

Aesthetics,
Metaphysics,
Language

Aesthetics, Metaphysics, Language:

Essays on Heidegger and Gadamer

By

Stefano Marino

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Aesthetics, Metaphysics, Language:
Essays on Heidegger and Gadamer

By Stefano Marino

This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2015 by Stefano Marino

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-7650-X

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-7650-6

To Giovanni Matteucci:
A teacher and a friend

I was surrounded by a language
In which I could say only 'hello'
And 'thank you very much'
But you spoke so I could understand.
ANI DI FRANCO
Hypnotized

You're trying to see through it
And it doesn't make sense.
MICHAEL STIPE
Hope

Self-realized and metaphysically redeemed
May not live another life
May not solve our mystery.
EDDIE VEDDER
Mind Your Manners

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ix
Introduction	1
Chapter One.....	5
Gadamer and McDowell on Second Nature, World/Environment, and Language	
Chapter Two	49
Gadamer on Heidegger: The History of Being as Philosophy of History	
Chapter Three	69
Gadamer's and Arendt's Divergent Appropriations of Kant: Taste, <i>Sensus Communis</i> , and Judgment	
Chapter Four.....	85
Gadamer's Hermeneutical Aesthetics of Tragedy and the Tragic	
Chapter Five	105
Heidegger and Rorty: Philosophy and/as Poetry and Literature	
Bibliography	123

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my scientific supervisor, Prof. Giovanni Matteucci, for his ongoing encouragement, for the countless discussions on contemporary philosophical questions (including, but not limited to, those concerning phenomenology and hermeneutics), and for the opportunity to take part in and collaborate on very different but always interesting and exciting philosophical projects, such as those concerning the aesthetics of fashion and popular music, the philosophy of food, and Theodor W. Adorno's negative dialectics.

I would also like to thank Prof. Carlo Gentili for permission to republish here his part of the text in Chapter 4, and Prof. Dr. Günter Figal for his openness and willingness to repeatedly invite me to the Department of Philosophy at the University of Freiburg i.B., where I spent several fruitful periods of study during the last years with the support of postdoctoral fellowships granted by the DAAD and the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung. I would also like to thank Dr. Jerome Veith at the University of Seattle for his precious help in the revision and correction of the English text.

Most of all, however, my gratitude goes to my family (my beloved wife Valeria; my dear son Marco, the greatest gift I have ever had in my life; my parents Giuseppe and Karin; my brother Giulio), and to *all* my friends for their love, patience and generosity. Like Adam Duritz sings, “[you] shine like the sun”!

Finally, I thank the following for permission to republish here my previously published writings: “Seconda natura e linguaggio, corporeità e libertà in Gadamer e McDowell”, in my previous book *Fusioni di orizzonti. Saggi su estetica e linguaggio in Hans-Georg Gadamer*, Aracne, Roma 2012, pp. 65-103; “Gadamer on Heidegger: Is the History of Being ‘Just’ Another Philosophy of History?”, in «The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology», 41/3, 2010, pp. 287-303; “Two Divergent Appropriations of Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*: Some Remarks on Arendt and Gadamer”, in «Internationales Jahrbuch für Hermeneutik», ed. by G. Figal, vol. 11, 2012, pp. 189-208; “The Role of Tragedy and the Tragic in Gadamer’s Aesthetics and Hermeneutics” (with Carlo Gentili), in «The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology», 44/2, 2013, pp. 145-162; “Philosophy and Poetry – Philosophy as a Kind of Writing: Some Remarks on Richard Rorty’s Heidegger Interpretation”, in D.

Espinet (ed.), *Schreiben Dichten Denken. Zu Heideggers Sprachbegriff*, Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 2011, pp. 56-68.

INTRODUCTION

Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer undoubtedly belong among the most important thinkers of the entire twentieth century. More precisely, they can be considered the preeminent representatives of twentieth-century phenomenological hermeneutics (i.e., philosophical hermeneutics resting on phenomenological grounds¹) which represents, in turn, one of the major traditions within so-called continental philosophy. Respectively teacher and pupil, during their long and philosophically intense lives and careers Heidegger and Gadamer greatly contributed to the development of philosophical thought in our age, providing significant and often decisive contributions in various fields of philosophical inquiry. Their main works, *Being and Time* (1927) and *Truth and Method* (1960), respectively amount to the great “classics” of contemporary philosophy, both being extraordinarily influential books without which the history of twentieth- and also twenty-first century philosophy as we know it would not even be conceivable. But the undeniably ground-breaking nature of these two philosophers’ masterpieces, emphatically defined as “watershed event[s] in the development of philosophical hermeneutics”², must not lead one to overlook the rest of their “rich and immense” philosophical *oeuvres*³.

This book addresses a number of problems concerning aesthetics, metaphysics, language, philosophical anthropology, and the history of philosophy, by focusing on Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s specific contributions in these fields, and by establishing fruitful and original comparisons between their views and those of other relevant thinkers of our time, such as Hannah Arendt, Richard Rorty and John McDowell. In fact, in some of the chapters I adopt a comparative approach that aims to portray the complex philosophical problems and concepts at the core of my investigation from different points of view, thus broadening the philosophical horizon and generating a more comprehensive perspective. The basic assumption underlying my interest in a comparative approach to philosophy is that – as has been convincingly explained by Jeff Malpas with the following words – “the cross-fertilization that occurs through contact between different approaches and styles is an especially significant factor [...] in driving new intellectual developments. In this respect, comparative work across traditions, and between philosophical styles, can

be seen as an antidote to the insularity and parochialism that otherwise provides a sure recipe for intellectual stagnation”⁴. Much of the newest literature on contemporary thought highlights the importance of studying philosophical questions in a comparative perspective, and although some scholars have argued that the analytic/continental divide (which plays an important role in at least some chapters of this book) has now become obsolete, I argue that it is actually still desirable to underline the compatibility of the different views and to show that, during the twentieth century and probably still today, some thinkers have simply talked past each other because they failed to see that their views were at least to some extent compatible. An inquiry into the questions concerning human nature (first chapter), or taste and aesthetic judgment (third chapter), or the relationship between philosophy, poetry and literature (fifth chapter), and other related problems, may be a fruitful way to do this, thus suggesting the idea that drawing comparisons can also be “a way of advancing a particular philosophical position”⁵.

