it for ourselves. And this is the crucial point that sets *Bildung* against the narrow conception of education in America public schools: we must make our unique claims and impressions in the world and *a fortiori* on the world, and this requires more than mere receptivity of cultural norms. The person growing into the world not only learns of the world but also pushes forward into its possibilities and variances through imagination and experimentation. In acting out the possibilities provided by the world, the child pushes from the known into the unknown. The child uses the pre-given material that is handed him to bring new possibilities into the world. Thus, *Bildung* is both reception and creative expression.

From this perspective, education as *Bildung* becomes stale and withers into nothingness as soon as one closes down and retreats into the world of certitude and dogma. The role of the teacher, then, cannot be to merely impart knowledge; it must be to engage in a conversation with the student whereby a free dialectic can occur, where conversation is a process of understanding. Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understand not the individual person but what he says.

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241 “The concept of *world* is thus opposed to the concept of *environment*, which all living beings in the world possess” (ibid., 441.).

242 Ibid., 387.
Horizons are fused when an understanding has been reached; and, ultimately, “to reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and usefully asserting one’s own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were.” Fundamentally, the capacity to engage in cross-cultural understanding is the same capacity required for one to fully grow into the world and make it one's own, for to be educated requires no less than the openness Gadamer speaks of when he describes hermeneutical experience.

We might think the move away from receptivity is nothing new, for both Dewey's critique of rote memorization and recitation and Freire's critique of banking education share the move away from mere receptivity. However, Gadamer's rendering of Bildung departs from the philosophies of both. Freire's philosophy assumes a distantiated point of critical reflection that rests on presumed oppression and false-consciousness and that, in its critical orientation, moves too far toward the extreme of criticizing the claims of one's culture. Gadamer's concept of prejudice and the structure of fore-conceptions in his theory both show it is impossible to acquire the distantiation of Freireian critique.

Dewey's answer to the student-teacher dynamic that still persists today is to move the locus of learning from something apart from societal (and social) life to something embedded in the activities of it, and to move the role of language from mere correspondence to an outside world to something embedded in meaningful social activity. Dewey and Gadamer share a close position in terms of their philosophies of language in that they both move away from the philosophy of "convention" and that of Platonic correspondence and towards a shared meaning found in the life of the shared community.

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243 Ibid., 371.
Yet to Gadamer unity of meaning comes through a fusion of horizons and the emphasis of the role of language is in provoking negative experience. Although unity is sought and possible, it is not assumed, and does not require shared, conjoint and contemporaneous activity. On the other hand, to Dewey, "genuine community of language or symbols can be achieved only through the efforts that bring about community of activities in present conditions;" only where there are common activities is there a common language and a unity of meaning. In the context of cross-cultural dialogue, unity of meaning is assumed possible but also assumed to not presently exist, as the very understanding of cultural difference rests on differences of activities and, by extension, an understanding of what it means to lead a good life. And although Dewey certainly acknowledges the gap in understanding across culture, it seems that understanding nonetheless requires shared activity, whereas from the hermeneutic perspective the fusion of horizons does not require this.

Thinking differently about education forces us to reconsider the activity of teaching. In the narrow sense of teaching, the teacher does not open herself in a way that allows a student to really say something to her about the subject matter, because she maintains absolute authority on it. Thus, as a reflective form of the effort to dominate, it closes down the possibility of conversation, in which Bildung occurs. However, although Gadamer is clear that the teacher-pupil relationship in schooling is antithetical to Bildung, he does make a helpful distinction that comes only briefly and that is particularly germane to the activity of teaching:

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( . . . Bildung as such cannot be a goal; it cannot as such be sought, except in the reflective thematic of the educator.) In having no goals outside itself, the concept of Bildung transcends that of the mere cultivation of talents, from which concept it is derived. The cultivation of a talent is the development of something that is given, so that practicing and cultivating it is a mere means to an end. Thus the educational content of a grammar book is simply a means and not itself and end. Assimilating it simply improves one’s linguistic ability…but in Bildung what is absorbed is not a means that has lost its function. Rather, in acquired Bildung, nothing disappears, but everything is preserved.  

Gadamer first speaks here of the reflective thematic of the educator. Recall that Gadamer says that the teacher-pupil relationship is the reflective form of the effort to dominate, which is a form antithetical to conversation and by extension Bildung. In the above passage, he says that Bildung can be sought in the reflective form of the educator. Here, the term educator, as that which educates or forms must be distinguished from the term teacher, who trains a pupil in school. So the position of educator, as opposed to teacher, does not preclude one from participating in the Bildung of another. However in order to avoid the asymmetry Gadamer opposes in the teacher-pupil relation, the Bildung of the educator must also be thinking over the same subject material, if it is to be a true conversation; the educator must be open to the transformation of understanding. Furthermore, and as such, the educator must maintain a hermeneutical consciousness toward the other as Thou. For hermeneutical consciousness “culminates … in the same readiness for experience that distinguishes the experienced man from the man captivated by dogma.”  

