

## CONFERENCE PAPERS IN ENGLISH

### PHILOSOPHICAL SCIENCES

#### SECTION 1.

### PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY OF CULTURE

#### GADAMER AND LEVINAS ON CONCEPTS OF CULTURE

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#### **Introduction**

In this work, I have compared the views of Hans Georg Gadamer and Emmanuel Levinas on various concepts of culture and understanding of the 'man' within the framework of Western civilization with the help of three of their essays. In two lectures of Gadamer—'Culture and Peace', delivered at Salzburg in 1980, and 'Man and His Hand in Modern Civilization', delivered in Munich in 1978—and several essays by Emmanuel Levinas such as 'The Philosophical Determination of the Idea of Culture' (1983). If both authors are critical of the rational based on the technique and calculation of the concept of culture inherited from the Enlightenment, and further, if this concept is embodied in the bourgeois and later in industrial societies, as retraced in the first chapter, the authors differently see the way out of the dehumanizing crisis of the modern era.

The second chapter is devoted to the analysis of the views of philosophers on culture based on artistry and art. The main questions that reveal the original concepts of the two philosophers—'hermeneutics of the word' by Gadamer and 'transcendence of the Other' by Levinas—are discussed in the third chapter of this research work.

## 1.

### **Gadamer's and Levinas's criticism of the concept of culture, which came out in the 'Spirit of Enlightenment and Modern Era'**

Culture is something that supports or should support us. By following this chain of thought, Gadamer began his essay 'Culture and Peace'. Nevertheless, this positive definition of the concept of culture has always been questioned. There has always been pessimism about culture, and there is an ongoing debate about the definition of the concept of culture. As Gadamer aptly remarked, we all understand instinctively and intuitively what culture is, but still it is difficult to provide a right definition of this concept. Both Gadamer and Levinas criticized the understanding of culture as conceptually inheriting the traditions of the Enlightenment, namely culture and knowledge. Levinas wrote on the relation of man and knowledge in terms of externalization.

The Other in this situation is no longer a person, he/she is 'depersonalized' and transcendence turns into immanence. The Other appears in front of me as an object, the certainty of my knowledge. In this case, I believe it should be emphasized that we are talking about the rational abstract knowledge that takes its origins from the Enlightenment and even earlier from Stoicism as an opposition of the thinking to being.

Gadamer and his views, I would say, are in accordance with the views of Levinas, as they criticize the project of the Enlightenment and the Modern:

[T]hat one could be lifted up above the rawness of the state of nature and progress along this path to become a perfect 'policymaker,' toward complete humanity— this was the arrogant confidence of modernity at its beginnings.[1, p. 1]

Gadamer considered the Enlightenment's faith in human reason arrogant. He thought that the subsequent development of bourgeois society and industrial society not only failed to remove this arrogance and its negative consequences, including dehumanization, disregard of the Other, and uncontrolled industrialization, but also exacerbated the problems. In this regard, one of the key questions that Gadamer emphasized is given in the following:

What moral advancements does mankind owe to the unfolding of the sciences and the arts? (from the spirit of the Enlightenment) [1, p. 1]

The possible definition of progress—through the understanding—as the extent to which some people can understand others and the latter cannot do it. This is a path from the total misunderstanding to understanding the Other, and that Other, at first, is not only indifferent to the fact whether others understand it or not, but initially in the state of misunderstanding Me

