

Paul Ricoeur's and Hans-Georg Gadamer's Diverging Reflections on Recognition

David Vessey

Grand Valley State University

As the story goes, Hans-Georg Gadamer was furious at Paul Ricoeur for not backing him in his debate with Jürgen Habermas. Gadamer thought everyone sympathetic to hermeneutics would see that Habermas was confused in thinking hermeneutic understanding was insufficiently critical. Yet instead of joining Gadamer against Habermas, Ricoeur sought a middle ground that satisfied neither. Although siding primarily with Gadamer, Ricoeur took more seriously than Gadamer Habermas' criticisms and argued for a dialectic of engagement and distanciation, a dialectic toggling between the hermeneutics of meaning and the hermeneutics of suspicion. Gadamer thought all that was required was a historically informed, careful phenomenology of the essential place of reason in linguistic understanding. He thought that once reason and linguistic understanding are separated and isolated, they would never be properly united again, not even dialectically.

Their difference with respect to Habermas is indicative of much of their philosophical approaches. Ricoeur is nothing if not synoptic. He takes in all views from any tradition he can understand and he works hard to assign them their proper place. Seemingly intractable differences often turn out to be only differences in emphasis in Ricoeur's hands. Personal identity: is it the identity of a person over time, or is the way a person identifies him or herself—*idem* or *ipse*? Both are correct, but each is only half the story. Meaning—is it about the continuity of tradition or the critical overcoming of tradition? Both, we need a hermeneutics of meaning and a hermeneutics of suspicion. Gadamer, is a reader not a synthesizer. He certainly

holds expansive views about language, rationality, art, and morality, though they tend to arise only in the process of reading other's views. That's why it can be so difficult to detangle Gadamer's views from those views upon which he is commenting, and why it is so difficult to excerpt a selection of Gadamer's views for collections in Continental philosophy. Ricoeur reads to find a thinker's place in the overall picture; Gadamer reads to find out what questions he can learn to ask. Gadamer is also more thematically focused—he is concerned above all with understanding fully what happens when we understand. What happens when we engage a text, another person, or a work of art in dialogue? Gadamer is concerned with understanding the place of language in human understanding, and with understanding the place of the humanities in contemporary life, however his reflections have neither the scope nor the breadth of Ricoeur's ambitious program. Ricoeur seeks to incorporate all reasonable positions into a synthetic dialectical whole; Gadamer shows little interest in philosophical positions or traditions that he thinks have gone astray. In this respect, Gadamer is a student of Heidegger's approach to the history of philosophy; Ricoeur a student of Hegel's. Even though philosophically, the closest hermeneut to Gadamer is Ricoeur, yet comparisons between them are never as fruitful as one might expect. It should be that they share so much that focusing on their differences highlights the nuanced ways one might approach a philosophical problem. But it rarely works that way, in part because they are such different thinkers.

As a synoptic philosopher committed to dialectic, Ricoeur's rival is Hegel, and should come as no surprise that he has written comparatively little on Hegel nor has drawn extensively on Hegelian concepts. In the third volume of Time and Narrative he even hints that Hegel should be "renounced", but in the end he could not ignore the important impact Hegel's account of recognition, Anerkennung, has had on twentieth century European thought, first in France

through Alexandre Kojève's Introduction to the Reading of Hegel¹ and more recently in Germany through Axel Honneth's work on the Struggle for Recognition.² Comparing Ricoeur's and Gadamer's discussions of recognition provides an ideal place for comparing their different philosophical approaches. Ricoeur works to present all the various meanings of reconnaissance and then uses that taxonomy to situate the contemporary debate. He eventually shows how a core understanding of recognition in terms of agape love escapes some of the concerns raised against accounts of recognition. It is a synoptic understanding—a conceptual mapping that grants everyone their piece of conceptual soil to till, but no one, except Ricoeur himself, a claim to the whole. Gadamer says virtually nothing about recognition—Anerkennung—in its technical philosophical sense. I say “virtually” nothing as it played a fairly significant role in Truth and Method,³ making an appearance in two key sections. (Coincidentally or not, it appears in the two sections most relevant for his debates with Habermas.) But after Truth and Method is vanishes from his technical, conceptual vocabulary. It seems he decided that recognition, as it functioned technically in Truth and Method, had no important role to play in an adequately articulated phenomenology of linguistic understanding as exemplified by dialogue. Where Ricoeur seeks to preserve as much as possible the legitimacy of the various philosophical meanings of recognition, Gadamer abandons the term. To bring Ricoeur and Gadamer into dialogue, then, will require us to understand why Gadamer thinks a phenomenology of recognition is not the path to understanding dialogue. What we will find is that the differences revolve around the two competing ancient meanings of love—agape and philia.

