

HEIDEGGER'S CONCEPT OF FORE-STRUCTURE AND TEXTUAL INTERPRETATION¹

Heidegger's conception of interpretation (*Auslegung*) in *Being and Time* is decisive for the contemporary development of hermeneutics. As David Couzens Hoy says, the general movement that he calls the "hermeneutic turn" would not have been "imaginable without a dramatic change earlier in this century, the change brought about in philosophy by Martin Heidegger."² Central to the change effected by Heidegger in *Being and Time* is the concept of fore-structure (*Vor-struktur*). Later, his student Hans-Georg Gadamer, in his book *Truth and Method*, also puts special emphasis upon this concept, making it the starting point of his own version of philosophical hermeneutics (GW1: 270/265). Due to the somewhat enigmatic character of Heidegger's writing style, it is often through the supposedly more accessible prose of Gadamer that Heidegger's concept of fore-structure is known to those who are interested in the contemporary theory of interpretation but whose primary profession is not philosophy. However, there are certain significant differences between their accounts of the fore-structure, which might cause those who know Heidegger's concept of fore-structure only through Gadamer's account to misunderstand it, especially in regard to its relation with tradition. The aim of this essay is to clarify Heidegger's concept of fore-structure. It will be divided into four sec-

- 1 This paper was presented at the Fourth Conference of the Phenomenology for East Asian Circle, 9-13th December 2010, Kaohsiung (Taiwan), National Sun Yat-Sen University.
 - 2 David Couzens Hoy, "Heidegger and the Hermeneutic Turn," in Charles Guigon, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 170.
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tions. In the first section, we will first fill in some background for our clarification. Then, in the following sections, we will discuss Heidegger's account of the fore-structure in *Being and Time* and its genesis in his earlier lectures, Gadamer's theory of prejudice and its differences with Heidegger, and some implications of Heidegger's concept of fore-structure to textual Interpretation (*Interpretation*).

I.

Heidegger regards interpretation as the own possibility of the understanding (*Verstehen*), or as "the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding." He says in *Being and Time*:

24

The projecting of the understanding has its own possibility – that of developing itself. This development of the understanding we call "interpretation". In it the understanding appropriates understandingly that which is understood by it. In interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself. Such interpretation is grounded existentially in understanding; the latter does not arise from the former. Nor is interpretation the acquiring of information about what is understood; it is rather the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding. (SZ: 148/188–189)

We have to be cautious against two views as regards the relation between understanding and interpretation in Heidegger: the one that sees interpretation as a derivative mode of understanding,³ and the one that takes understanding and interpretation to be one and the same thing.⁴ Dreyfus seems to suggest that Heidegger uses the term "interpretation" for "understanding as interpreting in the human sciences,"⁵ and therefore regards it as a derivative mode of understanding. He quotes the passage:

If we interpret understanding as a fundamental existentiale, this indicates that this phenomenon is conceived as a basic mode of Dasein's Being. On the other

3 Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), p. 195.

4 Stanley Rosen, "Horizontverschmelzung," in Lewis Edwin Hahn, ed., *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (Chicago/La Salle: Open Court, 1997), pp. 207–218. Against this supposedly Heideggerian view, Rosen tries to "suggest that there is a difference between understanding and interpretation, although the two are unquestionably related. In order to interpret something, we must first understand it" (p. 211). But it seems to me that it is precisely the view of Heidegger that we must have already understood something, in order to interpret it.

5 Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, p. 195.

hand, ‘understanding’ in the sense of one possible kind of cognizing among others (as distinguished, for instance, from ‘explaining’), must, like explaining, be Interpreted as an existential derivative of that primary understanding which is one of the constituents of the Being of the “there” in general. (SZ: 143/182)

Heidegger intends to use the term “understanding” in a sense that he supposes to be the original or primary sense (GA20: 357/259), to mean a “fundamental existentiale” which, together with two other existentiales, i.e., state-of-mind (*Befindlichkeit*) and discourse (*Rede*), constitute the disclosedness in which the world and Dasein itself are disclosed. In this sense, understanding is “the condition of possibility for all of Dasein’s particular possible manners of comportment” (GA24: 392/276). It is true that Heidegger regards understanding as it is conceived in the human sciences as a derivative mode of understanding in the original sense. The problem in Dreyfus’ suggestion is that Heidegger does not use the term “interpretation” to designate understanding in the derivative sense. As we can see from the above quotation, Heidegger also uses the term “understanding”—or ‘understanding,’ with single quotation marks, if we follow the usual practice of Heidegger as applied to the term “world” (SZ: 65/93)—to designate understanding in the human sciences. What Heidegger calls “interpretation” is, in his own words, understanding’s own possibility, its development (*Ausbildung*), or the working-out of possibilities projected in it, rather than something else derived from it. Therefore, Heidegger says: “In interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself.” If interpretation is understanding’s own possibility, then understanding in the human sciences, as a derivative mode of understanding in the original sense, will also have its own form of interpretation, its own way of developing its own possibility, just as another derivative mode of primary understanding, explaining, also has its own kind of interpretation, which Heidegger calls “assertion” (*Aussage*), or “judgment” (*Urteil*), and regards as a derivative form of interpretation in the original sense (SZ: 153–154/195).