I have not attempted to be either exhaustive or even systematic in my treatment of Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s philosophical work⁶. Rather, this book is conceived as a collection of papers, all dealing with Heidegger’s and/or Gadamer’s philosophy but each focused on a specific question. Chapters 2-5 derive from previously published articles that I am republishing here with a few little changes. Chapter 1 instead is heretofore unpublished in English, although it rests on some materials that had been previously presented only in Italian.

Notes

¹ The relationship between phenomenology and hermeneutics does not even need to be explicated, since from Heidegger's *Being in Time* until today the roots of philosophical hermeneutics lie precisely in phenomenology. As Gadamer once said, "what one now calls hermeneutical philosophy is based to a large extent on phenomenology" (GW 3, p. 214 [HW, p. 51]). Heidegger, for his part, stressed his belongingness to the phenomenological tradition not only in *Being in Time* and the lecture courses that he held during the 1920s, but also in such a later text as the 1963 short essay *My Way to Phenomenology* (see GA 14, pp. 91-102 [Heidegger 1972, pp. 74-82]). In recent times the essential, intrinsic relationship between phenomenology and hermeneutics has been especially emphasized by Günter Figal, who first stresses the need today to move from the stage of "philosophical hermeneutics" to that of "hermeneutical philosophy" (Figal 2010, pp. 5-47), and then explains that "if philosophy is understood hermeneutically", then it has basically to do with the inner belongingness of "interpretation, understanding, and objectivity [...]. Only what is objective has to be interpreted; it is disclosed as what it is through interpretation alone, because only presentative recognizing preserves the exteriority of its matter. [...] And, when a presentation is understood", then one understands "not only something, but rather, always also the relation of interpretation, that is, of presentation, and object. What one understands in this way is the *structure of presentation*". But the "philosophical contemplation of the structure of presentation is phenomenology", so that "phenomenology here is supposed to have the character of an intensification of hermeneutical reflection" (Figal 2010, pp. 121-123). At a later stage Figal seems to have gone a step further, so to speak, and claims that even aesthetics is fundamentally, intrinsically phenomenological. As he explains, indeed, "insofar as philosophical reflection on aesthetic experience is concerned with the subject matter of this experience, and thereby especially with artworks, it is phenomenological. [...] In this regard, art is no arbitrary theme of phenomenological description [...]. Rather, an artwork is essentially phenomenal; it is an appearance that is not to be taken as the appearance of something, but instead purely as appearance. Accordingly, aesthetics essentially is phenomenology; it must be phenomenology if it wishes to grasp that which can be aesthetically experienced", and in turn "aesthetics also at the same time alters phenomenology, insofar as phenomena capable of being experienced aesthetically are not pure correlates of consciousness, but rather things. [...] Yet artworks are things of a special sort": "essentially phenomenal things", "phenomena that are essentially thing-like", in a word "appearing things (*Erscheinungsdinge*)" (Figal 2015, pp. 3-4).

² Malpas and Zabala 2010, p. XI.

³ Figal 2002a, p. 85.

⁴ Malpas 2002, p. 196.

⁵ Malpas 2002, p. 196.

⁶ I have attempted to provide a systematic interpretation of Gadamer's philosophy in light of the question concerning the crisis of modernity and the limits of its

basically scientist worldview in my previous book *Gadamer and the Limits of the Modern Techno-Scientific Civilization* (see Marino 2011). This interpretation stays in the background here but it actually constitutes the ground upon which, or the starting point from which, I developed many of my investigations of specific aspects of Gadamer's thought in this book.

CHAPTER ONE

GADAMER AND MCDOWELL ON SECOND NATURE, WORLD/ENVIRONMENT, AND LANGUAGE

1.

The philosophy of the entire twentieth century, and to some extent of the twenty-first as well, has been characterized among other things by the strong divide between analytic and continental approaches. Without detailing here the origins of this division (which, according to some scholars, may be even traced back to the discussions on the difference between natural and human sciences at the end of the nineteenth century¹) or lingering on its most famous expressions (such as the Heidegger/Carnap controversy of the 1930s on the significance and indeed the very possibility of metaphysics, or the Derrida/Searle debate of the 1970s on deconstruction and speech acts theory), and without discussing here the meaning and rigorosity of the distinction criterion itself (defined by Bernard Williams as “a quite bizarre conflation of the methodological and the topographical, as though one classified cars into front-wheel drive and Japanese”²), what matters for the specific purposes of the discourse I want to develop here is that until relatively recent times the analytic/continental divide was strong and profound. As a matter of fact, during the twentieth century it often appeared very difficult to even establish a potential conversation and philosophical exchange between these different philosophical approaches; thus, for example, in 1981 Richard Rorty described the situation in the following terms:

Analytic philosophers, because they identify philosophical ability with argumentative skill and notice that there isn't anything they would consider an *argument* in a carload of Heidegger or Foucault, suggest that these must be people who tried to be philosophers and failed, incompetent philosophers. [...] Conversely, I have heard fans of Continental philosophy

be obnoxious about the “mere logic-chopping” with which their analytic colleagues waste students’ time and dehydrate their minds³.