Ricoeur on Recognition

Ricoeur's The Course of Recognition⁴ explores the range of possible philosophical meanings of reconnaissance. He starts with twenty-three different meanings in the Dictionnaire de la langue française and moves to three general categories in Grand Robert de la langue française. The three are, roughly, recognition as grasping with the mind, recognition as accepting as true, and recognition as acknowledging a debt by showing gratitude. He distills these down to three interconnected philosophical motifs, moving from the more active to the more passive. There is the recognition of something as something in coming to know it; there is self-recognition; and there is being recognized. "Recognition as Identification," "Recognizing Oneself," and "Mutual Recognition," are the titles of the three chapters of the book. The discussions are richly detailed and draw on a wealth of material and a lifetime of reflection that few others than Ricoeur could sustain.

For bringing Gadamer and Ricoeur into conversation, the most important part is his third chapter, where he takes up the Hegelian concept of Anerkennung especially as it is explicated in Alex Honneth's writings. Ricoeur reads Hegel as providing a response to Hobbes for whom all recognition is the recognition of struggle and the threat of death. Hegel's account of recognition shows how we are connected to others at a more basic level than the level of the social contract and, if there is going to be any sort of contract, it can only be sustained on the back of values which we must always already share. A contract can neither be the original nor the sole source of social norms. Likewise, our relationship to the other cannot solely be one of struggle. In Hegel's writings in the Jena period (as opposed to, for example, Hegel's later Philosophy of Right) Ricoeur finds more promise, for Hegel's early account links recognition and self-reflection, moves from injustice to respect, and makes explicit the levels of institutionalization involved in mutual recognition, from the interpersonal to the political.

Ricoeur seeks an account of mutual recognition that still takes seriously the “original dissymmetry that widens the gap between the one and the other.”⁵ If we start with the original dissymmetry, as he claims phenomenology does, then we have the problem of explaining how mutuality and reciprocity are possible. Edmund Husserl and Emmanuel Levinas are Ricoeur’s models for mistaken starting points. Starting from the Ego pole (Husserl) or the absolute Other (Levinas) each must find a way to “account for a reciprocity between unequal partners,”⁶ something they accomplish only with difficulty, if at all. One way to see what Ricoeur is doing is to see him as Hegel to Levinas and Husserl’s Hobbes. Levinas and Husserl focus on the originary asymmetry between self and other. Ricoeur helps us see how this asymmetry can only presuppose a deeper affinity modeled on recognition.

After discussing Honneth’s views and ways that the struggle for recognition could open up possibilities for self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem, Ricoeur raises the question of whether all forms of recognition are best understood as struggles. His concern is that the account of a struggle without end amounts to a version of Hegel’s “Bad Infinity.” He writes,

To ward off this worry about a new “unhappy consciousness” and the consequences that follow from it, I propose to take into consideration our actual experience of what I shall call states of peace. ... [Such] experiences of peaceful recognition cannot take the place of a resolution of the very perplexities raised by the concept of struggle, still less of a resolution of the conflicts in question. The certitude that accompanies states of peace offers instead a confirmation that the moral motivation for struggles is not illusory. ... The thesis I want to argue for can be summed up as follows: The alternative to the idea of struggle in the process of mutual recognition is to be sought in peaceful experiences of mutual recognition,

based on symbolic mediations as exempt from the juridical as from the commercial order of exchange.⁷

Ricoeur's focus is on agape, different from Aristotelian philia and Platonic eros and a suspicious category for recognition since it seems to lack the mutuality that Ricoeur claims is the focus of the chapter. Agape is a gift of love. It is not in any way connected to justice, as Aristotle's account of philia is, nor is it an expression of a kind of lack, as Plato's account of eros is. It is pure generosity, pure gift, freed from any expectation of recompense, "without any regard for the obligation thereby engendered to give something in return."⁸ The gift of agape inaugurates gratitude, which, in French, is often expressed by reconnaissance, recognition. So by focusing on agape as that which escapes the logic of the gift, Ricoeur connects his discussion of mutual recognition with the third meaning of the term derived from the dictionaries: recognition as an expression of thanks.