On the other hand, although Heidegger regards interpretation as the development of understanding’s own possibility, he does not see it as one and the same with understanding; otherwise, he would not have said that one arises from the other. Indeed, it is basic to Heidegger’s concept of understanding that understanding is different from interpretation: on the one hand, what is understood does not necessarily get interpreted, as is evident from his concept of the understanding of being (*Seinsverständnis*); and on the other hand, every interpretation must be grounded upon something that has already been

understood. As we will see in what follows, this is the fundamental idea that underlies Heidegger's concept of fore-structure.

Heidegger characterizes interpretation as the appropriation of what is understood: "In it [interpretation] the understanding appropriates understandingly that which is understood by it." This means that in interpretation we make into our own, into our property, what is in the first place foreign to us and does not belong to us. This character of interpretation is the most obvious in the case of translation, which, in Heidegger's words, is "making what was presented in a foreign language accessible in our own language and for the sake of it" (GA63: 11/9).

In interpretation as appropriation, what is understood comes explicitly into sight. In other words, interpretation is also the making explicit of what is already understood. Heidegger says:

26 To say that "circumspection discovers" means that the 'world' which has already been understood comes to be interpreted. The ready-to-hand (*das Zuhandene*) comes explicitly into the sight which understands. (SZ: 148/189)

While what is understood is not always explicitly understood, explicitness (*Ausdrücklichkeit*) is the essential character of what is interpreted. Anything that is explicitly understood, or that is interpreted, has the structure that Heidegger calls "as-structure" (*Als-Struktur*), i.e., "the structure of something as something" (SZ: 149/189). "The 'as' makes up the structure of the explicitness of something that is understood. It constitutes the interpretation" (SZ: 149/189). The interpreting of something as something, or the making explicit of something that is understood, is in turn achieved on the basis of another structure, the structure that Heidegger calls "fore-structure."⁶

II.

The fore-structure is composed of three elements: fore-having (*Vorhabe*), fore-sight (*Vorsicht*), and fore-conception (*Vorgriff*). Heidegger thinks that interpretation, as the appropriation of understanding and as the making explicit of what is understood, always operates in "something we have in advance," something that is "already understood" (SZ: 150/191). This is what Heidegger calls "fore-having." As something that is already understood, fore-having nev-

6 "Sinn ist das durch Vorhabe, Vorsicht und Vorgriff strukturierte Woraufhin des Entwurfs, aus dem her etwas als etwas verständlich wird." (SZ: 151)

ertheless “need not be grasped explicitly by a thematic interpretation.” In addition, “even if it has undergone such an interpretation, it recedes into an understanding which does not stand out from the background” (SZ: 150/191). It is what always remains inexplicit in the process of making something explicit, and what never completely stands out (*unabgehoben*) in the process of making something stand out (*Abhebung*). For example, in the case of the understanding of the ready-to-hand, what serves as the fore-having is the totality of involvement (*Bewandtnisganzheit*). “The ready-to-hand is always understood in terms of a totality of involvement” (SZ: 150/191).

We have pointed out that Heidegger characterizes interpretation as appropriation; that is, as making into one’s own what is in the first place foreign to one. What is to be interpreted is at first foreign to us. It is through the process of interpretation that we make it our own and transform it into our property. Heidegger also uses another term to characterize interpretation. He characterizes it as “unveiling” (*Enthüllung*). To speak of “unveiling” only makes sense if what is to be interpreted is veiled before the interpretation. Heidegger thinks that every interpretation is in possession of something that is already understood, but that which is already understood is “still veiled” (*noch eingehüllt*) (SZ: 150/191). It is through the process of interpretation that “it becomes unveiled.” And this unveiling “is always done under the guidance of a point of view, which fixes that with regard to which what is understood is to be interpreted” (SZ: 150/191). This point of view is what Heidegger calls “fore-sight.” It “‘takes the first cut’ (*anschneidet*) out of what has been taken into our fore-having, and it does so with a view to a definite way in which this can be interpreted” (SZ: 150/191). In other words, fore-sight guides our approach and directs our sight in the process of making explicit and unveiling what is already understood but is still veiled.