and misunderstanding what is 'I'. Considering this perspective, the maintenance of bourgeois society, which is laying the concept of equality as the basis for its ideology, has been criticized by many philosophers. Levinas argued that the state of the asymmetry of the relationship between 'I' and the 'Other', where 'I' must meet the call of the Other, is age-old. Gadamer noted that outline of the movement of the 20th century also questioned the bourgeois ideal of equality. As Gadamer said, he himself belongs to a generation 'that went into the woods'. At the same time, industrial society is also based on the legacy of bourgeois society. There are no illusions—it is science, as Gadamer wrote in his other essay 'Man and his head', which determines the shape of our modern age most profoundly, where a question appears in this regard: 'How a person, a creator can coexist with this datum? How is it possible not to lose a sense of creative hand, which would be a loss of self in the end and would be ultimately the loss of humanity in the dehumanized, industrial world where man becomes an instrument?' Similar views were expressed by Levinas when he wrote about the barbarism and 'universal significant culture' as a culture of knowledge. It must be emphasized that such knowledge is rationally based on 'technicism', reliability, and mathematization, and, hence, the culture of dehumanized knowledge emerges. Ultimately, this dehumanization develops into barbarism, which is more expressed in the externalization of the Other.

Levinas contrasted barbarism with the ethical culture where the central point of this transcendence is liability before the Other. Gadamer, in his turn, examined the roots of the dehumanization of the modern era and overcoming of this dehumanization of the modern era of industrial society by returning human attention to the culture of the word, where the focal point becomes the first and last, and at the same time, the highest word of reconciliation:

[T]he reconciliation brings an increase into the world. Only through reconciliation can the otherness — the insuperable (unaufhebbare) otherness that divides man from man — be overcome. [1, p. 14]

By such reconciliation the non-removable difference between people is overcome, and insurmountable alienation can only be removed by means of reconciliation within the culture of word, and this word is the word of reconciliation. On the other hand, Gadamer, to overcome dehumanization, offered to realize more deeply our 'non-specialization', where our body, namely our creative organ as of the man-creator ('our hand'):

[T]he hand is an intellectual organ, a limb that serves for many things and makes many things serve it. That is why this part of the body is so closely linked with language. The hand not only makes and handles things, it also points to things. [2, p. 116]

Gadamer linked here ‘intellectual hand’ with voice, which is his allegory of the concept of culture as a ‘culture of word’.

Together the hand and the speaking voice represent the highest perfection of human non-specialization. [2, p. 116]

The decision of Levinas, in contrast to Gadamer, is primarily ethical, the basis of culture, and in its framework of humanity is an asymmetric relation to the face of the Other, where in this respect the Other takes priority—I can neither hear nor dismiss its call to me.

In the next chapter, we will examine a more detailed solution for the problem of overcoming dehumanization through art and creation; it is one of the pieces of work of Gadamer. We will also consider the theories of Levinas about the artistic culture.

## 2.

### **Man-creator and Culture of Art, Gadamer’s ‘Man and his hand’ and Levinas’s ‘Balance of senses, specialization’—threat and excuse of culture within artistry**

Man has been always seeking how to answer the question: ‘What is man, what is this distinction of ‘homo humanus’ that distinguishes man from all other things, makes it stand out from the animal kingdom, gives sense to its existence’ as part of the cultural community, as opposed to the ‘instrumentalized’ existence where a man is understood as a thing, a mere cog in the system of wealth extraction; an artificial human specialization is made; and force of will and cultivation are needed. This is reflected in the following quote by Gadamer: ‘Man needs to form himself into something.’

According to Gadamer, people can reflect, doubt, and eventually choose who to become, and, this, in its turn, requires certain criteria that would help the man to make a rational choice. The rational Gadamer opposed to the demonic impulse and instincts, but our thinking reveals us our capacity so that we can level our instincts—that is think before acting. According to Gadamer, the main question is how to find the right balance between our instincts and moral aspirations:

Clearly, the problem of man is this: How can we find a balance that fulfils the law of our nature when we are just as much sensuous creatures as moral ones [2, p. 115]

Here Gadamer does not deny the instinctive in man, although he stresses that our common nature can be something more than a self-preservation instinct. And it is defined by the fact that it includes culture, history, progress, and regress. Our human capabilities—the original ‘non-specialization’—give us the opportunity to be creators of culture, but this ‘non-specialization’ poses a threat to entering artificial determination, and

the differentiation occurs when a man ceases to be a creator and becomes a machine and the thing is in the hands of others:

As a result of our whole cultural process, the individual finds himself more and more in the service of functions, circumscribed by functioning robots and machines—a new kind of universal slavery has come over mankind. [2, p. 117]

As a result, a man got into a new form of slavery. So, how to balance in the paradigm offered by Gadamer? For Levinas, there is some other decision. In Levinas's opinion, there is an ethical decision, and it is strongly marked in the personification of the Other; there is no speech only about the education of the senses, but we will come back to it later. Gadamer argued that there is no and should be no opposition between the senses and the intellect. It is the hand of man, which is an intelligent organ, and our senses are at that measure spiritualized and cultivated as far as they are inspired by the 'hand' that is completely free and touches, embraces, specifies, and creates. Feelings have their own intelligence. According to Gadamer, this intelligence protects man from wild instincts and deep prejudices. 'Culture senses' is the development of human capacity for choice and judgment. In Gadamer's opinion, 'universal' again appears here in a different form than the position of Levinas, which amounts to 'intelligence':

We need to see how the hand can coexist with calculation. What about a balance, then? Both sides must obviously be cultivated. Losing a hand means a loss in cultivated senses, but we saw that it is the person himself that needs to be cultivated—his understanding as well as his senses. [2, p. 118]

At the same time, Levinas is trying deliberately to get away from the 'universal'. His foundation is the personalized face of the Other. But at the same time, Gadamer does not fall into the naive 'instrumentalized' paradigm of the intellect 'fershtandt'. In his opinion, the mind is 'intelligence'—exactly, 'fernunft'. This is not a calculation, arithmetic., the art of contractual relations, or technical art. But what does this cultivation mean? When and how the mind directs us? Here is a surprising similarity in the definition of this 'specifica homo humanus' in mind, as provided by Gadamer:

Someone has cultivated senses only if he can see with the sensibility of the whole of his nature, to be observant, notice other things and enter into them. [2, p. 120]

That is, in these other things, the need for the Other is already read, but it is still 'things', which might be some features, although they are inherent to the living. But Gadamer means the eventual return to the origin. According to Levinas, however, it is not the other things, it is not a look,

‘the same’, of the same on himself, another eventually, according to Levinas it is transcendence, a person of the other, there is no longer track of quality of the thing that remains in the views of Levinas, it is a person, it is my neighbour, it is the Other. Gadamer says that the cultivation ‘bildung’ requires that we should learn and know how to look at the world through the eyes of the Other. ‘Bildung’, cultivation, not only demands, but also gives this opportunity, and here we see how the view of the Other is also important for Gadamer. But this view is somewhat assimilated by me—it is me who cultivates the feelings; it is my opportunity to look at the world through the eyes of the Other. This is not the Other who looks; rather this is my ability to put myself in his place and look at the world through his eyes. It does not deny the Other and the otherness. Gadamer leaves the subject at a privileged place. His paradigm is still the paradigm of Art Nouveau, though softened by the negation that is the Other. But the Other is assimilated by me and eventually I come back to myself. The assimilation of the Other by the same is criticized, in particular, by Levinas:

Knowledge would thus be the relation of man to exteriority, the relation of the same to the Other, in which the Other finally finds itself stripped of its alterity, in which it becomes interior to my knowledge, in which transcendence makes itself immanence [3, 180]

And then, the destiny of such a culture is its transformation into the culture of immanence:

Metaphors to take seriously: A culture in which nothing can remain the Other is, from the beginning, turned toward practice. [3, 180]

That is the destiny of this paradigm, which is becoming a practice—that is, the primacy of the subject, subject-centrism.

According to Levinas, it leads to ‘instrumentalization’ of the human, where the culture of immanence becomes a schematic representation of the embodied practices, appropriation, and satisfaction. However, formation by a hand presents itself, and, according to Levinas, it is the expression of thought in the flesh. It traced the similarity of his views to the hand of the man-creator in Gadamer’s essay. Cultural development is not a return of the same:

Culture in the etymological sense of the term—a dwelling in a world which is not a simple spatial inherence, but a creation of perceptible expressive forms in being by a non-thematizing wisdom of the flesh, which is art or poetry. [3, 183]

It is the expression of one in the Other, and, according to Levinas, the source for all the arts. Here there is no longer internalization by the knowledge of the Other; there is no domination of one over the other; the culture is presented to us in accordance with the outstanding definition of

Levinas. I consider Levinas as one of the best in culture, as he shows us the creation of the free flesh by destiny, perceptive, and expressive forms in existence, which are art and poetry.