Gadamer's Abandonment of Anerkennen

In the course of his Course of Recognition Ricoeur mentions Gadamer's discussion of the recognition of the authority of a tradition; Ricoeur calls this "the recognition of superiority." But then admits that such an account of authority "constitutes a thorn in the flesh of an enterprise like my own, deliberately limited to reciprocal forms of mutual recognition."⁹ It's true as we shall see that in Truth and Method Gadamer speaks of recognition in non-reciprocal terms, but we should not conclude that Gadamer lacks an account of mutuality analogous to Ricoeur's—one that neither denies an "originary dissymmetry" nor reduces relations to struggles nor succumbs to the logic of the gift—, we should just not seek in Gadamer's account an account of mutual

recognition. In fact, I will argue, Gadamer sees what relying on talk of recognition misses and rightly turns to other conceptual resources, ultimately to philia as the proper model of the mutual relations between persons.¹⁰

Throughout his writings Gadamer uses versions of anerkennen in its everyday sense of acknowledgement or recognition, and, of course, in its philosophical sense when discussing Hegel and Jean-Paul Sartre. However it plays a distinctive technical, philosophical role in his writings on philosophical hermeneutics up to and including Truth and Method. Gadamer gets from Karl Löwith the idea that Anerkennung is the proper way to characterize I-Thou social ontologies. His 1929 review of Löwith's Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen contains the densest set of references to Anerkennung outside his essay on Hegel's account of self-consciousness.¹¹ Gadamer cites this book for its influence on his pivotal discussion in Truth and Method of three ways of treating others as Thous. Yet despite his life-long friendship with Löwith, Gadamer moves away from adopting an I-Thou account of intersubjectivity and at the same time abandon's the terminology of anerkennen as a technical term. We'll want to see why he rejects such I-Thou accounts on intersubjectivity, and why these arguments apply equally well against the usefulness of speaking of recognition.

There are two notable places in Truth and Method where Gadamer speaks of recognition, Anerkennung, and both are significant for his interaction with Ricoeur. They are seldom read together, but need to be. The first comes in his "rehabilitation of authority and tradition" from the Enlightenment's "prejudice against prejudice."¹² He wants to argue that granting a text the authority to teach us something is not an abdication of reason, even though it is a kind of acceptance on authority of the legitimacy of the text. Gadamer would never deny that there is a difference between accepting something on authority and accepting something on the basis of

reason— “[t]he Enlightenment's distinction between faith in authority and using one's own reason is, in itself, legitimate”¹³—his concern is that when learning something new we cannot solely rely on reason. After all, in such cases our reason is itself being informed. He suggests the Enlightenment failed to understand that authority could be “a source of truth.” He writes:

[T]he authority of persons is ultimately based not on the subjection and abdication of reason but on an act of acknowledgment [Anerkennung] and knowledge [Erkenntnis]—the knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence—i.e., it has priority over one's own. This is connected with the fact that authority cannot actually be bestowed but is earned, and must be earned if someone is to lay claim to it. It rests on acknowledgment [Anerkennung] and hence on an act of reason itself which, aware of its own limitations, trusts to the better insight of others. Authority in this sense, properly understood, has nothing to do with blind obedience to commands. ... Thus, acknowledging [Anerkennung] authority is always connected with the idea that what the authority says is not irrational and arbitrary but can, in principle, be discovered to be true.¹⁴

An authority becomes an authority in virtue of his or her superior rationality, and it is this rationality we recognize when we accept as true what an authority tells us. Because being and authority is connected to rationality, what the authority teaches is in principle confirmable by us. Not only is the authority's rationality what we recognize, but the recognition itself is an act of reason. It is always rational to take the word of someone more knowledgeable and rational than oneself. Importantly for the topic at hand, Anerkennung, according to Gadamer, is essentially and exclusively rational, both in what justifies it and what it acknowledges.

The second place Gadamer speaks of Anerkennung in his discussion of three ways in which we might engage a text on analogy with three ways we might treat other as a Thou. Gadamer has just completed a discussion of Hegel's theory of experience in order to stress that all experiences are also self-experiences—we experience the world self-consciously. Gadamer concludes that the more experienced we are the more open we are to the possibility of finding truth elsewhere. Openness to others comes in the form of putting ourselves in the position to learn from them. Here his discussion of tradition converges with his discussion of experience. Openness to the truth of others and tradition is the rational response to the self-awareness that accompanies all experience.