Interpretation achieves the appropriation, explicitness, and unveiling, by putting what is held in fore-having and seen in a particular point of view into concepts. It can do this in two possible ways: “the way in which the entity we are interpreting is to be conceived can be drawn from the entity itself, or the interpretation can force the entity into concepts to which it is opposed in its manner of Being” (SZ: 150/191). In either case, the process involves articulating the entity that we are interpreting with certain concepts and, in thus doing, “the interpretation has already decided for a definite way of conceiving it, either with finality or with reservation” (SZ: 150/191). This is what Heidegger calls “fore-conception.”

Heidegger thinks that all interpretation is essentially grounded upon the structure constituted by fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. He says:

Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. (SZ: 150/191)

All interpretation, moreover, operates in the fore-structure, which we have already characterized. (SZ: 152/194)

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger also uses the term “hermeneutical situation” (*hermeneutische Situation*) to designate the whole structure:

Every interpretation has its fore-having, its fore-sight, and its fore-conception. If such an interpretation, as Interpretation, becomes an explicit task for research, then the totality of these ‘presuppositions’ (which we call the “hermeneutical Situation”) needs to be clarified and made secure beforehand, both in a basic experience of the ‘object’ to be disclosed, and in terms of such an experience. (SZ: 232/275)

28 Since Heidegger’s discussion of the fore-structure in *Being and Time* is quite brief, it may be helpful to look into the genesis of this concept. The hermeneutical situation was first said to be composed of fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception in the 1923/24 WS lecture *Introduction to Phenomenological Research*, although at the time Heidegger did not connect them with the term “fore-structure.” In this lecture, fore-having is characterized as “what is in view from the outset in the entire investigation,” and “what is had from the outset for the investigation, upon which the look constantly rests”; fore-sight as “how what is placed in view from the outset is seen,” and “the sort and manner of seeing what is held onto in the fore-having”; and fore-conception as “how what is seen in a specific way is conceptually explicated on the basis of specific motivation” (GA17: 110/79–80; translation modified).⁷

In the two preceding lectures, i.e., in the 1922 SS lecture *Phenomenological Interpretations of Selected Treatises of Aristotle on Ontology and Logic* and the 1923 SS lecture *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, only two out of the three elements of the fore-structure are mentioned—the fore-sight is missing. Heidegger says in the 1923 SS lecture:

It is with respect to this authentic being itself that facticity is placed onto our fore-having when initially engaging it and bringing it into play in our hermeneutical questioning. It is from out of it, on the basis of it, and with a view to it that facticity will be interpretively explicated. The conceptual explicata which grow out of this interpretation are to be designated as existentials.

7 See also GA18: 274f.

A “concept” is not a scheme but rather a possibility of being, of how matters look in the moment, i.e., is constitutive of the moment – a meaning drawn out of something – points to a fore-having, i.e. transports us into a fundamental experience – points to a fore-conception, i.e., calls for a how of addressing and interrogating. (GA63: 16/12–13)

Here, just as in the 1922 SS, “fundamental experience” is the term used in Heidegger’s characterization of fore-having,⁸ while here fore-conception is said to be a “how of addressing and interrogating,” and in the 1922 SS it is regarded as some sort of “categorical articulation” (GA62: 111).

In the 1921/22 WS lecture *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, although the terms “hermeneutical situation,” “fore-having,” and “fore-conception” are found in the present edition issued as volume 61 of the *Gesamtausgabe* (GA61: 3, 19, 20),¹⁰ there is no mention that the hermeneutical situation is constituted by fore-having and fore-conception. The latter two concepts are not even mentioned together as a group.¹¹ Yet we can still detect some early traces of the development of these two concepts, and even that of fore-sight, which would only be added in the 1923/24 WS lecture. In the second part of this lecture, while looking for a definition of philosophy, Heidegger seeks to clarify “the original sense of definition” (GA61: 17/15). It is in this context that Heidegger states that every object “has its mode of genuinely being possessed” (GA61: 18/15), and in the respective modes of possession, “there are immanently co-functioning, according to the character of the possession or, according to the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of the object (its ‘Being’), definite forms of cognitive grasping and determining, specific forms of the clarification of each experience” (GA61: 18/16). The modes of grasping and determining are not something external to the modes of possession. They are not only “extrinsic accompaniments.” Instead, they are “immanently” connected, like the two sides of the same coin: “the mode of possessing the object as such is itself an addressing of the object” (GA61: 18/16; translation altered). What Heidegger here calls the mode of possession clearly anticipates the concept of fore-having,

8 See also SZ: 232/275.

9 Theodore Kisiel suggests that the term “*hermeneutische Situation*” in fact “postdates the lecture course itself.” See Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being & Time* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 233, 534 n.5.

