

# Understanding and Language in Heidegger: Ex-sistence, Ontological Openness and Hermeneutics / *Compreensão e linguagem em Heidegger: ex-sistência, abertura ontológica e hermenêutica*

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## ABSTRACT

The article investigates in which way Heidegger's hermeneutics, mainly in his works *On the Way to Language*, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, and *Being and Time*, proposes that the act of understanding be understood by means of a fundamental ontology, in its facticity and historicity, as opposed to the scientific approach. It is concluded that understanding supposes a fundamental opening; the resurgence of the Greek's notion of truth; the circularity that is part of every act of understanding; the understanding of itself that is present in all philosophically primordial understanding and the notion of language as the home of being. It approaches language as beyond a mere communication tool, since the instrumental reason has led human beings to an unauthentic way or mode of being. Language, taken in an essential and primordial way, is constitutive of the historical and finite *Dasein*, as opposed to a logical-scientific propositional theory of language.

KEYWORDS: Heidegger; Language; Understanding; Truth; Finitude

## RESUMO

*O artigo investiga de que modo a hermenêutica heideggeriana, especialmente nas obras A caminho da linguagem, Os conceitos fundamentais da metafísica: mundo, finitude, solidão e Ser e tempo, propõe que se tome o ato da compreensão de algo, por meio de uma ontologia fundamental, em sua facticidade e historicidade, de maneira oposta à abordagem científica. Conclui-se que a compreensão supõe: uma abertura fundamental; uma retomada da noção de verdade grega; a circularidade que está envolvida em todo ato compreensivo; a compreensão de si que está presente em toda compreensão filosoficamente originária sobre algo e a noção de linguagem como a casa do ser. Trata-se de uma abordagem da linguagem para além de mero instrumento comunicativo, dado que a razão instrumental tem conduzido o homem para um modo inautêntico de ser. A linguagem, tomada de modo essencial e originário, é constituinte do próprio Dasein, histórico e finito, contraposta a uma teoria proposicional lógico-científica da linguagem.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Heidegger; Linguagem; Compreensão; Verdade; Finitude

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## Introduction

Our aim here is to understand in which sense Heidegger's hermeneutics is a kind of interpretation that is considered a primary act of understanding by means of a fundamental ontology. To accomplish this, it is necessary to investigate Heidegger's proposed approach, contrary to the scientific approach, to understand life by means of experiencing life itself, in its facticity and historicity, and to make possible the unveiling of being, assuming the existential structure of *being thrown* and of *projection*, of past and future.

First, Heidegger's concept of understanding will be analysed with an emphasis on *Being and Time*, approaching notions such as openness, truth and understanding of oneself that are proper to all philosophically primordial ways of understanding something. In a second moment, the notion of language as the place in which we inhabit, as the home of being, will be investigated. It is an approach to language as something beyond a mere communication tool. In a subsequent moment, and the last one, we deal with the circularity of understanding and how the hermeneutic circle, as a radical turning point, influenced hermeneutics in such a decisive manner.

### 1 UNDERSTANDING: Temporality, Historicity, Finitude and Openness

Understanding, even before having its meaning attributed for theoretical or pragmatic interests, has its primordial meaning attributed to its ontological nature, which is proper to human life (HEIDEGGER, 1996).<sup>1</sup> Understanding becomes an existential structure of *Dasein*, which is thrown into the world, left alone with its own existence, its own temporality:

If we interpret understanding as a fundamental existential, we see that this phenomenon is conceived as a fundamental mode of the *being* of Da-sein. In contrast, "understanding" in the sense of one possible kind of cognition among others, let us say distinguished from "explanation," must be interpreted along with that as an existential derivative of the

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<sup>1</sup> HEIDEGGER, M. *Being and Time*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State of New York Press, 1996.

primary understanding which constitutes the being of the there in general (HEIDEGGER, 1996, §31, p.134).<sup>2</sup>

In this manner, understanding is our mode of being, the mode by means of which we relate to our projection in the world, in temporality, existentially instantiating this *Dasein*'s mode of being that is the potentiality-for-being, as the only entity who has existence in the potentiality-for-being. This way, the concept of existence must be grasped by its etymological root, as *ex-sistere*, that is, being out, transposing the reality that is simply given, reassessing its openness:

*Understanding is the existential being of the ownmost potentiality of being of Da-sein in such a way that this being discloses in itself what its very being is about [...] As disclosing, understanding always concerns the whole fundamental constitution of being-in-the-world. As a potentiality of being, being-in is always a potentiality of being-in-the-world. Not only is the world, qua world, disclosed in its possible significance, but innerworldly beings themselves are freed, these beings are freed for their own possibilities (HEIDEGGER, 1996, §31, p.135).<sup>3</sup>*

Thus, understanding<sup>4</sup> becomes, also, openness to possibilities, a constitutive movement that happens within time. Nothing is completely understood, finished. There is always a non-stopping flow of understanding. Every understanding implies a practical knowledge, *an expertise* that is primarily – before being the goal of any science – the grounding of every act of understanding and of every search for knowledge: a knowledge that guides practice, brings along a power or a capacity of how to face life's various situations is the meaning of understanding. This meaning can be perceived more easily if we take into account the choice of the term *Verstehen*, which, in German, has this embedded meaning of applicability and is equivalent to saying that the one who understands something also knows how to deal with it.

The meaning of Phenomenology, in Heideggerian theory (1996),<sup>5</sup> assumes openness as a means to seeing things just as how they manifest themselves. The act of understanding begins when there is an interaction with something, when this something

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<sup>2</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>3</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>4</sup> Having as background Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics, fundamentally attached to Heideggerian philosophy, we use the word 'understanding' as equivalent to the word *Verstehen*, which both Heidegger and Gadamer use.

<sup>5</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

manifests itself. The openness to possibilities is the constitutive openness of understanding that, in Heidegger (1996),<sup>6</sup> is the proper condition for *Dasein* to project itself as possibilities. However, the essential openness to the hermeneutic conscience cannot be firstly conceived as a rational act. This openness, as Heidegger (1996)<sup>7</sup> says, is an affective disposition, one of the existential structures of *Dasein*. This shows that understanding is always an affective understanding – something that apostrophizes and affects us as soon as this something becomes visible. It is true openness to understanding, a moment in which we perceive that we are part of our tradition, when something challenges us, by means of language.

According to Heidegger, this openness reveals a project nature that is part of every understanding. The project nature of understanding constitutes the openness *Da* (there) of the *Sein* (being) that, as being-in-the-world, is a potentiality-for-being. This constant re-projecting opens up the possibility of new readings and interpretations that will always be subject to revisions and meaning productions. These re-workings are called interpretation by Heidegger (1996).<sup>8</sup> Thereby,

We shall call the development of understanding *interpretation*. In interpretation understanding appropriates what it has understood in an understanding way. In interpretation understanding does not become something different, but rather itself. Interpretation is existentially based in understanding, and not the other way around. Interpretation is not the acknowledgment of what has been understood, but rather the development of possibilities projected in understanding (HEIDEGGER, 1996, §32, p.139).<sup>9</sup>

Interpretation occurs from something previously given, a presupposition that is projected in the openness to be re-worked.

Therefore, Heidegger (1996)<sup>10</sup> states that the structure of anticipation of understanding is the condition of possibility for understanding. He names it fore-understanding. To him, interpretation is always interpretation of something previously understood. Therefore, Heidegger makes explicit the three previous structures of understanding when saying that “[t]he interpretation of something as something is

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<sup>6</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>7</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>8</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>9</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>10</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

essentially grounded in fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception. Interpretation is never a presuppositionless grasping of something previously given” (HEIDEGGER, 1996, §32, p.141).<sup>11</sup>

Philosophy and science deal with distinct modes of understanding. Philosophical questions query the own questioner and the search for the unveiling of something is, always and foremost, a question about the unveiling of the being who queries:

Philosophical knowledge of the essence of world is not and never can be an awareness of something present at hand. It is rather a comprehending disclosure of something in a specifically determined and directed questioning, which as a questioning never allows what is questioned to become something present at hand (HEIDEGGER, 1995, §70, p.292).<sup>12</sup>

This act of understanding implies the very being who understands in the understanding of the thing, and is related to the experience that is involved in the movement of understanding. Understanding modifies the being who understands: “Metaphysics is a questioning in which we inquire into beings as a whole, and inquire in such a way that in so doing we ourselves, the questioners, are thereby also included in the question, placed into question” (HEIDEGGER, 1995, §3, p.9).<sup>13</sup> The being who queries something also queries herself or himself. The unveiling of being happens by means of the experience of understanding in its finitude and historicity.