It provides a place for the thinking of Bildung, as it is the necessary comportment for a conversation about subject matter. If we accept that Bildung is a broader conception of education, then Socrates must fall within a broader conception of teaching, and it is no coincidence that Gadamer draws

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246 Ibid., 355.
from Socratic dialogue to conceptualize understanding. We can then say that the teacher-pupil relationship is a reflective form of domination only as it has come to manifest itself in the conventional, institutional way. To the contrary, the educator can help students engage in reflective thematic activities that have the same end as Socrates’ elenchus and which encourage hermeneutical consciousness. One way in which the teacher might model Socrates as educator is simply to carry on the art of questioning about a topic in particular as described above.

Finally, we must remember that coming to an understanding of what the text says requires a conversation with the text about the subject matter on which it speaks. In the case of the classroom, it is important is that in the educator does not collapse into an effort to dominate if the relation is to be educative. In leading a conversation about any subject that is bound to a text, the educator can act as a guardian of openness in the same way that Socrates would not let his interlocutors stand on dogmatic ground. That is, the educator can ask questions that provoke the student to hearing claims from the text that might otherwise be unheard. The educator does this without technical aim, but merely by engaging in the material as a partner in inquiry. In any case, the educator remains open to the claims of the students and must remain open to the possibility that her interpretation of the text is untrue if she is to be an educator. If the educator is new to the text, this is not a difficult task. However, if the educator is deeply familiar with the text and its ideas, the educator might have come to fairly certain explanations and understandings of the text--perhaps even dogmatic in the extreme cases, and she must
consciously keep herself open.\textsuperscript{247} She might even choose a new text, one with which she is less familiar. The educator ensures the student returns to the text and justifies his claims, and the educator also returns to the text as well to challenge the student if she feels his interpretation is untrue. This stands in opposition to the teacher merely saying, “That is wrong. This is absolutely what is meant here.”\textsuperscript{248}

The being of the educator, then, is to be “against the fixity of opinions, questioning makes the object and all its possibilities fluid. A person skilled in the ‘art’ of questioning is a person who can prevent questions from being suppressed by the dominant opinion.”\textsuperscript{249} Dialogue in this sense undermines mere reciting--the opposite of speaking--which is found in the teacher-pupil relationship and where “the advantage of sudden inspiration is precluded.”\textsuperscript{250} If Gadamer is correct in saying that “the art of questioning is the art of questioning further – i.e., the art of thinking,”\textsuperscript{251} then it seems that educator-as-conversation-leader might be a form of teaching that, to Gadamer, escapes reflecting the form of domination, encourages the thinking of Bildung, and educates toward hermeneutical consciousness. Gadamer's conceptualization of the educator, couched in the process of Bildung, suits the development of the courage of understanding first and foremost because it allows understanding to occur; understanding cannot occur if either person's claims are delegitimized. If understanding cannot occur,

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\item \textsuperscript{247} Gadamer specifically warns us of the “danger of ‘appropriating’ the other person in one’s own understanding and thereby failing to recognize his or her otherness”\textsuperscript{247} whereby the in this case the teacher might hear what the patient has to say, but it is done only insofar as it fits within the preformed narrative or modification that the teacher already deems correct.
\item \textsuperscript{248} I recognize that practical concerns and temporal constraints of institutional schooling might impose itself upon the process such that the teacher is forced into a temporary relation of domination. The question of whether such a relation must be exercised is a moral dilemma not within the scope of this essay to answer.
\item \textsuperscript{249} Gadamer, \textit{Truth and Method}, 361.
\item \textsuperscript{250} Ibid., 552.
\item \textsuperscript{251} Ibid., 360.
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negative experience cannot occur, and thus courage cannot be exercised. However, this conceptualization of educator it stands in opposition to the current role of the teacher as derived from the aims of American public schools.

Teacher Education for Teaching Courage

The practicality of teaching courage is seriously challenged in an era of high-stakes testing and teacher accountability geared to ensure human capital development. The arts and humanities are going by the wayside in favor of subjects like science, technology and mathematics, which are all more valuable to corporate interests in human resources. Moreover, as Bowles and Gintis argued three decades ago, the type of consciousness formed by this kind of corporatized education stands in strong tension with the type of consciousness needed for full democratic participation. I have argued that hermeneutic consciousness and the courage it rests on is necessary to maintaining a liberal-democratic society insofar as its citizens are able to engage in dialogue to determine the good. The kind of consciousness currently being developed in public schools stands in opposition to this as well.