And this is how the situation was recently described by Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi with specific regard to the philosophy of mind (but the same observations, in my view, can be easily applied to other fields of philosophy as well):

By mid-century, and indeed throughout most of the latter part of the twentieth century, we find that [...] there is very little communication going on between analytic philosophy [...] and phenomenology. In fact, on both sides, the habitual attitude towards the other tradition has ranged from complete disregard to outright hostility. Indeed, up until the 1990s, it was unusual to find philosophers from these two schools even talking to each other. There has been plenty of arrogance on both sides of the aisle⁴.

Now, it is surely important to note that in the last decades the situation has changed, inasmuch as thinkers belonging to both sides have tried to enter into dialogue with colleagues belonging to opposite or even “rival” traditions, and that Hans-Georg Gadamer played an important role in this shift in at least two respects. First of all, he intensified his teaching and lecturing activities after his retirement in 1968, and “for two decades [he] taught in North America virtually every fall, thus preparing the basis for the spread of hermeneutic philosophy across that continent”⁵. Secondly, his unshakable faith in the possibility and even the need of always pursuing the fusion of different horizons led him, among other things, to never avoid “the debate with analytic philosophy” and instead continue searching for “possible ways to build bridges”⁶. On this basis, some scholars have inquired into the relationships between, for example, Gadamer’s and Donald Davidson’s philosophical conceptions of understanding, language and interpretation⁷, while a few outstanding representatives of analytic philosophy and pragmatism have tried to develop in their own fashion some fundamental Gadamerian themes and arguments. Among the latter, the most interesting and impressing cases are probably those of Richard Rorty – according to whom philosophy should move from the stage of epistemology to that of hermeneutics, whereas the latter is (in a very original but indeed not unproblematic way) conceived as “a polemical term in contemporary philosophy [...] for the attempt” to radically and definitively “set aside [...] epistemologically centered philosophy”⁸ – and two other philosophers deeply influenced, among others, precisely by Rorty: Robert Brandom⁹ and John McDowell. It is precisely the latter’s influential project of a naturalism of second nature,

developed in some papers and in a more systematic way in his 1994 masterpiece *Mind and World*, that I will proceed to discuss here.

2.

As has been noted, *Mind and World* represents a “powerful and complexly argued book”¹⁰; a recent “milestone” on the question of “the relationship between mind and nature, [...] concepts and experience”¹¹; an “enormously difficult book – as difficult as it is important”¹². One of the book’s fundamental ideas is that human beings normally and, so to speak, naturally inhabit two different and indeed irreducible logical spaces. On the one hand, we move within what McDowell calls “the logical space of reasons” (borrowing this expression from Wilfrid Sellars, according to whom “the essential point is that in characterizing an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says”¹³) and defines as “the structure in which we place things when we find meaning in them”¹⁴. However, on the other hand, we also belong to “the logical space of nature”, which during the modern and contemporary age has been increasingly strictly identified with the “ways in which the natural sciences [find] things intelligible” (namely, “by subsuming them under lawlike generalizations”¹⁵), and which can thus be defined as “the realm of law”. McDowell describes this relationship as a real “contrast between two kinds of intelligibility”¹⁶, as a “distinction between two ways of finding things intelligible”¹⁷, namely as a sort of dichotomy between the dimension of reasons, motivations and justifications, on the one hand, and that of natural causes, or rather natural laws¹⁸, on the other hand. A dichotomy that McDowell, in my view, does not aim either at maintaining in its abstract dichotomous character nor at simply denying by opting instead for some kind of reductionism. Rather, he seeks to simultaneously incorporate and overcome the dichotomy by outlining an original philosophical perspective that intends to do justice to both the difference between the two logical spaces and their coexistence in the human being.

In the first chapters of *Mind and World*, McDowell exemplifies this basic theme by concentrating on the question concerning the relationship between concepts and intuitions. The Kantian idea of the indispensable cooperation and interdependence between *Verstand* (intellect, understanding) and sensibility¹⁹, and the Davidsonian conception of the conceptual scheme/empirical content dualism²⁰, serve as guides to this inquiry. What McDowell sketches here is a general view of modern philosophy as

trapped in an *impasse* and somehow unable to avoid falling again and again into opposite but equally unsatisfactory conceptions, such as “a coherentism that threatens to disconnect thought from reality”, on the one hand, and “a vain appeal to the Given, in the sense of bare presences that are supposed to constitute the ultimate grounds of empirical judgements”²¹, on the other. Without detailing here McDowell’s particular reconstruction of the guiding tendencies in the history of modern philosophy, what matters for the specific aims of the present analysis is that he identifies the fundamental problem underlying such typical philosophical oscillations in the contrast between two basic conceptions of the human being that he calls “rampant Platonism” and “bald naturalism”. In light of this basic opposition, the various epistemological problems that McDowell addresses throughout his book (most noticeably, as mentioned, in the first chapters) actually appear as instantiations, so to speak, of a wider and more general philosophical-anthropological question: namely, the question concerning the need for us, today, of accounting for the particular nature of the human being in a more adequate way than it has been. Seeking “a way to dismount from the seesaw”²² and to overcome the fatal tendency of modern philosophy “to oscillate between a pair of unsatisfying positions”²³, McDowell thus advances the idea of rethinking, and most of all of broadening, the basic naturalistic view that has been predominant in our culture since the seventeenth century. In short, what he proposes is to include second nature, i.e. what we may call the domain of reason, history, and culture, in our basic conception of human nature. McDowell defines the resulting perspective as “a naturalized Platonism” or better as “a naturalism of second nature”²⁴, and he maintains that such a philosophical perspective may do justice, in a way that “rampant Platonism” and “bald naturalism” are both unable to, to the inextricable intertwining of reason and perception, spontaneity and receptivity, that characterizes our world-experience and that (in the words of McDowell’s friend and colleague Robert Brandom) is “distinctive of us as *cultural*, and not merely *natural*, creatures”²⁵.