10 See also PIA: 346, 348, 351, 364, 373.

11 Hence, Kisiel says: “[the ‘hermeneutic situation’ in] GA 61: 3 is a semester premature,” and “the use of the term [*Vorhabe*] in GA 61: 19 is a semester too early.” See Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being & Time*, pp. 499, 508.

and what he calls the mode of grasping and determining, or addressing, clearly anticipates the concept of fore-conception. From the way in which Heidegger here characterizes the mode of possession, we can also see how the concept of fore-sight arises out of a split in the concept of fore-having. The mode of possession is here characterized as “the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of the object.” In comparison, in the 1923/24 WS lecture, when the concept of fore-sight is introduced, fore-having, as we have seen above, refers only to the “what,” to “what is had from the outset”; while the “how,” “the sort and manner of seeing what is held onto in the fore-having,” is covered by the newly introduced concept of fore-sight.

30 A concrete example may also be helpful in understanding Heidegger’s concept of fore-structure. *Being and Time* provides us with precisely such an example because this whole book is an attempt at interpretation. It attempts to provide an interpretation of the being of Dasein. If every interpretation is essentially grounded upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception, then the interpretation of Dasein in *Being and Time* must also be grounded upon this structure. In fact, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger even explicitly points out the hermeneutical situation in his interpretation of the being of Dasein. He states that Dasein is the fore-having, existence is the fore-sight, and existentiality is the fore-conception of his interpretation. Heidegger says:

In its anticipatory resoluteness, Dasein has now been made phenomenally visible with regard to its possible authenticity and totality. The hermeneutical Situation which was previously inadequate for interpreting the meaning of the Being of care, now has the required primordially. Dasein has been put into that which we have in advance and this has been done primordially—that is to say, this has been done with regard to its authentic potentiality-for-Being-a-whole; the idea of existence, which guides us as that which we see in advance, has been made definite by the clarification of our ownmost potentiality-for-Being; and, now that we have correctly worked out the structure of Dasein’s Being, its peculiar ontological character has become so plain as compared with everything present-at-hand, that Dasein’s existentiality has been grasped in advance with sufficient Articulation to give sure guidance for working out the existentialia conceptually. (SZ: 310–311/358–359)¹²

According to Heidegger’s definition, “Dasein” refers to the “entity which each of us is himself” (SZ: 7/27); i.e., the entity which is traditionally called “man” (*Mensch*) (SZ: 11/32; GA24: 36/28), in contradistinction with those

12 See also SZ: 232f; GA17: 110.

entities “whose character of Being is other than that of Dasein” (*das nicht daseinsmäßige Seiende*), which Heidegger calls “the present-at-hand” (*das Vorhandene*) or “the Being-present-at-hand” (*Vorhandensein*). Meanwhile, “existence” refers to the being of Dasein (SZ: 12/32, 42/67),¹³ in contrast to the being of the present-at-hand, which Heidegger calls “presence-at-hand” (*Vorhandenheit*) or reality. Finally, “existentiality” refers to the structure of the being of Dasein (SZ: 13/33); in other words, the structure of existence, whose conceptual articulation Heidegger calls “existentials,” in opposition to the “categories,” which is the conceptual articulation of the being of the present-at-hand (SZ: 44/70). Therefore, generally speaking, what is in the fore-having of an interpretation is some sort of entity—a what that has already been understood but is still somewhat veiled. The fore-sight, or the point of view that guides the interpretation, is a how—the particular kind of being of the entity in question, or the way in which it is seen. As for the fore-conception, it is the particular conceptuality with which the entity in question is articulated or explicitly addressed.

III.

Gadamer in *Truth and Method* develops a theory of prejudice apparently based upon Heidegger’s concept of fore-structure. Gadamer begins the section on “the hermeneutic circle and the problem of prejudices” with Heidegger and his concept of fore-structure, giving the impression that his theory of prejudice is nothing but the natural consequence of this concept. However, there are certain significant differences between their accounts of the fore-structure, which might cause those who know Heidegger’s concept of fore-structure only through Gadamer’s account to misunderstand it, especially in regard to its relation with tradition.