Unfortunately, as difficult as it would be to do so, bringing back the humanities and arts as centerpieces in the curriculum would not be enough to teach our youth the courage of dialogue. We also need educators of courage. As pointed to earlier, learners need *phronimoi* not only modeled in literature but also living in contemporaneous social space. In other words, just as Socrates taught by example, so too our teachers must be courageous if they are to teach courage. Yet how can they be courageous if they were never taught to be so and even worse never even seen it modeled? Higgins offers us a
start to the answer when he suggests educational philosophy as a means of liberal teacher education:

   By sharing our love for the questions--and for the historically removed, humanistic texts which maintain, in their treatment of questions of human becoming, an untimely relation to the present’s foreclosed and shrunken questions—we invite educators into this larger conversation . . . Such an education helps put teachers in touch with the questions we have forgotten how to ask. It encourages them to be more circumspect about the social fabric they have been enlisted to renew, and, at the same time, to convert from a practice that runs on the fast burning fuel of altruism to the sustainable commitment of an ongoing apprenticeship to questions worth loving.\textsuperscript{252}

   Although teachers might not have undergone an education in public schools that provide them the experience necessary to cultivate dialogic courage and thus to be exemplars for their students, teacher candidates can find the necessary experience through educational philosophy as part of their academic requirements. This, of course, requires philosophers of education to refrain from teaching teacher candidates the subject matter of educational philosophy in a manner reflective of the teacher-pupil relationship. Rather, the educational philosopher brings teacher candidates into the conversation of educational questions, most importantly, what does it mean to be a good teacher? In so doing, the philosopher educates the teacher candidate, not only developing the requisite virtue that needs to be taught but also providing a substantive ground for reflective practice.

   To summarize, teachers cannot be exemplars of dialogic courage or by extension teach it if they have never undergone such an education themselves. Yet we can provide a form of this education to teacher candidates through educational philosophy. Of course, teaching teachers to be courageous does not alone provide the conditions of

teaching courage. Schools themselves must acknowledge the validity of such an education in practice. The current conditions of high-stakes testing, measurable outcomes of instruction, and the relegation of the arts and humanities for the sake of science, technology, and mathematics all work to close of the possibility of teaching courage. We would be better to rethink education in terms of Bildung insofar as it is the educative process in teaching the humanities, and, by extension of dialogic courage.

Courage is not merely a good onto itself; it is crucial for the maintenance of any diverse democratic society. If we care about ours in America, we need to take seriously the need to teach courage for the sake of creating citizens who can fully grapple with questions about the good. This means reassessing the current social outcomes of schooling. If we continue down the path we are currently on, developing educational systems whose only interest is in creation of human capital, the transmitting and receiving of knowledge, and the development of skills in the service of the former two, we fail to risk an exacerbation of the already toxic, polarized, and vitriolic public sphere that might very well lead to outright acts of violence against those whose claims to the good to deeply challenge our own. Instead, we must accept the challenge to teach our youth to be courageous in the quest of ethical understanding, in the search for the common good, if the moral substance of diverse society is not to atomize under the doctrine of equal worth nor force the self-immurement of others. It is a daunting task that asks us to question what a good school is and what it means for students to be given the possibility to lead a good life. If we are courageous we will enter into conversation for the sake of understanding the good.
REPRESENTATIONS


APPENDIX A

CRITICISMS OF GADAMER'S THEORY OF HERMENEUTICS

Levinas and the Primacy of Metaphysics

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas levies an explicit criticism at the fundamentals of Heideggerian philosophy, namely that ontology precedes metaphysics.\(^{253}\) To understand the basis of this criticism it is first necessary to explain Heidegger's position. In the introduction of Heidegger's Magnum Opus, *Being and Time*, he tells us that the concern over basic concepts, specific entities, and facts about them are not fundamental, so to speak. Rather, it is the very underlying background assumptions hidden from view that are most fundamental. Heidegger states that

> Ontological inquiry is indeed more primordial, as over against the ontical inquiry of the positive sciences. . . . The question of Being aims therefore at ascertaining the *a priori* conditions not only for the possibility of the sciences which examine entities as entities of such and such type, and, in so doing, already operate with an understanding of Being, but also for the possibility of those ontologies themselves which are prior to the ontological sciences and provide their foundations. *Basically, all ontology, no matter how rich and firmly compacted a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains blind and impervious from its ownmost aim, if it has not first adequately clarified the meaning of Being, and conceived this clarification as its fundamental task.*\(^{254}\)

The primacy of the question of Being leads Heidegger to a conceptualization of Others and how they are encountered. Levinas takes this conceptualization as the smoking gun of the error of Heidegger's project. Here is a crucial passage from *Being and Time* pointing to this smoking gun:

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\(^{253}\) Gadamer's theory of hermeneutics is largely influenced by Heideggerian philosophy. Given this dissertation takes up the question of ethics, it is important to address Levinas's criticism of Heideggerian philosophy.