On a philosophical-anthropological level, this perspective finally makes it possible to satisfactorily account for the fact that the capacity of inhabiting a linguistically and culturally conditioned space of reasons does not position human beings outside the realm of biology, but simply belongs to “our mode of living”²⁶, to our being “animals whose natural being is permeated with rationality”²⁷. “Exercises of spontaneity belong to our mode of living”, McDowell explains, and “our mode of living is our way of actualizing ourselves as animals”; but if “exercises of spontaneity belong to our way of actualizing ourselves as animals”, this removes “any

need to try to see ourselves as peculiarly bifurcated, with a foothold in the animal kingdom and a mysterious separate involvement in an extra-natural world of rational connections”²⁸. With regard to the concept of human nature, then, he claims that “our nature is largely second nature” and it is the way it is

not just because of the potentialities we were born with, but also because of our upbringing, our *Bildung*. [...] Our *Bildung* actualizes some of the potentialities we are born with; we do not have to suppose it introduces a non-animal ingredient into our constitution. And although the structure of the space of reasons cannot be reconstructed out of facts about our involvement in the realm of law, it can be the framework within which meaning comes into view only because our eyes can be opened to it by *Bildung*, which is an element in the normal coming to maturity of the kind of animals we are²⁹.

McDowell’s concept of second nature thus refers to “capacities of a subject that are natural but have to be instilled through education”³⁰, and postulates a continuous but not reductive relationship between nature and culture³¹. In this context, language is of fundamental importance for properly understanding the acquisition of second nature, a process of “being initiated into conceptual capacities, whose interrelations belong in the logical space of reasons”³². As McDowell claims in a more recent work, entitled *Perception as a Capacity for Knowledge*, human beings are distinguished indeed “from the rest of the animal kingdom” in that they are “rational animals”, “animals that occupy positions in ‘the logical space of reasons’”, and also (implicitly equating reason with the mastery of language and, in particular, with “language with which one can give expression to one’s credentials for saying things”) “language-using animals”³³. In the last sections of *Mind and World* he thus explains that, in his view,

human infants are mere animals, distinctive only in their potential, and nothing occult happens to a human being. [...] Human beings [...] are born mere animals, and they are transformed into thinkers and intentional agents in the course of coming to maturity. This transformation risks looking mysterious. But we can take it in our stride if, in our conception of the *Bildung* that is a central element in the normal maturation of human beings, we give pride of place to the learning of language. In being initiated into a language, a human being is introduced into something that already embodies putatively rational linkages between concepts, putatively constitutive of the layout of the space of reasons, before she comes on the scene. [...] Human beings mature into being at home in the space of reasons or, what comes to the same thing, living their lives in the world;

we can make sense of that by noting that the language into which a human being is first initiated stands over against her as a prior embodiment of mindedness, of the possibility of an orientation to the world³⁴.

3.

It is precisely at this point that Gadamer comes into play, as McDowell in *Mind and World* makes explicit reference to his hermeneutical conception of the “human experience of the world [that] is verbal in nature”³⁵. The fact that McDowell refers to a thinker like Gadamer, belonging to a philosophical tradition quite different and sometimes viewed as even opposite to the analytic tradition in which he has been trained and works, should not be surprising if one just pays attention, for example, to the resemblance between the aforementioned dichotomy of the different logical spaces of nature and reason, on the one hand, and the basic contrast of explaining (*erklären*) and understanding (*verstehen*) underlying nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophical hermeneutics, on the other. This resemblance has been noted, among others, by John Haldane³⁶ and by McDowell himself, who in his response to an essay by Michael Friedman about *Mind and World* hints at this comparison and recalls the old “tradition [...] in which *verstehen* is distinguished from *erklären* and the *Geisteswissenschaften* from the *Naturwissenschaften*”³⁷.

The specific aspect of Gadamer’s hermeneutics that McDowell explicitly refers to in *Mind and World* is the relationship between the concepts of language and world, and the way in which this conceptual relationship can help us to distinguish human beings from other animals. According to McDowell, those “creatures on which the idea of spontaneity gets no grip”³⁸ (that is, animals lacking rationality and language) actually live in an environment, while human beings alone, by virtue of their conceptual and linguistic capacities, live in a world. The basic distinction at issue here is clearly that between environment and world, *Umwelt* and *Welt*: a distinction that McDowell makes use of in order to differentiate the nature of human beings from that of nonhuman, i.e. non-rational animals, and that he openly borrows from Gadamer³⁹. More precisely, McDowell refers here to a few particularly important pages of *Truth and Method* concerning language as experience of the world, where Gadamer’s characteristic ontological account of language⁴⁰ is somehow fused to anthropological observations. As he explains indeed, language

is not just one of man’s possessions in the world; rather, on it depends the fact that man has a world at all. The world as world exists for man as for no other creature that is in the world. But this world is verbal in nature.