Since all experience has the form of revealing finitude, so must hermeneutic experience, the experience of an interpretive understanding of a text. Gadamer considers three ways of being open to texts and others as Thous. The preliminary significance of speaking of texts or others as Thous is to highlight that we share a relation to them. We belong to them in the sense that an address requires an addressee to be successful. We could talk about someone without engaging him or her, but we couldn't address someone without succeeding to engage him or her. An address is not something that can be achieved by only one person. It invites a relation and succeeds only through that relation.

The first way of treating someone as a Thou lies in understanding them as manifesting scientifically predictable behavior. We see them as experimental subjects. Citing Kant's maxim against treating humanity never solely as a means Gadamer claims this way of treating others is immoral. It is simply using their responses for our purposes, with no concern for the truth in what they say. The analogue to textual interpretation would be a kind of strong methodologism,

say like trying to understand a poem by focusing on the quantifiable features of the poem. It is only the second way of treating another as a Thou that includes genuine recognition.

“A second way in which the Thou is experienced and understood is that the Thou is acknowledged as a person [*als Person anerkannt wird*].”¹⁵ Here Gadamer uses Anerkennung as a technical term. The interlocutor is recognized as someone who has a view on the world that should be taken seriously. The problem comes when rather than recognizing the authority of what the other person has to teach us, we seek to reduce their views to placeholders in a larger conceptual framework, already articulated. The result is a struggle for genuine recognition as the participants each claim authority and try to “reflectively to outdo the other.”¹⁶ The analogous situation to texts is to read a text as an example of a historical or philosophical standpoint. He writes,

The text that is understood historically is forced to abandon its claim to be saying something true. We think we understand when we see the past from a historical standpoint—i.e., transpose ourselves into the historical situation and try to reconstruct the historical horizon. In fact, however, we have given up the claim to find in the past any truth that is valid and intelligible for ourselves.

Acknowledging [Anerkennung] the otherness of the other in this way, making him the object of objective knowledge, involves the fundamental suspension of his claim to truth.¹⁷

Two points should be made here. First, Gadamer is not treating recognition, Anerkennung, as taking only one form. People can be recognized in different ways, and some forms of recognition are more open to the otherness of the other than other forms of recognition. Or perhaps better put, there are various aspects of the rationality of a person which could be the object of

recognition. In this case, it is the way in which their views exemplify a different point of view. Second, it's clear from Gadamer's references that he considered Hegel's account of recognition to fall into this second category of ways of engaging another as a Thou. Gadamer takes it as significant that the outcome of the Hegelian struggle for recognition is not a greater appreciation of our finitude and the importance dialogue, but instead an ever increasing self-consciousness and individuation—a masking of our essential finitude. According to Gadamer, the transition to the “highest” form of relating to others comes with the recognition that finitude is not a hindrance to understanding, but what makes understanding possible. The highest form of understanding others comes not from locating their views in a broader conceptual context, but from recognizing they have something to teach us.

About the highest form to relatedness to others Gadamer writes,

In human relations the important thing is, as we have seen, 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. ... Openness to the other, then, involves recognizing [Anerkennung] that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to.

This is the parallel to the hermeneutical experience. I must allow tradition's claim to validity, not in these sense of simply acknowledging [Anerkennung] the past in its otherness, but in such a way that it has something to say to me.¹⁸

The question is not simply one of recognition, but recognizing something in a specific way, in this case that the tradition or the other person “has something to say to me”—the same thing Gadamer will say belongs to the reasoned acknowledgement of an authority based on our

awareness of our own finitude. The two discussions converge at this point, and bringing to bear the insights from the ‘rehabilitation of authority and tradition’ helps to stem misunderstandings that might arise from his discussion of a Thou. The crucial point of the first discussion is the recognition of the authority of a text or another person has something to teach us is a judgment of reason rooted in the self-knowledge of our own finitude. We recognize that we don’t know everything and that others may have an expertise that we lack. By engaging them as having something true to say, we need to listen in a way that allows the truth of their views to show itself. Above all, according to Gadamer, it means understanding their views as an answer to a question—a question which we must take seriously enough to ask ourselves. There is nothing passive about such listening, nor is there anything irrational about it.¹⁹ On the one hand, the recognition that occurs in the highest form of I-Thou relationships is a kind of rational acceptance of authority—Ricoeur is right about its asymmetry—but as the realization of an I-Thou relationship it also serves as a model for the highest way of being together, what Gadamer calls miteinandersein.