Thus in characterizing the encountering of Others, one is again still oriented by that Dasein which is in each case one's own. But even in this characterization does one not start by marking out and isolating the 'I' so that one must one must then seek some way of getting over to the others from this isolated subject? . . . By 'Others' we do not mean everyone else but me--those over against whom there "I" stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself--those among whom one is too.\(^{255}\)

This last sentence, which claims that Others foremost are those from whom Dasein does not distinguish himself, gives credence to Levinas's concern that "Ontology, which reduces the other to the same, promotes freedom--the freedom that is the identification of the same, not allowing itself to be alienated by the other."\(^{256}\) The reduction of the other to same concerns Levinas, because it does not allow ourselves to be called into question. By placing at the center of the phenomenology of otherness how others are not distinguished from us, we do violence to the power of their uniqueness to call into question the very exercise of consuming the other into one's own framework of "the same." It is this ability to disrupt one's co-opting otherness to the same that Levinas calls ethics. Moreover, it is this ethics which saves us from the dogmatism of our own existence--"[a]nd as critique precedes dogmatism, metaphysics precedes ontology."\(^{257}\)

Levinas's worry is not just an academic one, whereby he must merely point out that Heidegger was blind to the theoretical implications of this thinking. Levinas says,

To affirm the priority of Being over existents is to already decide the essence of philosophy; it is to subordinate the relation with someone, who is an existent, (the ethical relation) to a relation with the Being of existents, which, impersonal, permits the apprehension, the domination of existents (a relationship of knowing), subordinates justice to freedom…To be sure, the freedom involved in the essence of truth is not for Heidegger a principle of free will…it is not man who possesses freedom; it is freedom that possesses man.\(^{258}\)

\(^{255}\) Ibid., 154. Emphasis original.


\(^{257}\) Ibid., 43.

\(^{258}\) Ibid., 45. Emphasis original.
Levinas is worried about the slide into ethical relativism whereby one's freedom to act supersedes any ethical commitment to others or to a commitment to justice. By placing the question of Being as primordial, as Heidgger does, there is no ethical relation that can supersede it. Thus, as I am sure is a concern to Levinas, Nazi philosophy and the injustices perpetuated in its name are wholly compatible with Heideggerian philosophy. By placing ethics as primordial, the injustices carried out by the Nazis would be demonstrative of their perversion of what it means to be human--their inhumanity--not that they were in any way superior humans. As Levinas says,

> Ontology as first philosophy is a philosophy of power. It issues in the state and in the non-violence of totality. It issues in the State and in the non-violence of the totality, without securing itself against the violence from which this non-violence lives, and which appears as the tyranny of the State. . . . Heideggerian ontology . . . remains under obedience to the anonymous, and leads inevitably to another power, to imperialist domination, to tyranny.  

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Thus, Levinas seeks to uncover a "non-allergic relation with alterity . . . where power, by essence murderous of the other, becomes, faced with the other and 'against all good sense,' the impossibility of murder, the consideration of the other, of justice."  

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One concern I have about Levinas's characterization of Heidegger's philosophy and how he stands in relation with it has to do with the distinction between an "I" and an "other." Heidegger's conceptualization of the relation between the I and the Other is first carried out to disintegrate the dualism of Cartesianism. In a sense, the objectification of the Other--the transformation of the other into an object that can be experimented on and tested like any other object in the world--is criticized implicitly if not explicitly in Heidegger's philosophy. Moreover, taking as fundamental that the Other is distinct from

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259 Ibid., 46-47.
260 Ibid., 47.
self is what opens the dualism of Cartesianism and implicitly allows for the
objectification of other Dasein. In other words, the Other exists as another Dasein, with
whom Dasein shares a world, not as an object to be dominated and controlled. Heidegger
tells us, continuing from the previous citation from Being and Time,

‘With’ and ‘too’ are to be understood existentially, not categorically. By reason of
this with-like [mithaften] Being-in-the-world, the world is always the one that I
share with Others. The world of Dasein is a with-world [Mitwelt]. Being-in is
being-with-Others. Their Being-in-themselves within-the-world is Dasein-with
[Mit-dasein].

So, to Heidegger, Dasein is not a being to be conflated with entities that we can objectify
in the same way we do with physical bodies.

Levinas's criticism nonetheless expresses that Heidegger's thought is totalitarian
beyond the mere treating of people as objects to be controlled. To wit, implicit in the
primordial attitude that I share a world with others is the fact that others worlds are the
same as mine. The danger, of course, is that what I take to be my own world I assume
and project onto others as their world. I think this concern, although legitimate in abroad
sense, is not warranted with Heidegger. From Heidegger's perspective, when we are
carrying out the daily activities of our lives, we immediately assume that Others we
encounter share a world. For example, when I say I go to the market to purchase food, I
do not need to explain to the reader what it means that I say that. Nor do I need to
explain to a person working the register at this store why I am there, standing before
them, unless, of course, it is for something not of the ordinary. Yet that is precisely the
point, we assume the ordinary. This does not necessarily preclude the possibility of the
radical alterity of the other breaking through the same. In fact, this inability to wholly

261 Heidegger, Being and Time, 154-55.
know the other is implicit in the thought of one of the most prominent Heideggarian: Gadamer. Gadamer extends of the limitation of cognizing entities by claiming that, in essence, all of our understanding of the world is also constrained by language and the historicity of our consciousness. For it is precisely these constraints that preclude us from wholly knowing the other and that leads us to be "pulled up short" by them in conversation.