[...] Thus, that language is originarily human means at the same time that man's being-in-the-world is primordially linguistic. [...] To have a world means to have an orientation toward it. To have an orientation toward the world, however, means to keep oneself so free from what one encounters of the world that one can present it to oneself as it is. This capacity is at once to have a world and to have language. The concept of world is thus opposed to the concept of environment, which all living beings in the world possess. [...] But it is thus clear that man, unlike all other living creatures, has a "world", for other creatures do not in the same sense have a relationship to the world, but are, as it were, embedded in their environment. [...] Moreover, unlike all other living creatures, man's relationship to the world is characterized by freedom from environment. This freedom implies the linguistic constitution of the world. Both belong together. To rise above the pressure of what impinges on us from the world means to have language and to have "world". [...] Animals can leave their environment and move over the whole earth without severing their environmental dependence. For man, however, rising above the environment means rising to "world" itself, to true environment. This does not mean that he leaves his habitat but that he has another posture toward it – a free, distanced orientation – that is always realized in language. [...] To have language involves a mode of being that is quite different from the way animals are confined to their habitat. [...] Whoever has language "has" the world⁴¹.

Both in his 1960 *magnum opus* and in other writings, Gadamer indeed insists on the possession of language – conceived by him as "the entrance to the world (*Weltzugang*)"⁴² and as "the means by which and in which the concept is brought to conceptualization"⁴³ – as the distinguishing criterion between human and nonhuman animals. And in making this claim, he (like McDowell himself, by the way⁴⁴) makes clear reference to Aristotle's famous definition of the human being as *zoon logon echon*, "the only animal who has the gift of speech"⁴⁵, "the living being who has *logos*"⁴⁶; Gadamer proposes to translate the latter definition not only with *animal rationale*, i.e. "the rational being, distinguished from all other animals by his capacity for thought"⁴⁷, but also (and perhaps even in the first instance) with "the living being that possesses discourse"⁴⁸: "man, as an individual, has the *logos*. He can think and he can speak"⁴⁹. However, just like McDowell, by referring to "a demanding interpretation for words like 'concept' and 'conceptual'", neither aims at debunking "animal mentality" in general, nor advocates "a reductive conception of biological imperatives"⁵⁰, so it must be said that Gadamer also never denies the existence of animal forms of intelligence and communication, although he warns us not to confuse them with human forms of rationality and language. Thus, with regard to the problem of intelligence, Gadamer

criticizes a diffuse scientific and philosophical tendency “to define the concept of human intelligence through direct analogy with that of animals”, thus simply comparing and in fact equating them; in his view, this approach implies “a fundamental impoverishment” of the concept of human intelligence, since it considers

the human person in terms of the instinctual forces which are proper to animal forms of life. Animal “intelligence” betrays something quite different than in the case of human beings, for whom the constraints of instinct are transformed through a powerful institutionalization of cultural forms. [...] In the end we are astonished to discover that talk of the intelligence of animals is not in fact a dubious form of *anthropomorphism*. Rather, the way we commonly talk of the intelligence of human beings, one which is informed by the normative ideal of a measurable quota of intelligence, represents a secret and unacknowledged *theriomorphism*⁵¹.

With regard to language, Gadamer goes so far as to claim that “coming to an understanding (*Verständigung*)” – which he somehow considers the very essence of all language⁵² – is “a life process in which a community of life is lived out”, and so, “to that extent, coming to an understanding through human conversation (*die menschliche Verständigung im Gespräch*) is no different from the understanding that occurs between animals”⁵³. At this point, however, he adds that “human language must be thought of as a special and unique life process since, in linguistic communication, ‘world’ is disclosed”⁵⁴, thus confirming his interest in grasping both the resemblances and differences between human and nonhuman animals. In this context, it is also remarkable that Gadamer, in a work published more than thirty years after *Truth and Method*, introduced the conceptual distinction between “being together-with (*Mitsamt*)” and “being with-one-another (*Miteinander*)” in order to account for “the area of animal behavior” and that of human behaviour which, “on the basis of natural determination of humans due to human language, supports human being with-one-another”⁵⁵. As has been noted, however, by doing so Gadamer is in no way trying to resuscitate old dualisms as that “of nature and mind” in order to define a strong and insurmountable “border between the animal and the human”, because the border is instead “fluid” and the *Mitsamt/Miteinander* distinction “is only a logical distinction: considered ontologically, one is interwoven with the other”⁵⁶. In fact, with regard to this distinction Gadamer explains that “it is difficult to imagine that one could clearly differentiate together-with and with-one-another in the area of animal behavior”, just like “of course we realize that human behavior acquires its form not independent of natural drives”⁵⁷. So, in Gadamer’s view, human beings represent a sort of “interlacing of together-with, to

which we are determined as natural beings, and, on the other side, humanity, by which we structure ourselves and our with-one-another"⁵⁸.

As far as the relationship between the two philosophers (Gadamer and McDowell) is concerned, one must also note how they connect the human capacity of inhabiting the space of (linguistically embedded) reasons, i.e. in hermeneutical terms the human *Verstehen*, to the fact of being free. According to McDowell, indeed, "the space of reasons is the realm of freedom", by which he means "the idea of something that empowers us to take charge of our lives" and which entails that it is precisely "freedom that gives its distinctively human character to human life"⁵⁹. At the same time, "the freedom of spontaneity" is not understood by McDowell as "a kind of exemption from nature, something that permits us to elevate ourselves above it", but rather as "our own special way of living an animal life": "what I am committed to denying in the case of mere animals", McDowell explains, "is precisely, and only, something correlative with possession of spontaneity. [...] The point is just that dumb animals do not have Kantian freedom"⁶⁰. This also finds precise resemblances and perhaps even correspondences in Gadamer's philosophy, inasmuch as the latter clearly distinguishes "the way of life of human beings [...] who alone are active on the basis of free choice (*prohairesis*)" from "that of other living beings" which is "fixed by nature", characterized by a "sheerly natural component within a mode of behavior" and guided by "the schemes of innate vital instincts"⁶¹. Beside the Aristotelian concept of *prohairesis*⁶², with regard to this subject Gadamer also relies on Kant's basic intuition according to which humans are "citizens of two worlds". "We live not only in the sensible" but also "from the 'supersensible standpoint' of freedom", Gadamer writes, although from a Kantian perspective freedom is obviously "not an object of experience, but a presupposition of practical reason"⁶³. At the same time, however, he refuses to derive from the existence of such peculiar living creatures as human beings any plea for implausible forms of anti- or supernaturalism⁶⁴. So, for example, Gadamer never hesitates in admitting that modern biology demonstrates "how continuous are the transitions from animal to human behaviour"⁶⁵, and admits that "the impressive wealth of knowledge that we have from recent behavioral research brings the events of the animal world and the behavior of humans together in an often shocking and touching way"⁶⁶. "Man shares a great deal with the other animals", he writes, and "animals and human beings resemble one another in so many respects" that one is led to suspect that "the borderline between them [might] become blurred"⁶⁷. Once again, however, recognizing that the animal/human distinction may appear "questionable" today, in the light