After Truth and Method Gadamer never returns to using Anerkennung as a technical term to mean the reasoned acceptance of an authority, though the idea that we always need to grant another person authority as a condition of dialogue will remain. The motivation for dialogue remains the awareness of our own finitude, the awareness of the need for language for any understanding, and the awareness that the meanings in language always go beyond our control. Certainly it is the case that others might understand a subject matter better than we can. More than that, others might understand our own views better than we do. Even if it turns out the other person does not live up to his or her granted role as an authority on the subject matter, simply the act of reformulating what we think for an interlocutor forces us to be attentive to our own beliefs

in a new and constructive way. Thinking, for Gadamer, simply is finding the right word for something. So finding new words for something as a result of a conversation with someone is thinking anew. The essential connection Gadamer finds between reasoning and using language should immediately put into doubt any criticism of Gadamer that suggests his account of dialogue marginalizes the role of reason.

Consider one of the few relevant post-Truth and Method places where Anerkennung appears as a technical term.

We seek conversation not only to understand the other person better. Rather we need it because our own concepts threaten to become rigid; and also because when we say something we want the other person to understand what we are thinking. My own efforts at thinking are led by yet another evident fact: the problem is not that we do not understand the other person, but that we don't understand ourselves! For precisely when we seek to understand the other person, we have the hermeneutical experience that we must break down resistance in ourselves if we wish to hear the other as other. This is really a basic determinant of all human existence and also still governs the success of our 'self-understanding.' ... Life is easier if everything goes according to one's own wishes, but the dialectic of recognition [Anerkennung] requires that there can be no easy laurels. We learn this from the resistance we feel in ourselves when we let the other person be right. To make ourselves aware of this, the best help may be for us may be to get as fully as possible in the matter itself, overcome our own biases, and in the end to see ourselves as put in question—and where does this happen best if not in standing before the other person, a person who exists in himself or herself? So I would like to close with a short saying of Kierkegaard that makes this

point especially clear and may even suggest a deeper meaning in my insistence on conversation, for conversation is the medium alone in which language is alive. The saying of Kierkegaard is the title of a talk he once wrote. It is “On what is edifying in the thought that against God one is always wrong.”²⁰

The dialectic of recognition Gadamer refers to is what he finds in Hegel and what he refers to in Truth and Method as the second way of treating others as Thous. It is the struggle for recognition. The struggle arises from the resistance of granting the other person authority; Gadamer thinks we must overcome this dialectic (or avoid falling into it in the first place) and embrace the fact that “I must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to.”²¹ In Truth and Method the highest form of miteinsandersein was still an expression of recognition; in his later writings the “dialectic of recognition” needs to be overcome to realize the proper mode of being with others.

We can understand Gadamer’s decision to abandon the vocabulary of recognition by looking at his criticisms of I-Thou accounts of intersubjectivity. While he seemed open to the I-Thou terminology in Truth and Method, later he will write that “[t]o say ‘the I’ and ‘the Thou,’ seems to us, at least since Wittgenstein, no longer quite allowable.”²² He clarifies it somewhat in one of his contributions to the Habermas-Gadamer debate.

We say, for instance, that understanding and misunderstanding take place between an I and a Thou. But this formulation “I and Thou” already betrays an enormous alienation. There is nothing like an “I and Thou” at all—there is neither the I nor the Thou as isolated, substantial realities. I may say “Thou,” and I may refer to myself as over against a Thou, but a common understanding always precedes these situations. We all know that to say “Thou” to someone presupposes a deep

common accord. Something enduring is already present when this word is spoken.