Habermas and the Problem of the Authority of Tradition

In parsing out the discussion between Habermas and Gadamer regarding the scope and limits of hermeneutic reflection, Paul Ricoeur states,

The gesture of hermeneutics is a humble one of acknowledging the historical conditions to which all human understanding is subsumed in reign of the finitude; that of the critique of ideology is a proud gesture of defiance directed against the distortions of human communication . . . each speaks from a different place. Nonetheless, each may be asked to recognize the other, not as a position which is foreign and purely hostile, but as one which raises in its own way a legitimate claim.262

Habermas's criticisms of Gadamer's hermeneutic theory largely derive from a difference in defining the scope of hermeneutical reflection. Whereas Gadamer believes that the hermeneutic experience is universal and inescapable, Habermas believes that hermeneutical reflection has its limits, namely in scientific monological language, and that the task of reflection is to critique ideology. Gadamer takes issue with the idea of objectivity in interpretation sought after by the tradition of the Enlightenment, and therefore in the human sciences, in his Truth and Method, arguing that our understanding is built upon prejudices that lie in the background of our understanding and are opaque to

us. It is these prejudices that are part and parcel of our understanding. However, when interpreting, the interpreter’s horizon expands as it reaches out to meet the horizon of the text, causing a fusion [Verschmelzung] of horizons. This Verschmelzung not only expands the horizon of the interpreter but also the possibility of meaning of the text, as the interpreter’s horizon sheds new light on the text. Paraphrasing Gadamer’s argument, Habermas states, “This interlacing of horizons cannot be methodologically eliminated; it belongs to the very conditions of hermeneutic work.”

Furthermore, Gadamer’s hermeneutics requires that the shared prejudices between the interpreter and the text guide the interpreter’s understanding of the text: "The anticipation of meaning that guides our understanding of the text is not an action of subjectivity; it is determined instead by a common bond that links us with the tradition.”

In Habermas’s review of Gadamer’s Truth and Method, Gadamer’s hermeneutics is criticized essentially because “Gadamer’s prejudice for the rights of prejudices certified by tradition denies the power of reflection.” Habermas agrees with Gadamer’s assertion that one’s prejudices are formulated by tradition, and that therefore our tradition circumscribes our Verstehen. He also agrees that understanding cannot “leap over” traditions bound up in the interpreter’s horizon. Habermas understands and accepts the idea that we have prejudices, but warns us that this does not mean that the understanding is stable and unchanging:

Every process of understanding takes place against the background of a culturally ingrained preunderstanding.... The interpretative task consists in incorporating the others interpretation of the situation into ones own... this does not mean that

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264 Hans-Georg Gadamer, quoted in ibid.
265 Ibid., 358.
266 Ibid., 357.
interpretation must lead in every case to a stable and unambiguously differentiated assignment.\textsuperscript{267}

He argues that Gadamer’s hermeneutic reflection, being necessarily tied to the horizon of the interpreter and therefore tied to the present, “is not, so to speak, extinguished, but fused with the horizon from which the tradition comes,”\textsuperscript{268} not allowing for one to recognize, in reflection, the \textit{a priori} power of tradition, which is founded on the passing on of meanings inevitable due to the universality of linguisticality. Habermas asserts that one thereby propagates tradition in the process of Gadamerian interpretation.

The pedagogical implications of this are cause for worry to Habermas. He states that in Gadamer’s hermeneutics, prejudices are transferred to an individual through an educative process where the educator “legitimizes prejudices inculcated in the learner with authority . . . under the potential threat of sanctions and with the prospect of gratifications.”\textsuperscript{269} These prejudices, “certified by tradition,” become the conditions of knowledge.\textsuperscript{270}

Although he agrees that understanding cannot leap over the influence of tradition, Habermas contends that this does not preclude the alteration of tradition through a more scientific reflection.\textsuperscript{271} In order for there to be reflection, Habermas asserts, the prejudices of one has to make itself transparent, and in doing so, “makes us conscious of that which is already historically prestructured by inculcated tradition.” Thus, the prejudices being “rendered transparent can no longer function as prejudice;”\textsuperscript{272} the very act of reflection destroys prejudices. Gadamer’s hermeneutics is so dependent on tradition that it does not

\textsuperscript{267} Ibid., 357.
\textsuperscript{268} ———, \textit{Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One} (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1984), 100.
\textsuperscript{269} ———, "A Review of Gadamer’s \textit{Truth and Method}," 342.
\textsuperscript{270} Ibid., 358.
\textsuperscript{271} Ibid., 357.
\textsuperscript{272} Ibid., 357-8.
allow one to freely criticize tradition, and, countering Gadamer’s “rights of prejudices,” Habermas states that “[t]he right of reflection demands that the hermeneutic approach restrict itself. It calls for a reference system that goes beyond the framework of tradition as such; only then can it be criticized.” Habermas charges that Gadamer has to recognize his conception of the hermeneutic process as precluding any opportunity for critical reflection, because it does not allow for the destruction of prejudices, only the perpetuation of them.