First of all, Gadamer’s choice of the term “*Vorurteil*” is already puzzling, insofar as it is meant to stand for what Heidegger calls “fore-structure.” The German word “*Vorurteil*” literally means pre-judgment. For Heidegger, judgment is only a derivative form of interpretation (SZ: 153–154/195). It would be very unlikely that Heidegger would have used this term to refer to the condition of understanding out of a consideration of its etymology. In fact, throughout *Being and Time*, “*Vorurteil*” is always used in its usual and pejorative sense,

13 Cf. GA24: 36: “Die Seinsweise des Daseins bestimmen wir terminologisch als Existenz”; GA26: 159: “Existenz ist der Titel für die Seinsart des Seienden, das wir je selbst sind, das menschliche Dasein.”

just as the English term “prejudice” is used. For his part, Gadamer’s choice of the term “*Vorurteil*” is obviously connected with his intention to “rehabilitate the concept of prejudice” and to rehabilitate “authority and tradition” (GW1: 281/277). But the unity of his theory of prejudice, as I will attempt to demonstrate below, is in the main verbal rather than substantial, achieved largely only by the subtle manipulation of the ambiguity of the term “*Vorurteil*,” through which things of very different nature are connected together in a single account. The term “*Vorurteil*” is used in *Truth and Method* in at least three different senses: (1) to stand for what Heidegger calls “fore-structure”; (2) to refer to provisional judgment or conjecture; and (3) to mean prejudice, according to the usual sense of the term. Whether Gadamer’s theory is justified depends very much on the question of whether the different senses in which the term “*Vorurteil*” is used are substantially rather than only verbally connected.

32

The above stated second sense in which the term “*Vorurteil*” is used derives from its literal meaning: “In itself, ‘*Vorurteil*’ means a judgment that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally (*endgültig*) examined” (GW1: 275/270; translation modified). In this sense, it is the opposite of “final judgment” (*Endurteil*) (GW1: 275/270; translation modified). Therefore, I construe it as provisional judgment. Gadamer uses the term “fore-projection” (*Vorentwurf*) to explain Heidegger’s concept of fore-structure, as though fore-structure were only some sort of provisional judgment or conjecture in the process of interpretation, which would be in constant need of revision. Gadamer says:

A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there. (GW1: 271/267)

But whether Heidegger ever uses the term “fore-structure” in this way is very much open to doubt. In our discussion of Heidegger’s account of the concept of fore-structure in *Being and Time* and its genesis in his early lectures, we do not see Heidegger employing the term “provisional,” or words with a similar meaning, to characterize the fore-structure. On the contrary, we see him explicitly stating that the fore-conception can be final: “the interpretation has already decided for a definite way of conceiving it, either with finality (*endgültig*) or with reservation” (SZ: 150/191). The reason that Heidegger employs

a term with the prefix “*vor-*” to designate this structure of understanding is not because it is something provisional in contradistinction with something final. Rather, it is because it is something that we have already had, something that we have already understood, something that belongs to what Heidegger calls “perfect tense *a priori*” (*apriorisches Perfekt*) (SZ: 85/117). It is something that we must have already had before the carrying out of explicit interpretation. According to Heidegger, every interpretation must have fore-structure, regardless of whether it is provisional or final. Moreover, insofar as judgment is a derivative form of interpretation, every judgment must also have fore-structure, whether provisional or final.

Gadamer’s first step in delivering his theory of prejudice is to associate the term “*Vorurteil*” with Heidegger’s concept of fore-structure. The bridge of this association is, on the one hand, to construe Heidegger’s fore-structure as fore-projection, which, in Gadamer’s usage, means some sort of provisional judgment or conjecture in the process of interpretation, which would be in constant need of revision, and on the other hand to use the term “*Vorurteil*” in the sense of provisional judgment according to its literal meaning. But this is only the first step. It is commonly believed that Gadamer’s theory of prejudice relies on the literal meaning or etymology of the term “*Vorurteil*.”¹⁴ But this is not completely true. Gadamer’s second step in expounding his theory of prejudice is to criticize “the prejudice against prejudice” in the Enlightenment (GW1: 275/270). This second step is no less important than the first step in his theory of prejudice as a whole. But here, in the second step, the term “*Vorurteil*” cannot possibly be used in the sense of provisional judgment according to its literal meaning; otherwise, there would be no point at all in criticizing the conception of prejudice in the Enlightenment. For the thing against which Enlightenment has prejudice is not provisional judgment but prejudice in the usual sense of this English term. If Gadamer were solely relying upon the literal meaning of the term “*Vorurteil*,” what he could say against the Enlightenment thinkers would merely be that they misused this term. While the term “*Vorurteil*” in itself means provisional judgment, it has been “limited in its meaning by the Enlightenment critique of religion simply to the sense of an ‘unfounded judgment’” (GW1: 275/270–271). But this is clearly not the only thing that Gadamer wanted to achieve. Rather, his ultimate aim was to rectify the biased opinion on unfounded judgment. If this was his aim, then the term

14 For instance, see Robert Sokolowski, “Gadamer’s Theory of Hermeneutics,” in Lewis Edwin Hahn, ed., *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (Chicago/La Salle: Open Court, 1997), p. 227.

