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# The fusion of horizons: The possibility of a genuine ethical dialogue

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This article seeks the possibility of a genuine ethical dialogue based on Gadamer's notion of a "fusion of horizons". For Gadamer, the human being is blessed with the unique ability to understand, and understanding is modelled on the act of conversation in which we engage with others. The fact that different points of view of dialogue partners merge in the process of understanding leads them to a better and mutual understanding, which is a fusion of horizons. For some of Gadamer's critics, in the fusion, the more dominant horizon assimilates the other, which is why Gadamer's notion of understanding seems to be unethical. To avoid this misinterpretation of the process of understanding, I will interpret Gadamer's notion of understanding as the fusion of horizons based on his analysis of the concepts of "dialogue" and "play" (*Spiel*). By doing that, I aim at showing that Gadamer's notion of the fusion of horizons is a dynamic process and that the latter requires an "openness" of participants to each other, which leads their encounter toward a genuine ethical dialogue.

## Introduction

For Gadamer (2007b), man [sic] is blessed with a unique ability to understand, and understanding is historically situated. He claims that we are anchored in historical situations because the preconceptions we have received from tradition always already shape and still continue to shape our points of view, and these preconceptions are the condition of the understanding itself (Gadamer 1999; 2006). It means that, while attempting to understand a text or a speech, we have already had some prejudices or preconceptions. However, according to him, we are not held captive by our prejudices because understanding is modelled on the act of conversation. He says we fall into a conversation which is "a process of coming to an understanding" (Gadamer 2006, 387). The process of understanding requires dialoguing with the Other through an artwork, text, or face-to-face. Therefore, the different points of view of dialogue partners *merge* in the process of understanding. This leads them to a better and mutual understanding. Gadamer (2007a, 98) states that

[t]he true reality of human communication is such that a conversation does not simply carry one person's opinion through against another's in argument, or even simply add one opinion to another. Genuine conversation transforms the viewpoints of both...The commonality between the partners is so very strong that the point is no longer the fact that I think this and you think that, but rather it involves the shared interpretation of the world which makes moral and social solidarity possible.

A real fusion of the viewpoints of the partners occurs in a genuine conversation, which means that each point of view is superseded by a mutual understanding. The nature of this understanding is characterised by Gadamer's (2007b) well-known notion of the *fusion of horizons* [*Horizontverschmelzung*]. "The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (Gadamer 2006, 301). Fusion is consistently depicted as a dialogical encounter between two independent horizons. Thus, a mutual understanding requires a fusion of horizons. That is, in the process of understanding a text, the horizons of the reader and

the author merge into each other, or in genuine conversation, the horizons of the speaker and the listener merge into each other. That is, they can join together to form a dialogical relationship that is mutually transformative. The separated horizons, like the different standpoints, are superseded by the common horizon called the “fusion of horizons” by Gadamer. To put it more precisely, as Zimmermann (2015, 138) said, “the fusion of horizons that happens in understanding does integrate another’s perspective into one’s own, but not as a one-sided assimilation”. The reason is that when we understand the point of view of our dialogue partner, our outlooks have already changed, even if we do not entirely agree with each other.

However, for some of Gadamer’s critics, this fusion is opposed to differences among viewpoints because it tries to force “two” into “one”, and so it does away with a diversity of perspectives. For instance, Derrida accuses Gadamer of not being radical enough and still being trapped in a metaphysics of presence which means that Gadamer is still trying to find the centre, the origin, the ultimate truth. According to Derrida (1989), this approach still assumes that there is a single truth or meaning that can be discovered; as a result, Gadamer is like a metaphysician seeking the original meaning. Derrida, on the other hand, contends that “the concept of truth...is itself a naive notion that ever since Nietzsche, we can no longer accept” (Gadamer 1989, 56) because the Nietzschean critique of metaphysics substitutes the concepts of play and interpretation for the concepts of truth and Being (Derrida 1967; 2005). There is no ultimate truth or singular meaning for Derrida; rather, there are many different perspectives and different interpretations. These perspectives are nothing more than the play of difference. Any approach to understanding the Other that strives to overcome the Other’s particularity and diversity, according to Derrida, is a form of violence. “Every reduction of the other to a real moment of my life, its reduction to the state of empirical alter-ego, is an empirical possibility, or rather eventuality, which is called violence” (Derrida 2005, 159). “Without the phenomenon of other as other no respect would be possible” (Derrida 2005, 151).

According to Derrida, the attempt to understand the Other should not be viewed as a form of violence. However, if the Other is perceived as a function of the self, this approach devolves into violence. Such a risk exists in understanding the Other, on which the fusion of horizons is based. Derrida (1989, 53) stresses this point in his encounter with Gadamer by asking whether “the precondition for *Verstehen*, far from being the continuity of *rapport* [Gadamer would call this “consensus” or “mutual understanding”], is not rather the interruption of *rapport*, a certain *rapport* of interruption, the suspending of all mediation”.<sup>1</sup> In other words, beneath the need to understand another, Derrida discovers a metaphysical will to power, a desire to control and master difference.