Whereas Gadamer believes the hermeneutic condition is universal and inescapable, Habermas believes that hermeneutic reflection finds its limitations in the language of the physical sciences:

Hermeneutic consciousness does, after all, emerge from reflection upon our own movement within natural language, whereas the interpretation of science on behalf of the life-world has to achieve mediation between natural language and monolingual language systems. This process transcends the limitations of a rhetorical-hermeneutical art which has only been dealing with cultural products that were handed down and which are constituted by everyday language.

The monological languages Habermas refers to here are like the languages of the physical sciences in that eliminate the possibility of interpretation. He believes that there is extralinguistic experience that can be described in unequivocal terms. Shaun Gallagher describes Habermas's concern this way: "Gadamer fails to recognize the elements of distortion and deformation of interpretation imposed by force, compulsion, and coercion, that is, by extrahermeneutical factors." In short, Gadamer's theory is completely blind to what Habermas calls "systematically distorted communication."

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273 Ibid., 358.
274 Jürgen Habermas, quoted in Gallagher, *Hermeneutics and Education*, 17.
275 Ibid.
Gadamer’s stance on the universality of hermeneutics then can become a form of *dogmatic hermeneutics* wherein, as Dietrich Böhler describes it,

the interpretation of institutional texts whose validity is presupposed in the community presents the task of bridging differences between the text and the given situation in such a way that it can actually have an action-orienting effect, that is, it can be applied to the present situation of the interpreter.\(^{276}\)

That is, the authority of the text is presupposed and the task is in the application without questioning the authoritative validity of the text.

Thus, Habermas does not see Gadamer’s hermeneutics as rational because it does not provide for an adequate distanciation for the interpreter to be rational. Habermas sees a rational person as one who

interprets the nature of his desires and feelings [*Bedürfnisnatur*] in the light of culturally established standards of value . . . especially if he can adopt a reflective attitude to the very value standards through which desires and feelings are interpreted . . . We also apply the term 'rational'--even with special emphasis--to the behavior of a person who is both willing and able to free himself from illusions, and indeed from illusions that are based not on errors (about facts) but on self deceptions (about one's own subjective experiences).\(^{277}\)

Thus, Habermas believes the "interpreter understands the meaning of the text only to the extent that he sees why the author felt himself entitled to put forward (as true) certain assertions, to recognize (as right) certain values and norms, to express (as sincere) certain experiences."\(^{278}\)

Gadamer responds to Habermas’s charges by clarifying the universality of hermeneutic understanding. He states that the universality of hermeneutic understanding does not refer solely to the universality of understanding in language, but, because he feels that all of life itself is linguistic, that


\(^{277}\) Ibid., 20-21.

\(^{278}\) Ibid., 132.
the phenomena of understanding, then, shows the universality of human linguisticality as a limitless medium that carries everything within it - not only culture . . . but absolutely everything--because everything (in the world and out of it) is included in the realm of “understandings” and understandability in which we move.  

Gadamer’s reply reminds us that language is in everything, and inherent in language is meaning passed from person to person within a tradition, carrying with it authority upon the very foundations of its meaning. Critical theory was borne out of the tradition that questioned neoclassicism, as did philosophical hermeneutics. Hermeneutical understanding takes place even between Habermas and the texts he reads within critical theory, as the linguisticality of ideas in critical theory move down from generation to generation of critical theorists. To this end, Gadamer clarifies what he calls

wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein [consciousness of effective-history] as more being than consciousness, and that “being is never fully manifest.” This is to further assert that wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein is, as that which is never fully manifest, beyond our ability to concretely analyze. Here, Gadamer draws the line on the critical theorist’s ability to understand the human and society.

Gadamer tells us that Habermas assumes the ability to reflect completely out of one's situation and historicity: "By reflection, by the completion of enlightenment, and in a conversation free of coercion, the repressions and social deformations would be dismantled." However, Gadamer tells us, the proponents of the critique of ideology always appeal to psychoanalysis to help explain how one overcomes their "false consciousness". Yet this is high problematic to Gadamer. To him,


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279 Gadamer, _Philosophical Hermeneutics_, 25.
280 Ibid., 38.
281 Ibid.
psychoanalysis presupposes the patient's insight that he or she is sick. A psychoanalytic treatment could never be successful if someone were to pursue this course with resistance . . . The model is viable only to the degree that there, too one is dealing with the reestablishment of distorted conditions within the community of communication. . . . [The critique of ideology] is related to determinate social conditions upon which it has corrective and dismantling effects. It belongs itself, then, to the social process it criticizes . . . this is no less true of psychoanalysis.