### 3.

#### **Culture based on the word as highest form (Gadamer) and culture based on the transcendence of the Other (Levinas)**

The large-scale system of Hegel—‘A colossus of systematic memory’—has undergone large-scale criticism after it was issued. This criticism can be divided into three branches, which were developed by many philosophical schools in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. These are ‘gnosiologism’ of philosophy, less represented by positivism, and the analytical branch of philosophy— phenomenology, existentialism, and hermeneutics. What could take the vacant place of the absolute spirit, the abstract idea? Many philosophers of the analytical branch and of the hermeneutical branch of philosophy drew attention to the language, to this ideal substance, which is not immanent, but at the same time connected with human flesh and is not a pure abstraction. The hermeneutic Gadamer draws his attention on the word exactly on whether the word brings light. According to Gadamer, we are a unified history of mankind and are ‘conversation’:

Because we are a conversation, we are the one story of mankind. In constantly discovering more early cultures and pre-cultures, we come to know more and more of this story. [1, p. 3]

In his opinion, we are ‘discourse’. This is what distinguishes humans from the animal kingdom. What does the ‘word’ mean? Of course, this ‘word’ is not in the dictionary; it is not a frozen signification or denotation of things; this word is ‘logos’ or ‘discourse’. All that is meaningful, is articulated. How does the ‘logos’ tissue culture? First of all, it should be noted that the ‘logos’, as Gadamer writes about it in his essay, is not the mind, not an abstraction, and certainly not a mathematical mind. Logos is a discourse. These are the words spoken by one to the Other. The Other, therefore, is present here, but unlike Levinas’s concept, there is no asymmetric relation to the Other. In the concept of Levinas, the Other, the face of the Other, calls out to me. This is a significant difference in conversation with one another. In Levinas’s view, discourse initially has ethical overtones. The sense in this, according to Levinas’s opinion, is in the face of the Other and its ethical calling ‘Thou shalt not kill’.

In Gadamer’s opinion, the word appears not as a command and not as an order, but as the answer to the question:

Ultimately, don't the words first come to exist in the answer? Isn't it, then, that they first become the words that were said to someone and to which someone has had to answer? [1, p. 5]

He says a word is spoken to someone on which the other must answer. The stress here is on questioning and not the ethical order. Although in Gadamer's theory the understanding of 'discourse', 'logos' itself, is not without ethical colouring—I would note that this is not an abstract questioning of being, language—any discourse or the logos initially exists to indicate what is good for us, what is evil, what is useful, what is bad by going out of the present immanence of things. This ethical distinguishing of good and evil through the logos, language, is that 'specifico homo humanus' that distinguishes man from all other beings. But the logos, according to the theory of Gadamer, is symmetrical, on the one hand, and its highest manifestation is the solidarity that is achieved through the 'logos', indicating things that are not here and now, that is, by a transcendent conversation and through the 'sharing with':

[I]t manages to make manifest what is helpful and what is harmful. That means pointing out things that we want to recommend or warn against, even when they do not immediately recommend themselves, perhaps because they are not very pleasant [1, p. 6]

And thus, the culture, according to Gadamer, becomes in its origin in the domain of everything that grows and increases through the transcendental. Exactly in this way Gadamer considers the logos 'sharing with', rather than immanent, not through the immanent contract deal.

One of the most important tasks of this transcendental non-contract 'sharing' is to prevent aggression. This 'sharing' is symbolic and is expressed through language and other symbolic means in the symbolic universe. In this symbolic universe, the word, according to Gadamer [1], gives us two things:

- 1) the recognition of oneself in the Other, and
- 2) the recognition together with others, which is approved for all through cooperation.