23

Over the course of his writings, Gadamer makes four arguments against I-Thou accounts of intersubjectivity. All return to the same basic point: seeing I-Thou relations as the primary intersubjective relation fail to appreciate the shared, especially linguistic, background that shapes persons such as to make the dialogue possible in the first place. Dialogues take place in language and thus intersubjective elements are already in place as a condition of the dialogue. Gadamer argues, first, that I-Thou relations are asymmetrical, and speaking of an “other” rather than a Thou can help make clear that the one is the other’s other. Second he argues that in I-Thou accounts of intersubjectivity there is a “mystifying substantialization” of the “between” as if a new subject were introduced, the between, which in principle escapes all phenomenological investigation.²⁴ Third he argues that I-Thou relations fail to appreciate the way our relations to others are always mediated through language, culture and tradition. Finally, he thinks that those who emphasize I-Thou relations do so in recognition of the limitations of Cartesian accounts of autonomous subjects, but in doing so they preserve the notion of an autonomous subject (which must be qualified dialogically) for the meaning of the encounter depends too heavily on the agency of a person saying “thou.” As I mentioned in passing above, an address establishes a relationship between the parties as it only occurs if it is accepted, but as the most fundamental relationship, it ends its analysis on the accepted agency of a person rather than spelling out the already established relationship that provides the condition for the possibility of the address.

Here then we get a glimpse of the problem Gadamer has with speaking of recognition. No matter how much one emphasizes, as Ricoeur does, the passivity of being recognized as a condition for mutual recognition, the description of the relation still relies too much on the

agency of individual subjects. Hegel, and Ricoeur, may have found a level of collaboration beneath the Hobbsean account of struggle between autonomous subjects that undermines the idea that the relation between two subjects is fundamentally one of struggle, but the account of recognition they embrace still preserves a mistaken sense of the independence of subjects. If you like, the “originary dissymmetry” that Ricoeur wants to acknowledge but not start from can only arise, Gadamer argues, against a background of shared agreement, of a shared miteinandersein.

Play as the Form of Irreducibly Social Actions

Recall that for Gadamer in Truth and Method there is a close connection between what it is to be open to the meaning of texts, tradition, and others, such that for all three *Anerkennung* initiates a proper encounter. But a reasoned acknowledgement of authority is not a consummation of a dialogue, as if the outcome of the dialogue were accepted on authority; rather it initiates the dialogue in the sense of establishing the necessarily attitude someone must take in order to engage in a genuine dialogue with another person, text, or work of art. What occurs in the dialogue is not a mode of recognition but a mode of play.

Gadamer says about play that it “fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in play.”²⁵ We give ourselves over to the game as we recognize its potential value for us above and beyond what we could accomplish alone. This is not pure resignation, “a person playing is, even in his play, still someone who comports himself”²⁶—we choose to engage in dialogue with particular people at particular times for particular reasons on particular topics—but we take for granting that the proper playing of the play will guarantee the successful outcome of the game. The engagement of another in play—for it is essential to play that it involve someone or something else—generates an irreducibly social action. Play is irreducible in two senses. First it cannot be done alone. Gadamer writes, “The movement to-and-fro obviously belongs so

essentially to the game that there is an ultimate sense in which you cannot have a game by yourself²⁷ (and Ricoeur agrees, “This ‘in-itself’ of play is such that, even in solitary play, there must be something with which or against which one plays”²⁸). Tennis is an example of an irreducibly social activity. As much as we might practice alone, we cannot play a game of tennis by ourselves. We need a partner. Play is irreducibly social in a second sense: what occurs in the playing, the outcome of the play cannot be explained by reference to the subjective intentions of the participants. The event of the game is irreducible to a description in terms of the actors, not even in terms of the back and forth of the actors. Granted in tennis the two played take turns hitting the tennis ball, but what occurs in the game itself cannot be explained as the sum of alternating agencies. The play has an agency of its own over to which the players give themselves.

In the case of dialogue, the participants are engaged in the collaborative attempt to arrive at an articulate understanding of a subject matter. They give themselves over to the play by granting the other person authority over the subject matter such that the requirements on each player shifts to charity—to take what the interlocutor say as true, even if the truth isn’t apparent—and to collaboration—to express what one believes in terms that could be convincing to the interlocutor. The dialogue is guided by the subject matter of the dialogue and what it takes to make the subject matter clear to the interlocutors. It “is not so much one’s being toward the object (taking that as something to be communicated) as the sharing of this being toward the object.”²⁹ The subjectivity of the interlocutors is displaced—there is a “primacy of play over the consciousness of the players”³⁰—so much so that Gadamer will say that an understanding that arises from the dialogue is not an accomplishment of the participants, but an accomplishment of language itself.