That is, proponents of the critique of ideology presume a place of epistemological privilege that creates its own communicative distortions; it becomes its own ideology.

Gadamer responds to Habermas’s concern regarding authority by explaining that it is not the task of hermeneutical understanding to “assert an opposition and separation between the ongoing natural tradition and the reflective appropriation to it,” but to help us “make transparent any dogmatism which asks that of us.” He fears that Habermas, in an attempt to discern individual “intelligible motives and concrete compulsions,” is grounding his arguments in prejudices that operate on a dogmatic presupposition that authority is always wrong, and that that is false objectivity, i.e., Habermas's attempt to create some type of “controlled alienation” through a methodology of interpretation fosters false objectivism, and this false objectivism is the very thing that Habermas is trying to avoid.

Gadamer sees hermeneutics as “being confronted with disrupted intersubjective understanding, seek[ing] to place communication on a new basis and in a particular to replace the false objectivism of alienated knowing.” Gadamer fears that Habermas’s definition of authority as a dogmatic power leads to a dichotomy of reason and authority, where one must choose one or the other. Gadamer believes that this dichotomy

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282 Ibid.
283 ———, Philosophical Hermeneutics, 28.
284 Ibid., 32ff.
285 Ibid., 29.
“embraced by the Enlightenment…gives critical reflection a false power.” He affirms that authority in many places is dogmatic, but as such does not always mean it is wrong.\footnote{Ibid., 33.}

Habermas is right to be concerned about any claim that critical reflection is impossible. But this is not Gadamer’s claim. Rather, Gadamer wants to acknowledge that there is no scientific objectivity in the social sciences and that there is ample room for critical inquiry, but it must be accepted that critical inquiry is itself conditioned by prejudices that shape the understandings of the critical theorist. As Ricoeur reminds us, Habermas’s “prejudice against prejudice is rooted . . . in a prejudice against authority, which is identified too quickly with domination and violence.”\footnote{Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," 305.}

Gadamer’s hermeneutic theory, if it is to be true to itself, cannot become a new dogma. As Richard Rorty claims, "[t]o the extent that 'hermeneutics' becomes the name of a movement which tells the students 'These concepts are now old fashioned; use these new ones -- the recently discovered right ones -- instead,' that movement betrays its own origins."\footnote{Richard Rorty, "Hermeneutics, General Studies, and Teaching," in Classic and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Education, ed. Steven M. Cahn (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1997), 534.} If “hermeneutics” does become a new orthodoxy, it will eventually become as sterile as the tradition of positivistic scientism has become.

Nonetheless, if we take the universality of hermeneutics to be true, Rorty tells us,

if truth were simply a move in a language-game, then Hitler, or Stalin, or the Inner Party of 1984 could simply create their own evil game, their own evil linguistic practices, and thereby make their ghastly views true . . . [Gadamer’s] only reply to this argument is: . . . who can give a “rational refutation” of Hitler or Stalin?\footnote{Ibid., 526.}
This, I think is a mistaken view of Gadamer's hermeneutics. For this to be true, language would have to be a closed and static system when in fact it is ever evolving and permeable. As conversations across traditions and languages take place, if conversation is as Gadamer describes it, each interlocutor's understanding is transformed in the process. Reflection on power and coercion that might affect the conversation is not precluded from the conversation but becomes another object of its study and as such is influenced by the prejudices by both interlocutors that come into play in interrogating those subjects. Yet, as I will discuss next, Derrida takes issue with Gadamer's assertion that the unity of meaning assumed in conversation is even a possibility.

Derrida and Conversation

Derrida's criticism stands to Gadamer's with a similar concern of Levinas--that in Gadamer's hermeneutics the Other is assumed the *same* in so far as conversation takes us to an agreement in meaning. However, whether in contemporaneous spoken conversation or in the interpretation of a historically distantiated text, Derrida wants to place at the center of interpretation not agreement but rupture. As Michelfelder and Palmer state, Heidegger's recognition of the priority of language is developed by Gadamer "towards a stress on the unity of and in meaning . . . In Derrida, on the other hand, it leads toward underscorign the irreducible equivocation and undecidibility of meaning, even apparently toward the questioning of the concept of meaning itself."290

Although Gadamer is clear that hermeneutics is universal, he nonetheless also believes that

the linguisticality of the event of agreement in understanding [Verständigungsgeschehen], which is the play between people, signifies nothing less than an insurmountable barrier...language never touches on the last, insurmountable secret of the individual person”, expressed most clearly in the idea of German romanticism that the individual is ineffable.