of the results of “the modern study of animal behavior”⁶⁸, does not imply for Gadamer that the distinction as such can be simply overcome and cancelled. Rather, according to him this distinction should be understood by taking into account that it is actually not we who arbitrarily set limits to modern naturalism and scientific reductionism, aiming at reducing the human being to an animal species among others; rather, it is nature itself that sets such limits, inasmuch as “during the great process of the universe’s evolution it let such beings like humans emerge, which have been equipped from nature itself in such a way that they do not have to simply fulfil their natural determination, but [...] have to shape the order of their own lives within nature”⁶⁹. So, in his conclusive contribution to the important collection in seven volumes *Neue Anthropologie* (co-edited by Gadamer), we read:

The fact that the human being is a living creature among others and that it has something in common with all other living creatures is something obvious. It is precisely in the demolition of ancient theological prejudices on this subject that modern biology, evolution theory and behavioural theory have succeeded and produced a decisive break with the past. However, the human place in the cosmos [...] is such a peculiar one that sometimes the possibility of transferring our knowledge about animals to the human realm appears problematic [...]. This has nothing to do with theological or philosophical prejudices in favour of the human being, [...] but it has rather to do with a sort of deep antagonism which is present in nature itself [...]. The fact that many natural factors determining the existence of the human being become visible on the basis of scientific investigations of the anthropoids’ or other animals’ societies is something astonishing and at the same time highly instructive. Dissolving ancient theological preconceptions that actually precluded becoming aware of such resemblances between human beings and animals, however, must not lead to the opposite extreme, namely to ignoring how the human being’s peculiar biological equipment also freed it from the exclusive instinctual constraint that otherwise determines the animals’ mode of behaviour⁷⁰.

4.

Now, it is a well-known fact that the question of whether or not there is an unbridgeable gap between mind, thought, behaviour, and communication in human and nonhuman animals (namely the discussion between “the supporters of the point of view of discontinuity” and those of “the point of view of continuity”⁷¹) is a very old, much debated and, most of all, still open one. This applies not only to contemporary scientific debates in this field, but also to philosophical debates⁷², as testified (just to mention a few

examples among the many that one might cite) by some works of such twentieth-century leading philosophers as Donald Davidson⁷³, Jacques Derrida⁷⁴ and Alasdair MacIntyre⁷⁵. The philosophical position of the latter, in particular, is very interesting for the specific purposes of my discourse, since in *Dependent Rational Animals*, after having paid close attention to, and indeed criticized, some ideas on this subject of both analytic and continental philosophers (respectively, Norman Malcolm, Donald Davidson, Stephen Stich, John Searle and Martin Heidegger)⁷⁶, MacIntyre eventually denounces the persistent attitude to ignore, or at least minimize, “the analogies between the intelligence exhibited” by such animals as dolphins or chimpanzees “and the rationality exhibited in human activities”; then, he explicitly claims that this is precisely what “Hans-Georg Gadamer does” and even “John McDowell does [...] after endorsing Gadamer”⁷⁷.

In this context, it is important to note that according to some interpreters McDowell’s “account of the relation of humanity to the rest of animal nature” actually needs to be put in close relation to “the theme of evolutionary continuity”⁷⁸ more than he did in *Mind and World*. While other scholars, like Tyler Burge and Michael Ayers⁷⁹, have raised analogous criticisms concerning McDowell’s general distinction between human and nonhuman ways of experiencing reality, in particular his view of the relationship between perception and conceptual capacities. Hubert L. Dreyfus has objected that claiming, as McDowell does, “that perception is conceptual ‘all the way out’” implies denying “the more basic perceptual capacities we seem to share with prelinguistic infants and higher animals”, and has suggested that McDowell could profit from phenomenological analyses of “nonconceptual embodied coping skills” and “nonconceptual immediate intuitive understanding”⁸⁰. Even a philosopher like Hilary Putnam, who is otherwise very close to McDowell in many respects, has argued that McDowell

mars an otherwise fine defense of a direct realist view of perception by suggesting that animals do not have *experiences* in the same sense that humans do. What leads McDowell to this – in my view, erroneous – idea is his failure to see that the discriminatory abilities of animals and human concepts lie on a continuum. And he fails to see this because his dependence on Kant’s discussion leads him to impose much too high requirements on having both concepts and percepts. (“No percepts without concepts” may be right if one is sufficiently generous in what one will count as a concept, but not if – as McDowell does – one requires both self-consciousness and the capacity for critical reflection before one will attribute concepts to an animal – or a child). Another possible (but less likely) source of McDowell’s error may be the thought that the

“discriminatory abilities” of animals are to be identified with *physical and chemical reactions* – that is, that reductionism is the right stance to take with respect to the psychological predicates we apply to animals but not to humans⁸¹.