The participants give themselves over to the play of the dialogue. In what sense is there a giving here, and does it fall under the logic of the gift? First, it is a kind of renunciation, or suspension, of intervention in order to open up the possibility of being led by language. It is not a one-sided offering, though. Rather it is an invitation, or more accurately a promise as an invitation. It is a commitment to refrain from withdrawing from the game and to listen to what the text, work of art, or other person has to reveal about the subject matter. It is a willingness to let the truth of the subject matter show itself in the dialogue with the understanding that the dialogue itself is the necessary occasion for the event of truth.

Is this gift reducible to the logic of exchange? It would appear to not be. An offer of an opportunity to collaborate and a promise to honor the terms of that collaboration is not something that incurs a debt. Gadamer says about promises that they occur only through their acceptance.³¹ So instead of the standard model of a gift where we do something to or for someone, dialogue is essentially a doing with someone only on the condition of the other person's mutual contribution. It does not incur an obligation on another's part as it is up to the other person to accept or reject the offer of friendship. As I said about the address of a Thou, and is true of play, it is only realized if it is accepted, joined. It is impossible to understand the address if it is understood as the activity of one person for another. It can only be understood as a joint activity.

Friendship in Place of Recognition

Gadamer, I am suggesting, moves away from the use of the term recognition as a technical term to characterize the actualized relations between persons because it shares the same flaw as I-Thou accounts on intersubjectivity—it overemphasizes the activity of one or other subject and misses the fundamental character of a genuinely social action. What occurs in a genuinely social

action—dialogue is Gadamer’s most obvious example—cannot be explained in terms of the participants taking turns. The agency is irreducibly social. What does he suggest better models this essentially social miteinandersein than I-Thou accounts of intersubjectivity or accounts based on mutual recognition? He appropriates the ancient concept of friendship as philia. Gadamer writes,

It seems to me an important modification that now one does not only avoid speaking of “the Thou,” nor does one (like Fichte) simply speak of the “Not-I,” which sounds like an opposition or a reduction against which one must struggle, or which one must overcome. Rather, one speaks of the Other. It changes the perspective to say here “the Other.” Immediately, there is brought in a change in the state of the I and Thou. Every Other is at the same time the Other of an Other, as one may learn from Michael Theunissen’s book. I myself have taken the measure of the ancient teaching on friendship in this regard.³²

Friendship, philia, is the term Gadamer uses in place of the I-Thou in his later writings. Drawing on Aristotle’s account of friendship, Gadamer argues that it is the highest form of miteinandersein—being-with-one-another—and that it is an essentially linguistic relation. It is a mutual bond that preserves the asymmetry between persons as it realizes the recognition of authority a friend should have over oneself; as Gadamer says, “only friends can advise.”³³ For the ancients, the test of friendship was the willingness of the person to speak the truth to you when you least wanted to hear it.³⁴ Philia is a kind of shared life, a shared perception, just as “[t]he true conversation is a lived with-one-another, in which the one and the other unite themselves.”³⁵

Conclusion

Let's return at this point to Ricoeur's views. Ricoeur wrote in Course on Recognition that Gadamer's account of recognition was a "thorn in his side" as it is not mutual recognition, but the recognition of superiority. We now know Gadamer has a kind of an account of mutual recognition that amounts to a mutual recognition of superiority; he simply does not present it in the conceptual vocabulary of Anerkennung. After Truth and Method Gadamer abandons the term recognition as a technical term as it cannot fully capture what occurs in irreducibly social actions. The version of mutuality he develops is characterized by play, is exemplified best in dialogue, and is reflected in relations of friendship (philia). We are rationally motivated to engage in dialogue on the recognition that others may understand things, including ourselves, better than we understand ourselves. Therefore the point of his earlier discussions of the recognition of authority is preserved in his discussion of dialogue, and his discussion of friendship, as a motivation for both and a condition of the success of both. Philia, as an irreducibly social action, does not give rise to concerns about "the logic of the gift" that arise with Ricoeur's conception of recognition. It also avoids the theological overtones that persist in the concept of agape and that may be required to make sense of a love "free from the rules of equivalence governing justice."³⁶ Granted philia cannot make sense of the French sense of reconnaissance connected to expressing gratitude, but perhaps this distinctively French connotation of recognition should not be given the philosophical weight Ricoeur gives it. Finally, perhaps most importantly, talking about mutual reciprocity in terms of philia—which Ricoeur himself says is "closest" to agape³⁷—reintroduces justice to matters of mutual recognition.