For Heidegger (1996),<sup>14</sup> temporality and historicity are constituents since essence is movement; it is temporal. The intent of subtracting temporality and finitude from language is naivety, delusion.

Heidegger (1996)<sup>15</sup> retrieves the understanding of the Greek’s *logos*, by means of the concept of *aletheia*, in which the concept of truth means unveiling: an act of bringing something that is veiled into light: “But everything depends on staying clear of any concept of truth construed in the sense of ‘correspondence’ or ‘accordance’

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<sup>11</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>12</sup> HEIDEGGER, M. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. Translated by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> For reference, see footnote 12.

<sup>14</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>15</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

[*Übereinstimmung*]. This idea is by no means the primary one in the concept of *aletheia*” (HEIDEGGER, 1996, §7b, p.29).<sup>16</sup>

Truth entails unveiling, finding out and falseness, veiling, covering up. This comprehension of a primordial *logos* also highlights its *oikos* meaning, that is, as the house in which being inhabits. Language as such is grasped in its primordial meaning that leads to unveiling.

For the Greeks, *logos* means language, discourse, but not *ratio*, as it has been traditionally translated as “reason, judgment, concept, definition, ground, relation. [...] Even if *logos* is understood in the sense of a statement, and statement as ‘judgment,’ this apparently correct translation can still miss the fundamental meaning [...]” (HEIDEGGER, 1996, §7b, p.28).<sup>17</sup>

According to Lawn (2006, p.59),<sup>18</sup> Heidegger’s existential hermeneutics, in emphasizing understanding’s fore-structure and redefining truth, made possible “[...] a revival of a more fundamental version of truthfulness [...].” Agreeing, Gadamer argues:

Heidegger made a striking insight possible for our generation as he retrieved the meaning of the Greek word that denotes truth. Heidegger was not the first to find out that *Aletheia* properly means unveiling. However, Heidegger taught us what it means, for the thinking of being, to say that truth has to be taken out of concealment [...]. There is a primordial link between Being and true speech (GADAMER, 1993, p.46).<sup>19</sup>

As he revives the Greek concept of *logos* from the concept of *aletheia*, Heidegger (1996)<sup>20</sup> reconsiders the essential ambiguity that is found in the authenticity of the concept of *logos*, and refers back to the Pre-Socratics, relating the notion of truth to tension between veiling and unveiling. He defends the idea that truth is primordial, comes before what is spoken, the concept, the propositional predication, the logical utterance:

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<sup>16</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>17</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>18</sup> LAWN, C. *Gadamer: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: CONTINUUM IPG, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> GADAMER, H.-G. *Wahrheit und Methode*. Band 2. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993. In original: “Es vermittelte daher eine schlagende Erkenntnis, als Heidegger in unserer Generation auf den Sinn des griechischen Wortes für Wahrheit zurückgriff. Das war keine erstmalige Erkenntnis Heideggers, daß *Aletheia* eigentlich Unverborgenheit heist. Aber Heidegger hat uns gelehrt, was es für das Denken des Seins bedeutete, daß es die Verborgenheit und die Verhohlenheit der Dinge ist, der die Wahrheit wie ein Raub abgewonnen werden muß [...]. Es besteht also ein ursprünglicher Zusammenhang zwischen wahren Sein und wahrer Rede.”

<sup>20</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

The being held in fore-having, for example the hammer, is initially at hand as a useful thing. If this being is the “object” of a statement, as soon as we begin the statement, a transformation in the fore-having is already brought about beforehand. Something *at hand with which* we have to do or perform something, turns into something “about which” the statement that points it out is made (HEIDEGGER, 1996, §33, p.147; emphasis in original).<sup>21</sup>

Proposition conceptualizes that with which the being was previously dealing or in contact. Therefore, proposition aims at something that was not being aimed at before. The thing manifests itself in a primordial way in this prior moment, when it is being dealt-with, a moment, therefore, prior to conceptualization.