“*Vorurteil*” as used by Gadamer in his critique of the Enlightenment cannot be used in the literal sense to refer to provisional judgment. After all, it makes no sense to say that “the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself” (GW1: 275/270), if “prejudice” (*Vorurteil*) is used by Gadamer to mean provisional judgment according to its literal meaning. What Gadamer’s theory of prejudice really draws on is the ambiguity of the term “*Vorurteil*” rather than its literal meaning or etymology.

Of course, if we take notice of the different senses in which Gadamer uses the term “*Vorurteil*,” we cannot but wonder how those different things referred to by the different senses of this word could possibly be integrated to form a coherent theory; i.e., how could what Heidegger calls fore-structure be associated with the provisional judgment, and how could these two things be integrated with what the Enlightenment called prejudice to form a coherent theory about the condition of understanding? As pointed out above, this is the crucial question as to whether Gadamer’s theory of prejudice is justified. But this is an internal problem of Gadamer’s theory that we will not discuss in detail here. We simply want to point out another salient difference between Heidegger and Gadamer: the difference in their views on tradition.

According to Gadamer, in the Enlightenment doctrine, prejudice is divided into “the prejudice due to human authority and that due to overhastiness” (GW1: 276/271). Gadamer is mainly concerned with the former. This focus would be surprising if Gadamer’s intention was to rehabilitate the literal meaning of the term “*Vorurteil*.” This is because provisional judgment seems to have a closer connection with overhastiness than with authority, especially when we notice that it is one particular form of the prejudice due to human authority that Gadamer is concerned about; i.e., tradition, which is essentially something long-established, persistent, and constantly repeated.

The ultimate aim of Gadamer’s consecutive moves from prejudice to authority and from authority to tradition is to demonstrate that tradition, or “belonging to a tradition” (GW1: 296/291), is the condition of understanding. But there are many problems in Gadamer’s account. First, how is Heidegger’s concept of fore-structure of any use to his argument if what Heidegger calls “fore-structure” and what he calls “prejudice” in the sense of provisional judgment are completely different things? We may grant that prejudice in the sense of provisional judgment, no matter what its relation with Heidegger’s concept of fore-structure may be, is in its own way also the condition of understanding. Even so, it is still questionable how this claim can be used to justify the assertion that prejudice in the sense of unfounded judgment is the condition of un-

derstanding, insofar as provisional judgment and unfounded judgment are not necessarily one and the same thing. It is only because Gadamer uses one single word to denote two very different things that he seems to be able to easily pass from one point to another. Furthermore, even if we grant, for the sake of argument, that prejudice in the sense of unfounded judgment is the condition of understanding, how this point can be used to support the thesis that tradition is necessarily a condition of understanding is still problematic. For tradition is only one form of the prejudice due to authority, and the prejudice due to authority is again only one form of prejudice. Even if we agree that prejudice in the sense of unfounded judgment is the condition of understanding, we are still not obliged to agree that tradition is the condition of understanding. Why do we not say instead that prejudice due to overhastiness is the condition of understanding? Besides, if both prejudice and tradition are the condition of understanding, how are we to understand something like “suspension of our own prejudice” (GW1: 304/299) and “break with the continuity of meaning in tradition” (GW1: 280/275)?

There are no such problems in Heidegger’s concept of fore-structure or his theory of interpretation in general. It is true that Heidegger regards the fore-structure as the condition of understanding, but for him prejudice and tradition are not the condition of understanding. In addition, Heidegger does not employ one single word to denote these three different things. It is true that, according to Heidegger, we are “proximally and for the most part” under the influence of the other and the influence of tradition in our understanding, but this is not because they are the condition of understanding. It is rather because “Dasein is inclined to fall back upon its world” and “fall prey to the tradition” (SZ: 21/42). In other words, in Heidegger, the influence of tradition upon our understanding is not explained by the condition of understanding, but by the concept of falling. For Heidegger, contrary to Gadamer, tradition in itself bears no “hermeneutic productivity (GW1: 287/283) to our understanding. Heidegger not only does not regard tradition as an element of our historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*), but even thinks that “tradition uproots the historicity of Dasein” (SZ: 21/43; translation altered). Tradition at first not only does not contribute to our understanding, but even keeps us from having authentic understanding: “Tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence; it blocks our access to those primordial ‘sources’ from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part quite genuinely drawn. Indeed it makes us forget that they have such an origin, and makes us suppose that the necessity of going back to these sources is something which we

need not even understand” (SZ: 21/43). The consequence is that we no longer understand “the most elementary conditions which would alone enable it to go back to the past in a positive manner and make it productively its own” (SZ: 21/43). Therefore, if we seek for an understanding of the primordial source, we must destruct the tradition and release what is blocked by it: “If the question of Being is to have its own history made transparent, then this hardened tradition must be loosened up, and the concealments which it has brought about must be dissolved. We understand this task as one in which by taking the question of Being as our clue, we are to destroy the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being” (SZ: 22/44).