It is perhaps due to these and still other critical comments to *Mind and World* that McDowell, in some of his more recent works (as, for example, the lecture *Perception as a Capacity for Knowledge*), concedes that one might be tempted to understand Sellars’ and also his own conception as expressing “a kind of human chauvinism”, but then claims that such an interpretation “would be point-missing”⁸². In his view, indeed, Sellars’ topic is “knowledge as an act of reason in a sense that he connects with language and self-consciousness. But that need not be prejudicial to a more liberal application of epistemic concepts”, so that we can “take him to conceive his topic as a species of a genus, which, for all he cares, can be recognized as being instantiated also in the lives of at least some non-human animals, and, we might add, in the lives of human children. [...] Directing our attention to perception as a capacity for a distinctive kind of knowledge, knowledge that is an act of reason”, he explains, “need not be prejudicial to the possibility of acknowledging that perception is, on some suitable understanding, a cognitive capacity in many kinds of non-human animals, and in pre-rational (pre-linguistic) human children, also”⁸³. In this slightly softened version of the human/animal distinction, “giving a special account of the perceptual knowledge of rational animals” is consistent then

with regarding perceptual knowledge in rational animals as a sophisticated species of a genus that is also instantiated more primitively in non-rational animals and pre-rational human children. [...] Perceptual capacities, rational or not, are modes of responsiveness to features of an animal’s distal environment that are strikingly undetermined by impingements on sensory nerve endings in the animal’s perceptual equipment. That poses a set of questions about how that perceptual equipment extracts information – as it is natural to say – about the distal environment, of course fallibly, from those immediate sensory impacts. Such questions arise no less urgently for rational perceivers than for non-rational perceivers. And in many cases they are answered, for rational perceivers, by theories that apply also to non-rational perceivers. [...] It is a fine thing to know how the perceptual systems of human beings and other animals do their work. [...] But knowing how perceptual systems work is not a substitute for getting straight about perception as a self-consciously possessed and exercised capacity for knowledge. [...] Perception as an operation of rationality is our distinctive species of something that is generally animal⁸⁴.

It is not my aim here to debate the theoretical plausibility and tenability of such human/animal distinctions. In fact, my philosophical scope is more limited and basically has to do with a historical-philosophical comparison between Gadamer's and McDowell's views, contextualized in the more general picture of a possible fusion of the horizons between continental and analytic approaches. So, after having swiftly hinted at some common general elements among Gadamer's and McDowell's philosophies, let us return now to the aforementioned *Welt/Umwelt* distinction, namely to the question concerning the relationship between the capacity of using concepts and language and that of living in a world instead of in a mere environment. The point that I would like to emphasize is the following: from a rigorous point of view, what McDowell calls "Gadamer's account of how a merely animal life, lived in an environment, differs from a properly human life, lived in the world"⁸⁵, should be defined as, say, an only indirectly Gadamerian account. In fact, in claiming that he borrows "from Hans-Georg Gadamer a remarkable description of the difference between a merely animal mode of life, in an environment, and a human mode of life, in the world"⁸⁶, McDowell does not take notice of the fact that, just like he borrows from Gadamer the abovementioned description, Gadamer for his part borrowed it from a long and complex philosophical and even scientific tradition⁸⁷.

In brief, and without going into the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century origins of the language/world relationship in German philosophy that can be traced back to the so-called Hamann-Herder-Humboldt tradition⁸⁸, it can be said that the original coinage of the world/environment distinction that Gadamer refers to can be found in the works of the German biologist Jakob von Uexküll, such as *Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere* (1909), *Bausteine zu einer biologischen Weltanschauung* (1913), *Theoretische Biologie* (1920) and *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen* (1934). It was probably Uexküll who first put the notion of *Umwelt* in general at the centre of scientific inquiry, immediately raising great interest in the domain of philosophy as well⁸⁹. As Giorgio Agamben has noted,

where classical science saw a single world that comprised within it all living species hierarchically ordered from the most elementary forms up to the higher organisms, Uexküll instead supposes an infinite variety of perceptual worlds that, though they are uncommunicating and reciprocally exclusive, are all equally perfect and linked together as if in a gigantic musical score. [...] Uexküll begins by carefully distinguishing the *Umgebung*, the objective space in which we see a living being moving, from the *Umwelt*, the environment-world that is constituted by a more or

less broad series of elements that he calls “carriers of significance” (*Bedeutungsträger*) or of “marks” (*Merkmalträger*), which are the only things that interest the animal. In reality, the *Umgebung* is our own *Umwelt*, to which Uexküll does not attribute any particular privilege and which, as such, can also vary according to the point of view from which we observe it. [...] Every environment is a closed unity in itself, which results from the selective sampling of a series of elements or “marks” in the *Umgebung*, which, in turn, is nothing other than man’s environment. The first task of the researcher observing an animal is to recognize the carriers of significance which constitute its environment. These are not, however, objectively and factually isolated, but rather constitute a close functional – or, as Uexküll prefers to say, musical – unity with the animal’s receptive organs that are assigned to perceive the mark (*Merkorgan*) and to react to it (*Wirkorgan*)⁹⁰.