According to Gadamer (2004, p.296), “[...] only when Heidegger gave understanding an ontological orientation by interpreting it as an ‘existential’ and when he interpreted *Dasein*’s mode of being in terms of time,”<sup>22</sup> temporal distance could be thought of and understood. It was with the overcoming of the naivety of historicism<sup>23</sup> that Heidegger (1996)<sup>24</sup> reconsidered hermeneutics’ historical situation, the historicity of the interpreter in the act of understanding, making time her or his own foundation.

## 2 EXPERIENCE and Language’s Infinite Search for Language Itself

One of the main philosophical problems for Heidegger (1982,<sup>25</sup> 1995,<sup>26</sup> 1996,<sup>27</sup> 2001<sup>28</sup>) is the question of language’s possibilities. According to him (1996), there is no

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<sup>21</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>22</sup> GADAMER, H.-G. *Truth and Method*. Translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. London: Continuum, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> According to Gadamer (1993, p.64) (For reference, see footnote 19), “The naivety of what is commonly called historicism is that it avoids such reflection and relies in its methodology, putting aside its own historicity.” From: “Die Naivität des sogenannten Historismus besteht darin, daß er sich einer solchen Reflexion entzieht und im Vertrauen auf die Methodik seines Verfahrens seine eigene Geschichtlichkeit vergißt.” Historicism’s naive presupposition was to demand transposing oneself to the “spirit” of the age, to demand thinking with the concepts and frameworks of the age and not of oneself and, as such, imposing historical objectivity.

<sup>24</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>25</sup> HEIDEGGER, M. *On the Way to Language*. Translated by Peter D. Hertz. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1982.

<sup>26</sup> For reference, see footnote 12.

<sup>27</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>28</sup> HEIDEGGER, M. *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols – Conversations – Letters*. Translated by Franz Mayr and Richard Askay. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001.

human relationship without language, and communication is only one of its multiple possibilities. In *Being and Time*, hermeneutics sharply projects itself onto the central stage of philosophical reflection. Language, as it speaks about the world, is seen as that which creates it and not as a tool of the conscience used to say what is being thought. Language becomes condition of possibility of being in the world and of the world itself. According to Heidegger (1982, p.75),<sup>29</sup>

We speak and speak about language. What we speak of, language, is always ahead of us. Our speaking merely follows language constantly. Thus we are continually lagging behind what we first ought to have overtaken and taken up in order to speak about it. Accordingly, when we speak of language we remain entangled in a speaking that is persistently inadequate.

Gadamer points out that, stemming from Heidegger's thinking, language assumes a central role and that, with Heidegger: "[w]hat happens in the phenomenon of language overcomes the reflection of transcendental philosophy and surpasses the concept of a transcendental subjectivity as the ground of utmost conclusions" (GADAMER, 1993, p.428).<sup>30</sup>

The problem of interpreting language as a set of demonstrative propositions occurs when this interpretation is viewed as the only true one. As Heidegger (2001)<sup>31</sup> states, this is one of language's possibilities, but not the only one nor the main one. Logical language does not apprehend language's manifoldness; it does not even touch the most essential problem: the question of being. Science and technology ended up veiling the fundamental question of being, and this is one of the reasons why Heidegger (2001) denounces the forgetfulness of being:

According to natural science, the human being can be identified only as something present-at-hand in nature. [...] From the projection of the natural sciences, we can see the human being only as an entity of nature, that is, we claim to define the human being's being utilizing a method, never designed to include its special nature (HEIDEGGER, 2001, p.26).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> For reference, see footnote 25.

<sup>30</sup> For reference, see footnote 19. In original: "Was im Geschehen der Sprache geschieht, übergreift offenbar die transzendentalphilosophische Reflexion und hebt den Begriff einer transzendentalen Subjektivität als des Bodens aller letzten Aufweisung grundsätzlich auf."

<sup>31</sup> For reference, see footnote 28.

<sup>32</sup> For reference, see footnote 28.



There is, therefore, a criticism against tradition and its conception of language and truth – conception tainted by an ontotheological reverie – bringing up the notion of finitude: being is time.

Thus, the existential analytic foundationally inquires language's structural possibility in its totality, which is essentially opposed to investigating elements of a proposition, such as subject, copula, and attribute. It is about a fundamental inquiry that asks about the particular within a totality, highlighting the importance of the context in which everything is, analysing the relation of every and each thing to the context in which it is embedded. This analysis is contrary to the intention of analysing concepts isolated from the context, hoping that these are immovable and eternal.