IV.

36 For Heidegger, hermeneutics is the carrying out of interpretation rather than the investigation of interpretation (SZ: 37; GA63: 9–14). Therefore, *Being and Time* is a practice of hermeneutics in the sense that it contains an interpretation of Dasein. Accordingly, Heidegger discovered the fore-structure not because he was in the first place concerned with the method or condition of textual Interpretation. Rather, it was discovered in the course of Heidegger’s investigations into the structure of existence, the structure of the being of Dasein.

Although in *Being and Time* Heidegger is not concerned with textual Interpretation in the first place, what he says about interpretation is also true of textual Interpretation, if textual Interpretation is, as regarded by Heidegger, “a particular concrete kind of interpretation” (SZ: 150/192). This means that textual Interpretation is also an act of appropriation, and the making explicit of what is already understood, and it is essentially grounded upon the fore-structure. The only question that remains is whether there are any implications for the method of textual Interpretation, if what Heidegger says about this structure of interpretation is true. In fact, Heidegger himself indicates some implications of his conception of fore-structure for textual Interpretation. He says in *Being and Time*:

An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us. If, when one is engaged in a particular concrete kind of interpretation, in the sense of exact textual Interpretation, one likes to appeal to what ‘stands there’, then one finds that what ‘stands there’ in the first instance is nothing other than the obvious undiscussed assumption of the person who does the interpret-

ing. In an interpretative approach there lies such an assumption, as that which has been ‘taken for granted’ (*gesetzt*) with the interpretation as such—that is to say, as that which has been presented in our fore-having, our fore-sight, and our fore-conception. (SZ: 150/192)

Heidegger thinks that every interpretation is grounded upon the fore-structure, which in a certain sense can also be called the “presupposition” of interpretation (SZ: 232/275), provided that it is not taken as the presupposition in the logical sense. Since textual Interpretation is a particular concrete kind of interpretation, every textual Interpretation is also essentially grounded upon the fore-structure, which is the presupposition and condition of every single Interpretation put forth. If an Interpretation is proposed by an interpreter who is not conscious of his own fore-structure and only appeals to what supposedly “stands there” in the text in support of his own interpretation, then what supposedly “stands there” is very probably only his own assumption based upon his own fore-structure. In other words, what he appeals to in support of his interpretation is very probably nothing other than his own assumption. If we are not to fall into this kind of mistake, it is important to recognize the fore-structure.

37

Heidegger also gives us some prescription for textual Interpretation according to his conception of fore-structure:

If the basic conditions which make interpretation possible are to be fulfilled, this must rather be done by not failing to recognize beforehand the essential conditions under which it can be performed. What is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way. This circle of understanding is not an orbit in which any random kind of knowledge may move; it is the expression of the existential fore-structure of Dasein itself. It is not to be reduced to the level of a vicious circle, or even of a circle which is merely tolerated. In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing. To be sure, we genuinely take hold of this possibility only when, in our interpretation, we have understood that our first, last, and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves. (SZ: 153/195)

Gadamer devoted some paragraphs of *Truth and Method* to discussing the meaning of the above quoted passage of Heidegger. However, the first remark that he puts forward is already quite puzzling. He says: “What Heidegger is working out here is not primarily a prescription for the practice of understand-

38

ing, but a description of the way interpretative understanding is achieved.” (GW1: 271/266) This remark is acceptable for most of what Heidegger says in *Being and Time* about the fore-structure or understanding in general, but for what is “here,” for what Heidegger says in the above passage, it is simply not correct. Regardless of whether we can or should call it a prescription, what Heidegger says here is surely not only a description of the actual process of understanding. It is obviously normative in nature, in the sense that what he wants to tell us is how an interpretation should be carried out or how an interpretation is carried out in the right way. Only so can it be regarded as the “task” of interpretation. On the contrary, in the Interpretation of those who are not conscious of their own fore-structure, interpretation can be achieved in the wrong way, so that the task of interpretation, as stated by Heidegger, may not be fulfilled, although it is still grounded upon the fore-structure. What is even more puzzling about Gadamer’s remark about this passage is that he not only sees it as being about the “correct interpretation” (GW1: 271/266), but himself also uses the word “prescription” (*Forderung*) to refer to what Heidegger says in the above passage (GW1: 272).