Thus, it is a world of freedom with free human speech and sharing, where humanity determines its own destiny itself and where the mystery of cultural human traditions rests on the word, namely 'logos' of the three domains, which are the word-question, restless questioning of spirit about being, every time requiring new answer, and words of legend and poetry, with its special claim to autonomy. Gadamer believes the most important is still word-logos with an ethical colouring, word of forgiveness, and word of reconciliation. Is there in this pathos of forgiveness and reconciliation resemblance to Levinas' 'Thou shalt not kill', uttered as a call of

personalized 'Other', spoken by the Other? In my opinion, yes, there is. After all, if we forgive and if we are reconciled, we never conciliate the abstract idea and we never forgive abstract concept; we always have the other person in front of us, the suffering of the Other—a particular human. At the same time, Levinas criticizes or at least questions the movement of the mind 'intelligibility', understood as the removal of the antagonism between 'the same' and 'the Other', just by the reduction or conversion of the Other to the same. Such a reduction, according to the views of Levinas, is present in the culture of rational knowledge, and similarly, in the artistic expression of culture where the unity of the whole is approved by the unity of body and soul. All this is an expression of neo-Platonic ideal 'of the one', to what the variety of the world returns and where the state is also understood as a form of this unity. Levinas offers an alternative: His 'Other' is the inescapable 'Other', where otherness is primordial and defies synthesis. The other is met; it is not constituted; it cannot be removed dialectically. The only possible relationship between 'me' and 'the Other' is an unwelcome stranger otherness, which is independent of all previous recognitions and fundamental ethical attitude. This is the project of culture preceding politics—the Other appeals to me and I am responsible to the Other, but the Other does not care about me and I cannot dodge the face of the Other or the view of the Other as it opens up a completely different project of culture, 'culture transcendence'. Otherness at its highest manifestation shows the face of the Other, 'epiphany of the face', a face like the death of the Other, where I am responsible for the death of the Other and it concerns me so that I cannot leave the Other dying alone. What is responsibility there? What does responsibility mean there? How is it manifested? What is different from the concept of Gadamer, when he talks about the word of reconciliation? The responsibility here is not postfactum such as reconciliation. The responsibility is not here a dry legal term; it is associated here with love. Hence, such responsibility can be related to existential guilt, which is essentially unrecoverable. Neutralization of transcendence is excluded here as it is essentially impossible.

### **Conclusion**

How, then, a person can live in an ethical culture without sinking into barbarism, bloody conflicts, and fatal fault lines that pass through the human soul and heart? It is clear that scientific and technological progress has not brought much progress in morals and nor has it softened the conflicts; it is possibly is fraught with even greater threats than the one already experienced by a disaster of the 20th century. In criticizing the industrial dehumanized era, two philosophers, Levinas and Gadamer, are

united, but their ways to solve the problem are different. Gadamer tends to the modernist paradigm, with the return of Otherness to 'the one' through logos, discourses, and reconciliation. Gadamer finds the word of reconciliation as the first and last word—the alpha and omega of what can help humanity not to slide into barbarism. At the same time, the concept of culture, offered by Levinas, is unavoidable and related to the inescapable concept of transcendence, where, as a transcendence, the face of the Other and its inescapable and eternal— 'Do not kill' and 'Thou shalt not kill'—is directed towards me. It is my responsibility to others that they do not meet a fatal death. Are both concepts antipodes and do have we to make a choice in favour of one of them? I think that is not the case. Both concepts remain, but they are an expression of the otherness, the assumption of the Other. Discourses can reveal to us the details of our responsibility in specific historical conditions to help us to find the answer to the question: 'How can I be responsible?' At the same time, the ethics, and, in this, in my view, Levinas is right, precedes any concept of knowledge. The Other is unavoidable—it is greeted and not constituted. And then it does not appear. 'Thus ethics is primordial' and comes as First Philosophy.

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