Truth cannot be found in a declarative proposition which expresses a subject, a copula and a predicate, even if this proposition is true, because “[t]he manifold character of the essence of being can therefore never be read off from the copula and its meanings at all” (HEIDEGGER, 1995, § 73, p.341).<sup>33</sup>

It is while experiencing<sup>34</sup> language that the primordial access to language itself occurs, because “we are already letting language, from within language, speak to us, in language, of itself, saying its nature” (HEIDEGGER, 1982, p.85).<sup>35</sup> This experience assumes language as the home of being instead of a communication tool:

But this, to undergo an experience with language, is something else again than to gather information about language. [...] Of late, the scientific and philosophical investigation of languages is aiming ever more resolutely at the production of what is called “metalanguage” [...]. Metalinguistics is the metaphysics of the thoroughgoing technicalization of all languages into the sole operative instrument of interplanetary information (HEIDEGGER, 1982, p.58).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> For reference, see footnote 12.

<sup>34</sup> “To experience something means to attain it along the way, by going on a way. To undergo an experience with something means that this something, which we reach along the way in order to attain it, itself pertains to us, meets and makes its appeal to us, in that it transforms us into itself.” (HEIDEGGER, 1982, pp.73-74) (For reference, see footnote 25).

<sup>35</sup> For reference, see footnote 25.

<sup>36</sup> For reference, see footnote 25.

From the work *Being and Time* on, Heidegger reallocates the questions of understanding and searching for truth, which were previously branches of the theory of knowledge, to existential grounds.

It is relevant highlighting that Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology, alongside the analysis of *Dasein*'s historicity, had the purpose of rethinking the question of being, and as such, it was not Heidegger's aim to design a theory of *Geisteswissenschaften* nor to overcome historicism's *aporias* (GADAMER, 2004).<sup>37</sup> Human existence constitutes itself insofar as language is experienced. This is an insurmountable experience to human beings, out of which no thought or communication is possible. This experience alone is responsible for making possible human coexistence, understanding and major consensus:

Gadamer learned from Heidegger how to read the Aristotelian definition that "man is endowed with *logos*" not as "the entity that has reason" (*rationale* animal), but as "the entity that has language." *Logos*, as language, cannot be conceived instrumentally. [...] As a being that has language, man constitutes and experiences himself in language's mode of being [...]. Our thoughts and knowledge, feelings and imagination, our willingness and desires are all marked by a linguistic understanding of the world. And, "as such, language is the essential mark of our finitude. It always surpasses us. Cognition is not a standard for measuring one's being" (ROHDEN, 2002, pp.225-226).<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, language ceases to be a tool and becomes a constitutive principle that constitutes meaning. It is not a tool, which we can master by using it over a period of time. It makes possible our thinking and understanding of the world; it is our link to the world. To view language as the home in which being inhabits, in a first and foremost way, is to refuse any attempt to control it. For Heidegger (1982), authentic language manifests itself rarely,

when we cannot find the right word for something that concerns us, carries us away, oppresses or encourages us. Then we leave unspoken

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<sup>37</sup> For reference, see footnote 22.

<sup>38</sup> In original: "Foi com Heidegger que Gadamer aprendeu a ler a definição aristotélica "o homem é o ser vivo dotado de logos" não como "o ente vivo que possui razão" (animal rationale), mas "o ente que possui linguagem". O logos, enquanto linguagem, não pode ser mais concebido instrumentalmente. [...] Enquanto ser que possui logos, o homem constitui-se e experiencia-se no modo de ser linguagem [...] Nosso pensar e conhecer, nosso sentir e imaginar, nosso querer e desejar estão sempre impregnados pela compreensão linguística do mundo, e, "neste sentido, a linguagem é a verdadeira pegada de nossa finitude. Sempre nos ultrapassa. A consciência do indivíduo não é o critério para medir seu ser."

what we have in mind and, without rightly giving it thought, undergo moments in which language itself has distantly and fleetingly touched us with its essential being (1982, p.59).<sup>39</sup>

Thus, language exists in its own absence, at that moment of hesitation, when we take time to find the proper word, at silence – not when we present an automatic, memorized, repeated response. Language is a non-stopping search for language, for the non-said that is not ready, developed, mastered yet. It is an endless *on the way*, within the scope of what is previous, of what precedes.