It is clear from the context that what Heidegger means here by the “circle” is that “any interpretation, which is to contribute understanding, must already have understood what is to be interpreted” (SZ: 152/194).¹⁵ What is the need for interpretation if what is to be interpreted has already been understood? This is the conundrum that Heidegger was referring to in the phrase the “circle of understanding.” Again, Gadamer’s conception is also different from that of Heidegger on this point. What Gadamer means by the circle is that the interpreter “projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text” (GW1: 271/267). Obviously, Gadamer has projected what he learned about the “circular relationship between the whole and the parts” (GW1: 179/175) from traditional hermeneutics and rhetoric into what Heidegger calls the “circle of understanding.”¹⁶ I am not saying that in the process of Interpretation no such thing occurs as what Gadamer calls “fore-projection”; i.e., the provisional judgment or conjecture about the meaning of a text. This is certainly a correct description of the process of Interpretation, about which “every interpreter who knows what he is about” can agree (GW1:

15 See also SZ: 7f, 314ff.

16 Cf. Jean Grondin: “Heidegger never speaks of the circle of the whole and its parts, but always of the circle between understanding and its unfolding in the interpretative process.” See Grondin, “Gadamer’s Basic Understanding of Understanding,” in Robert J. Dostal, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 47.

271/266). The only problem is that it is not what Heidegger calls the circle or the fore-structure of understanding.

We have already made clear that Heidegger's concept of fore-structure involves something that we have already understood—the point of view through which we approach this thing, and the conceptuality with which this thing is articulated. It means that every interpretation must be based upon something that we have already understood, which is the presupposition of interpretation in a certain sense. If this is true, then presuppositionless apprehending is only a myth. And if there is no way to “get out of the circle,” the only thing we should do is “to come into it in the right way.” The condition for this is that we are conscious of the essential condition or presupposition under which interpretation is performed, not blinded by our own assumptions on the one hand, and not captured by “fancies and popular conceptions” on the other hand.

As regards textual Interpretation, to come into the circle in the right way requires us to step into the presupposition of the author of the text we are interpreting, to step into its particular concrete fore-structure. Since Heidegger thinks that understanding underlies every comportment of Dasein, for him interpretation is at work in everything we think and do, everything we say and write. If we want to understand what someone writes in the right way, we have to work out his particular concrete fore-structure, his presupposition of saying what he says and writing what he writes. Surely, this has to be done “in terms of the things themselves,” and in the case of textual Interpretation, in term of the texts themselves. Unfortunately, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger does not indicate in further detail how we can work out the fore-structure in terms of the things themselves when we interpret a text. Perhaps, if we would like to get some ideas on this, we should turn to Heidegger's early lectures, in which he attempts to interpret Aristotle precisely by working out his fore-having and fore-conception.¹⁷

Abbreviation

Works by Heidegger:

GA17 *Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung*, Gesamtausgabe Band 17, hrsg. von Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann (Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 1994).

[*Introduction to Phenomenological Research*, trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005).]

17 See GA62: 89, 111, 269; PIA: 372f.

- GA18 *Grundbegriff der aristotelischen Philosophie*, Gesamtausgabe Band 18, hrsg. von Mark Michalski (Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 2002).
- GA20 *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs*, Gesamtausgabe Band 20, hrsg. von Petra Jaeger, 3., durchgesehene Auflage (Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 1994).
[*History of the Concept of Time*, trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1985).]
- GA24 *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, Gesamtausgabe Band 24, hrsg. von Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 3. Auflage (Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 1997).
[*The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, revised edition (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988).]
- GA26 *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*, Gesamtausgabe Band 26, hrsg. von Klaus Held, 2., durchgesehene Auflage (Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 1990).
- GA61 *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles: Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung*, Gesamtausgabe Band 61, hrsg. von Walter Bröcker und Käte Bröcker-Oltmanns, 2., durchgesehene Auflage (Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 1994).
[*Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001).]
- GA62 *Phänomenologische Interpretationen ausgewählter Abhandlungen des Aristoteles zur Ontologie und Logik*, Gesamtausgabe Band 62, hrsg. von Günther Neumann (Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 2005).
- GA63 *Ontologie (Hermeneutik der Faktizität)*, Gesamtausgabe Band 63, hrsg. von Käte Bröcker-Oltmanns, 2. Auflage (Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 1995).
[*Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, trans. John van Buren (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999).]
- PIA “Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles (Anzeige der hermeneutischen Situation),” in GA62, S.345–399.
- SZ *Sein und Zeit*, 17. Auflage (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1993).
[*Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).]

Works by Gadamer:

- GW1 *Wahrheit und Methode*, Gesammelte Werke Band 1, 6. Auflage (Tübingen: Mohr, 1990).
[*Truth and Method*, second revised edition, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1988).]