That is, although "understanding is a fundamental categorical determination of human existence," the hermeneutic events that arise from understanding do not have the ability to determine what or who any individual is--regardless of whether we take an individual to have an essential self or not. Yet the constraint of language on our ability to interpret the world does not in any way imply either that the linguisticality of understanding remains static. Nor does it mean that to encounter other ways of thinking means a co-opting of the other's though into the totality of one's own language in the way a psychoanalyst might place one's claims into a pre-existing framework without ever considering that what the patient says might challenge that framework, or when a teacher "knows" what the pupil "really" needs through the en toto assimilation of the student's claims into the teachers understanding and not taking those claims at face value. To wit, Gadamer tells us his own contribution is the discovery that no 'language of metaphysics', not even what Heidegger called the 'language of metaphysics', represents an unbreakable constraint upon the thought if only the thinker allows himself to trust language; that is, if he engages in dialogue with other thinkers and other ways of thinking.

That is, one goes beyond one's understanding and the limits of any current constrain language plays on one's interpretation of the world precisely be engaging with those who

292 Ibid., 22.
293 c.f. Karl Popper's discussion of falsifiable in the social sciences.
294 Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation," 23.
think *differently*. As I explained earlier, what is required for hermeneutic experience as experience is precisely the radical difference of the other that pulls us up short. Gadamer says in "Text and Interpretation",

> What we find happening in speaking is not a mere reification of intended meaning, but an endeavor that it continually modifies itself, or better: a continually recurring temptation to engage oneself in something or to become involved with someone. But that means to expose oneself and to risk oneself. Genuinely speaking our mind has little to do with a mere explanation and assertion of our prejudices; rather, it risks our prejudices--it exposes oneself to one's own doubt and to the rejoinder of the other. Who has not had the experience--especially before the other whom we want to persuade--of how the reasons that one had for one's own view, and even the reasons that speak against one's own view rush into words. The mere presence of the other before whom we stand helps us to break up our own bias and narrowness, even before he opens his mouth to make a reply.\(^{295}\)

Most of what Gadamer writes in "Text and Interpretation" is a response to Derrida, and what we see in the essay is an example, in a sense, of what Gadamer is discussing. Gadamer attempts to articulate the reasons for his point of view, but we can also see him trying to address what he sees as the concerns of Derrida and French philosophy at that time. The exchange between Gadamer and Derrida exemplified their differences, because whereas Gadamer sought to engage in dialogue with Derrida about the topics of texts and interpretation, Derrida sought to deconstruct what Gadamer said, withholding any possibility of hearing Gadamer's claims. In short the exchange went something like this: Gadamer presents a fairly robust presentation of the project of philosophical hermeneutics as he conceived of it. Derrida responds with a three quick questions, focusing specifically on when Gadamer mentioned "good will", taking it, as Gadamer says in his response, to mean something entirely different than what he meant. That is, Derrida's question cannot be answered because its premise is a misread of Gadamer's

\(^{295}\) Ibid., 26.
claims. Gadamer attempts to keep the conversation alive by responding to Derrida's questions and clarifying what he meant. In response to Gadamer's clarification, Derrida responds to the former's acknowledgement in the Gadamer's first reading of their mutual interest in Heidegger by critiquing Heidegger's engagement with Nietzsche. Thus, Derrida does not continue the conversation by responding to Gadamer's defense. Rather, he just picks up another topic entirely.

It is difficult to assess Derrida's specific concerns or claims about Gadamer's hermeneutics, because his response in this exchange either was, in the first case, a gross misreading of Gadamer's claims; or, in the latter case, a complete misrecognition of Gadamer's presence. Derrida's actions were, in large part, an example of deconstruction; his actions presented his words and much as his words did. The point of deconstruction is not to find agreement or engage in conversation, but to dismantle the claims of another person. As Fred R. Dallmayr points out, "If there is a central focus or target of Derridean deconstruction it is the notion of an unfolding meaning or continuity of understanding." Thus any attempt to engage in conversation with deconstruction is to make a demand of it that it fundamentally opposes as well as to abdicate any power one has to speak for himself to the will of the deconstructionist. That is, a condition of engaging with deconstructionism requires the precondition that I negate the validity of


297 In doing so, rather than opening himself up to have his claims tested or acknowledging the fallibility of his claim, as when Gadamer clarified what he meant in light of Derrida's mis-read, he merely moved on, once again assuming a point of epistemological privilege wherein the deconstructionist knows more about what another claims than the other himself.

my own claims, and in taking up the precondition of deconstructionism I abolish the precondition of dialogue. As such, as I mentioned in the introduction, it would be naïve for me to try to engage the critique of deconstruction any further than this exposition insofar as deconstruction has any bearing on an inquiry that takes as a fundamental presupposition the possibility of a unity of meaning out of which the act of conversation springs.