### 3 LANGUAGE and the Ontological Circle of Understanding

Heidegger (1996)<sup>40</sup> demonstrates the circular character of understanding based on the uninterrupted movement of understanding and interpreting. He radically redirects the hermeneutic circle, influencing hermeneutics decisively. Heidegger, therefore, was the first to deal with the hermeneutic circle not from an epistemological perspective, but from the perspective of a universal method to apprehend meaning.

The Heideggerian description of the hermeneutic circle (1996)<sup>41</sup> makes a new sense of the circular structure of understanding, existentially, highlighting understanding's ontological nature. Thus, it clearly shows that this circularity of understanding is not primarily a demand for its *praxis*, but an account of the very unfolding that is done by comprehensive interpretation. "The point of Heidegger's hermeneutical reflection is not so much to prove that there is a circle as to show that this circle possesses an ontologically positive significance" (GADAMER, 2004, p.269).<sup>42</sup>

Heidegger (1996),<sup>43</sup> in *Being and Time*, elaborates the hermeneutics of facticity by means of the temporal analytic of human existence (*Dasein*). Facticity is *Dasein*'s mode of being, which finds its possibility of revelation in time: "Thus the structure of temporality appeared as ontologically definitive of subjectivity. But it was more than that. Heidegger's thesis was: being itself is time" (GADAMER, 2004, p.248).<sup>44</sup> With this,

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<sup>39</sup> For reference, see footnote 25.

<sup>40</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>41</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>42</sup> For reference, see footnote 22.

<sup>43</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>44</sup> For reference, see footnote 22.

Heidegger (1996)<sup>45</sup> finally overcomes modern philosophical subjectivism and all metaphysics that apprehends the meaning of being from the present as something given, immediate. For him, understanding does not depend on a method but is *Dasein*'s own mode of being.

Therefore, based on the analysis of human existence, Heidegger (1996)<sup>46</sup> retrieves the most essential meaning of the circle of understanding. When understanding, the circle of the whole and its parts does not disappear; instead, it reaches its authentic fulfilment:

What is decisive is not to get out of the circle, but to get in it in the right way. This circle of understanding is not a circle in which any random kind of knowledge operates, but it is rather the expression of the existential fore-structure of Da-sein itself. The circle must not be degraded to a *vitiosum*, not even to a tolerated one. A positive possibility of the most primordial knowledge is hidden in it which, however, is only grasped in a genuine way when interpretation has understood that its first, constant, and last task is not to let fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception be given to it by chance ideas and popular conceptions, but to guarantee the scientific theme by developing these in terms of the things themselves (HEIDEGGER, 1996, §32, p.143).<sup>47</sup>

Every interpreter is already immersed in what she or he means to understand. It is not possible to deny oneself and nullify previous opinions. It is not possible to get out of the hermeneutic circle. In the same way, it is frivolous to believe that our presuppositions and expectations will be confirmed in the *things-themselves*. It is important to be aware that a right interpretation must be protected from the arbitrariness of naive intuitions, from ordinary opinions and irreflexive habits of thinking. Thus, the interpreter must be attentive to things themselves.

When understanding, at each revision of the previous project, it is possible to undertake another project of meaning so that, as possibilities are interpreted, new elaborations can arise until a more cohesive unity of meaning is confirmed. Interpretation from a previous conception must always be at disposal, that is, open to substitutions of new projects, new elaborations, searching for concepts that are more adequate. Understanding is an infinite process, for there will always be new possible interpretations

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<sup>45</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>46</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>47</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

that can arise with the interpreter's knowledge at hand, in accordance with her or his historical time.

Therefore, apprehending the fundamental meaning of the hermeneutic circle is not only knowing that the anticipation of understanding is always part of the interpretation project. More than that, it is making sure that the anticipation has its origin and validity put to the test. For understanding to be achieved, ensuring its scientific trait, it is necessary for the interpreter not to approach what she or he intends to understand in a direct, arbitrary and irreflexive manner, but to examine her or his opinions concerning their legitimacy.

About this, Stein (2010, p.66)<sup>48</sup> states that: “[i]t is a circularity in which we understand ourselves and understand being, which results from our openness, our revelation.” This makes evident the relation of reciprocity with regard to the openness of understanding. We only understand ourselves when we understand the other, and as we understand the other, we understand ourselves. Being open is being revealed in understanding; it is being open to the truth that emerges from this relation of openness. Openness between the world and us is carried out insofar the world is our horizon of meaning and our means to openness.