Ricoeur was concerned that speaking of justice requires us to enter into the logic of the gift, but the irreducibly social character of philia, puts off that concern. It preserves our intuitions that acting from the recognition of the essential rationality of others is acting morally.

Bibliography

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "Hermeneutics and Ontological Difference." The Gadamer Reader (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 356–71.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "Ich und Du (Löwith)." Gesammelte Werke, Vol. 4 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 234–39.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "Phenomenology of Ritual and Language." *Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, ed. Lawrence K. Schmidt (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000), 19-50.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "Praktisches Wissen." Gesammelte Werke, Vol. 5 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985).

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "Religious and Poetical Speaking." Myth, Symbol and Reality. Edited by Alan Olson (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 86–98.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity; Subject and Person." Continental Philosophy Review, 33 (2000), 282.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. Truth and Method (Continuum: New York, 2004).

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "The Universality of the Hermeneutic Problem." Philosophical Hermeneutics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 7.

Honneth, Axel. "On the Destructive Power of the Third: Gadamer and Heidegger's Doctrine of intersubjectivity." Philosophy and Social Criticism 29:1 (2003),5-21.

Honneth, Axel. The Struggle for Recognition (Boston: MIT Press, 1996).

Kojeve, Alexandre. Introduction to the Reading of Hegel (New York: Basic Books, 1969).

Plutarch. "On How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend." *Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 51–112.

Ricoeur, Paul. "Appropriation." Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

Ricoeur, Paul. The Course of Recognition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005).

Ricoeur, Paul. Time and Narrative, Vol. III (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988)

¹ Alexandre Kojève, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel (New York: Basic Books, 1969).

² Axel Honneth, The Struggle for Recognition (Boston: MIT Press, 1996).

³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method (Continuum: New York, 2004).

⁴ Paul Ricoeur, The Course of Recognition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁵ The Course of Recognition, 152.

⁶ The Course of Recognition, 160.

⁷ The Course of Recognition, 218–19.

⁸ The Course of Recognition, 232.

⁹ The Course of Recognition, 212.

¹⁰ It is beyond the scope of this paper, but certainly not incidental, that agape is a religious term appropriate for Ricoeur, a committed Christian, and for that reason less likely to be embraced by the agnostic Gadamer.

¹¹ "Ich und Du (Karl Löwith)" in Gesammelte Werke, Vol. 4 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 234–39.

¹² The important pages are 277–84 in Truth and Method.

¹³ Truth and Method, 280.

¹⁴ Truth and Method, 281.

¹⁵ Truth and Method, 353.

¹⁶ Truth and Method, 353.

¹⁷ Truth and Method, 302–03.

¹⁸ Truth and Method, 355.

¹⁹ Axel Honneth makes this mistaken criticism of Gadamer’s views in his "On the Destructive Power of the Third: Gadamer and Heidegger's Doctrine of Intersubjectivity." Philosophy and Social Criticism 29:1 (2003), 5-21.

²⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Hermeneutics and Ontological Difference” in The Gadamer Reader (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 371.

²¹ Truth and Method, 355.

²² Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity; Subject and Person,” in Continental Philosophy Review, 33 (2000), 282.

²³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Universality of the Hermeneutic Problem,” in Philosophical Hermeneutics, trans. David Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 7.

²⁴ “Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity; Subject and Person,” 282.

²⁵ Truth and Method, 103.

²⁶ Truth and Method, 107.

²⁷ Truth and Method, 106.

²⁸ Paul Ricoeur, “Appropriation” in Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 186.

²⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, Plato’s Dialectical Ethics (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 33.

³⁰ Truth and Method, 105.

³¹ He emphasizes this in “Religious and Poetical Speaking” in Myth, Symbol and Reality, ed. Alan Olson (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 86–98.

³² “Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity, 282. He is referring to Michel Theunissen’s The Other: Studies in the Social Ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Buber (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1984).

³³ “Praktisches Wissen” in Gesammelte Werke, vol. 5 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985), 239.

³⁴ See for example Plutarch’s “On How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend” in *Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 51–112.

³⁵ Hans-Gerog Gadamer, “Phenomenology of Ritual and Language,” in Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics, ed. Lawrence K. Schmidt (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000),45

³⁶ The Course of Recognition, 232.

³⁷ The Course of Recognition, 220.