As has been noted, however, Uexküll’s attention was focused instead on the continuity between human and nonhuman animals⁹¹, such that he identified a merely quantitative difference, i.e. a difference pertaining to their breadth and dimension, between environment and world, and eventually conceived “the *Umwelt* [...] as the mere sum of individual *Welten*”⁹². It was the phenomenologist and founder of German philosophical anthropology Max Scheler who, in his 1928 work *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, borrowed from Uexküll the world/environment distinction, but interpreted it in terms of a radical and even immeasurable difference between the human being and all other forms of life. According to Scheler, the concept of *Umwelt* should in fact only be used with reference to animals, while the notion of *Welt* is apt to grasp the specific and indeed extraordinary character of the human being, the only living creature that is at the same time “a being having spirit” and that, for this reason, “is not tied anymore to its drives and environment, but is ‘non-environmental’ or [...] ‘world-open’”⁹³. As Scheler emphatically claims, “such a being has ‘world’”: in his view,

the ultimate determination of a being with spirit – no matter what its psycho-physical makeup – is its *existential detachment from organic being*, its freedom and detachability – and the detachment of its center of existence from bondage to, the pressure of, and the *organic* dependence on “life” and everything which belongs to life, and thus also its detachment from its own drive-related “intelligence”. [...] Furthermore, a being having spirit is not only able to rise above its basic given centers of “resistance” and reaction to its environment – animals have nothing more than this and are ecstatically immersed in their environs – but this being turns its centers of resistance and reaction into “objects” in order to grasp the “what” of all objects itself. [...] The structure of the environment fits exactly to, and is

“fixated” in, the physiological peculiarity of an animal and indirectly to its morphological structure, and so its environment also fits the firm function of its unity of drive and sense structures. Everything which the animal notices and grasps in its environment is securely embedded in the frame and *boundary of its environment*. [...] This is quite different from a being having “spirit”. If such a being makes use of its spirit, it is capable of a comportment which possesses exactly the opposite of the above structure. [...] The form of such comportment must be called “world-openness”, that is, it is tantamount in principle to shedding the spell of the environment. [...] *The human being is that X who can comport himself, in unlimited degrees*, as “world-open”. Becoming human is tantamount to being elevated to world-openness by virtue of spirit. [...] An animal is not removed from its environment and does not have a distance from its environment so as to be able to transform its “environment” into “world” (or a symbol of the world) as humans can [...]. Because of spirit, the being we call human is [...] able to broaden his environment into the dimension of world⁹⁴.

One can find analogous theses in Martin Heidegger’s *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, lectures held at the University of Freiburg in 1929-30 that have been defined as “a secret principal work”⁹⁵ in which Heidegger “for the first time puts forward a kind of nature philosophy – an attempt unique for him and never to be repeated later”⁹⁶. In fact, the second part of his lecture series is entirely dedicated to a long and complex “comparative examination of three guiding theses: the stone is worldless, the animal is poor in world, man is world-forming”⁹⁷. Heidegger explicitly connects this to Uexküll’s aforementioned distinction, inasmuch as he proposes to elucidate the animal structure and condition (defined with the term “absorption in itself”) as “captivation”, and claims that the latter “is the condition of possibility for the fact that, in accordance with its essence, the animal *behaves within an environment but never within a world*”⁹⁸. “To say that captivation is the essence of animality”, Heidegger explains, means that “*the animal as such does not stand within a manifestness of beings*”⁹⁹. Hence for him the animal is bound to its environment, while the human being (or, in Heidegger’s own terms, *Dasein*) is world-open and indeed world-forming. Thus he ultimately speaks of an “essential contrast between the animal’s being open and the *world-openness* of man. Man’s being open is a being held toward..., whereas the animal’s being open is a being taken by... and thereby a being absorbed in its encircling ring”¹⁰⁰.

However, the thinker who drew most powerfully on the world/environment distinction and even reinforced it by interpreting the two concepts as mutually exclusive and connecting them to his famous idea of the human being as a “deficient being (*Mängelwesen*)”¹⁰¹, was the

philosopher and sociologist Arnold Gehlen. As we read in his 1940 work *Man: His Nature and Place in the World*, while “the environment is an unchanging milieu to which the specialized organ structure of the animal is adapted and within which equally specific, innate, instinctive behavior is carried out”, man is instead “world-open”, inasmuch as “he foregoes an animal adaptation to a specific environment”: his “lack of physical specialization, his vulnerability, as well as his astonishing lack of true instincts together form a coherent whole which is manifested in his ‘world-openness’ (Scheler) or, what amounts to the same thing, in his lack of ties to a specific environment”¹⁰². In Gehlen’s philosophical-anthropological view, the human being is thus

incapable of surviving in truly natural and primitive conditions because of his organic primitiveness and lack of natural means. [...] In order to survive, he must master and re-create nature, and for this reason must *experience* the world. [...] The epitome of nature restructured to serve his needs is called *culture* and the culture world is the human world. There are no “natural men” in a strict sense [...]. Culture is therefore the “second nature” – man’s restructured nature, within which he can survive. [...] The cultural world exists for man in exactly the same way in which the environment exists for an animal. For this reason alone, it is wrong to speak of an environment, in a strictly biological sense, for man. His world-openness is directly related to his unspecialized structure; similarly, his lack of physical means corresponds to his self-created “second nature”. [...] The clearly defined, biologically precise concept of the environment is thus not applicable to man, for what “environment” is to animals, “the second nature”, or culture, is to man; culture has its own particular problems and concept formations which cannot be explained by the concept of environment but instead are only further obscured by it¹⁰³.

Now, even this brief historical-philosophical outline clearly shows that there is a long, articulated and complex history underlying Gadamer’s use of the world/environment distinction. This is definitively confirmed, however, by the fact that Gadamer himself, in the section of *Truth and Method* that McDowell actually refers to in *Mind and World*, explicitly (although quite cursorily) mentions some of the aforementioned authors. Thus, precisely when he claims that, “unlike all other living creatures, man’s relationship to the world is characterized by *freedom from environment*” which “implies the linguistic constitution of the world”, so that rising “above the pressure of what impinges on us from the world means to have language and to have ‘world’”, Gadamer also explains that “it is in this form that recent philosophical anthropology [...] has worked out the special position of man and shown that the verbal constitution of