When we understand, based on the relation between what is familiar and unfamiliar, we stand before the true hermeneutic task:

Hermeneutics must assume that whoever wishes to understand is bound up with the thing that comes to the fore with tradition. She or he is linked with or is attained to the tradition from which the transmitted text speaks. On the other hand, the hermeneutic conscience knows that it cannot be linked with that in an unquestionable and obvious manner, as is the case of an uninterrupted tradition. There is really a polarity between familiarity and unfamiliarity on which the task of hermeneutics is based [...] [It must be understood] in a truly hermeneutic way, that is, on view of what is said: language with which tradition apostrophizes us, the saga that it tells us. The position between unfamiliarity and familiarity at which tradition stands before us is therefore the *in-between* – between distant objectivity, referred to by history, and belongingness to a tradition. This *in-between* is hermeneutics true place (GADAMER, 1993, pp.62-63).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> In original: “É uma circularidade em que nós nos compreendemos e compreendemos o ser, resultante de nossa abertura, revelação.”

<sup>49</sup> For reference, see footnote 19. IN original: “Die Hermeneutik muß davon ausgehen, daß wer verstehen will, mit der Sache, die mit der Überlieferung zur Sprache kommt, verbunden ist und an die Tradition Anschluß hat oder Anschluß gewinnt, aus der die Überlieferung spricht. Auf der anderen Seite weiß das

The circularity of understanding cannot be objective nor subjective, even though our presuppositions are acts of subjectivity. In spite of the fact that our fore-understanding is the condition for understanding and is involved in the process from the beginning, it is not possible to infer that we exclusively own it. Instead, our fore-understanding results from our close relation to tradition, which is under continuous development, something that is formed and transformed as we advance our understanding.

Thus, as we understand the place of tradition, in which we participate, we understand ourselves. Consequently, understanding's true possibility of achievement occurs when the validity of our prejudices is constantly put to the test, highlighting and bringing them inside the event of understanding, making it possible for that which is historically distinct to use its otherness.

In this relationship, which constitutes itself as self-understanding, understanding is achieved. Heidegger (1996)<sup>50</sup> elaborates the task of historical conscience, describing the movement of understanding's structures and revealing the ontological nature of the hermeneutic circle (TESTA, 2004).

Another important contribution of Heidegger (1996)<sup>51</sup> was the question of belonging, as a precondition to the primordial meaning of historical interest. It is from this meaning that the problem of historicity develops more radically. With the fore-structure of understanding, legitimacy is conceded to historical knowledge; that is, for the first time historical knowledge becomes conscious of its own ontological grounding. "[...] historicity of human Dasein in its expectancy and its forgetting is the condition of our being able to re-present the past" (GADAMER, 2004, p.252).<sup>52</sup> Therefore, we do not interpret the world as a *tabula rasa*; we are historical beings, who belong to a tradition that undisputedly influences us.

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hermeneutische Bewußtsein, daß es mit dieser Sache nicht in der Weise einer fraglos selbstverständlichen Einigkeit verbunden sein kann wie sie für das ungebrochene Fortleben einer Tradition gilt. Es besteht wirklich eine Polarität von Vertrautheit und Fremdheit, auf die sich die Aufgabe der Hermeneutik gründet [...] sondern wahrhaft hermeneutisch [zu verstehen ist], d. h. im Hinblick auf ein Gesagtes: die Sprache, mit der die Überlieferung uns anredet, die Sage, die sie uns sagt. Die Stellung zwischen Fremdheit und Vertrautheit, die die Überlieferung für uns hat, ist also das Zwischen zwischen der historisch gemeinten, abständigen Gegenständlichkeit und der Zugehörigkeit zu einer Tradition. In diesem Zwischen ist der wahre Ort der Hermeneutik."

<sup>50</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>51</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>52</sup> For reference, see footnote 22.

We always understand and interpret the world from fore-understanding. We create it from our own point of view, from the position we take towards it. Even if this understanding is not completely conscious, we involuntarily adopt a mode of being that Heidegger (1996)<sup>53</sup> names hermeneutic.

It is hermeneutic because *Dasein*, through its practical involvements in the already culturally interpreted world, is ceaselessly projecting into the future whilst rooted in tacit understandings in the present and the past. Human existence is not trapped in the fore-understandings because they are condition on which we seek to understand the world in a more explicit self-conscious way (LAWN, 2006, p.56).<sup>54</sup>

As Heidegger (1996)<sup>55</sup> describes understanding's fore-structure, he also shows an important aspect of the alleged reading of that which is at hand, that is, the reading of something other than the interpreter, the other as a text, a tradition, or someone who is apart from the interpreter. It is necessary to account for the open nature of a hermeneutically formed conscience, which, when the voice of the other is heard, relates *to* this other. However, this relationship must make possible for the interpreter to consider her or his own presuppositions; thus, that which is different and awkward can make use of its own otherness. As the interpreter becomes conscious of her or his prejudices, she or he stops them from exerting blind guidance, making possible the authentic openness to the text, allowing it to present itself as the other part of the relationship and, finally, enabling its truth to become exposed, bringing it closer to the dialogue.

The interpreter's belonging to her or his object provides, as Heidegger (1996)<sup>56</sup> shows, a legitimacy that was not achieved by the reflections of the historical school. He showcased that this expression of meaning is hermeneutics' task. Time, the cornerstone of the historicity of the interpreter in the understanding act, enables us to solve hermeneutics' critical problem, i.e., to "[...] separate in advance the productive prejudices that enable understanding from the prejudices that hinder it and lead to misunderstandings" (GADAMER, 2004, p.295),<sup>57</sup> halting individual prejudices, thus enabling the recognition of legitimate prejudices.

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<sup>53</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>54</sup> For reference, see footnote 18.

<sup>55</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>56</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>57</sup> For reference, see footnote 22.

## Final Considerations

A self-sufficient and arrogant reason associated with the allegedly flawless method of natural sciences, clarified by Enlightenment, has been leading human beings to an unauthentic mode of being. Modern instrumental reasoning made the world scientifically objective and transformed man into a manipulated object. Gradually, human society has become the victim of its own doings, becoming gradually incapable of hearing and seeing what is essential to life.

Disagreeing with the epistemological model and its postulate of knowledge legitimacy, Heidegger (1996)<sup>58</sup> challenges the pretension of the scientific method of natural sciences as the only legitimate means of accessing the truth, and awakens us to a truth that is below and beyond that which is guaranteed by guiding reasoning.

Within hermeneutics, knowing the truth becomes experiencing the truth. This experience, which enables us to reach for the truth and to know and understand the world and ourselves, is the hermeneutic experience as authentic openness to the other. This experience is ontological since it is what we experience before any rational and reflexive activity. It is like a rapture experience about which we cannot speak because words do not follow our thinking.

Such experience does not correspond to our expectations, agreeing with them. It is not viewed as a scientific experiment, in which meaning is associated with repetition, producing the same results repeatedly. It frustrates our expectations and, in doing so, makes us realise that something is not how we expected it to be. It is not seen as a mistake that can be pinpointed and corrected, but as an understanding that this represents a new horizon of meaning and purview, which inexorably transforms us.

Every act of understanding linguistically stems from what we are, our stance of openness to the other, who is different from me and confronts me unpredictably and entices me to think about and discern the issue at hand.

According to Heidegger (1996),<sup>59</sup> when we are not in an inauthentic mode of being, the fundamental mode of understanding implies taking language as constituent of

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<sup>58</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>59</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.



the historical and finite *Dasein*, as a place in which given and memorized language is not – a place where language hints at its own happening, its unveiling. It is creativity's most authentic place.

Logical and scientific languages are far from what is original and primordial: the question of being. That is because a declarative proposition presumes categorical determinations and a position that explains, controls, and reduces the entity. Such position is improper and unauthentic when considered to be the only right way of approaching language.

Thus, the hermeneutics of facticity implies questioning, in which understanding is understanding of something and self-understanding – that is, the understanding of the *Dasein* who questions. Such understanding, in its most authentic mode, happens, primarily, when something is dealt with. Heidegger's (1996)<sup>60</sup> hermeneutical phenomenology brings into light the notion of *logos* as unveiling, highlighting its belonging to language as the place in which humans inhabit in their finiteness.

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<sup>60</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

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