Another philosopher who criticises Gadamer is Habermas, who sees Gadamer’s notion of the fusion of horizons as a kind of unification that involves the submission of one horizon to another. In this case, there is the submission of our present horizon to that of the past (Habermas 1990). Habermas agrees with Gadamer when Gadamer argues that all understanding begins with prejudices. However, Habermas accuses Gadamer of not acknowledging the power of reflection to criticise one’s inherited prejudices based on tradition. In other words, Habermas (1990, 236) charges Gadamer with uncritical acceptance of tradition because he neglects “the power of reflection” to unmask the prejudices whose authority is based on force rather than reason. Nonetheless, Gadamer never claims that the horizon of the text or the tradition is always superior to the horizon of the interpreter (Schmidt 2010). The prejudices that have been passed down through tradition are continuously in jeopardy. Gadamer (2006, 303) states that “[t]he horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion”, and “[t]he prejudices that lead my preunderstanding are also constantly at stake...It is the untiring

1 In his encounter with Gadamer, Derrida first asks, in reference to Gadamer’s appeal to good will, “[h]ow could anyone not be tempted to acknowledge how extremely evident this axiom is?” (Derrida 1989, 52). In his second question, Derrida raises the issue of interpretation context: “What to do about good will – the condition for consensus even in disagreement – if one wants to integrate a psychoanalytic hermeneutics into a general hermeneutics?” (Derrida 1989, 53). The third question builds on Gadamer’s claim that the underlying structure of understanding [*Verstehen*] is “good will”, which leads to the possibility of consensus. Derrida asks whether “the precondition for *Verstehen*, far from being the continuity of *rapport* [Gadamer would call this “consensus” or “mutual understanding”], is not rather the interruption of *rapport*, a certain *rapport* of interruption, the suspending of all mediation” (Derrida 1989, 53). For a detailed analysis of these questions, see Swartz and Cilliers (2003).

power of *experience*, that in the process of being instructed, man is ceaselessly forming a new preunderstanding” (Gadamer 2008, 38; emphasis in original).

Gadamer does not reject the interpreter’s horizon because he does not refuse to accept the power of reflection, which is already included in the dialogue. In contrast to Habermas’ interpretation, Emilio Betti (1980) feels that Gadamer’s notion that prejudice is a *condition* of understanding leads to a loss of objectivity in interpretation – not in the sense of the interpreter’s submission to tradition (as we saw with Habermas), but rather in the sense of their subjective projection of meaning onto tradition or traditional text. The meaning that is finally understood in the Gadamerian model consists, according to Betti (1980), of merely the interpreter’s own meaning or their own projection. Betti, in contrast, insisted on a two-step approach to interpretation. The first step is to objectively find the original meaning of the text, which is the intention of the author; the second step is that the interpreter applies the recovered meaning to his own context. As a result, we must differentiate between the modernised meaning, which Betti refers to as “significance”, and the original meaning (Grondin 1994). Betti (1980) accuses Gadamer of failing to distinguish between the original meaning and its significance for the interpreter’s present context. According to Gadamer, application<sup>2</sup> is intrinsic to interpretation. This means that application is inseparable from the interpretive process.

In Betti’s and Habermas’s criticism of Gadamer, as Vilhauer (2010, 60) said, “the popular phrase ‘fusion of horizons’ is commonly interpreted and criticized as meaning the submission of one horizon to another, where the outcome is either a dominating past or dominating present”. Additionally, Derrida says that the phrase rejects the difference between the two horizons. Thus, the critics’ concern about Gadamer’s notion of understanding as a fusion of horizons reveals to us a potential problem when we endeavour to develop a shared understanding. Any time we try to understand what a text, artwork, or other form of tradition is saying to us, we run the risk of accepting the traditional meaning in a wholly uncritical way (Habermas’ critique), or projecting our own meaning onto tradition (Betti’s critique), or eliminating the difference between them (Derrida’s critique). Thus, according to these three critics, in the fusion of horizons, one suppresses the difference between past and present horizons and between the viewpoints of the dialogue partners. That is, the problem is the problem of a dominating power suppressing difference or diversity among ideas. If diversity is suppressed, we run the risk of the tyranny of prejudices. Any time we attempt to reach a shared understanding, there is not only the danger of one voice silencing the others, there is also the danger of one voice actually putting words in the Other’s mouth, and thereby doing a kind of violence to the individuality of the Other and their own thoughts. In this way, the more dominant horizon assimilates the other, which is why Gadamer’s notion of understanding as a fusion of horizons seems to be *unethical*.

The main shortcoming of these critics concerns the character of the fusion of horizons. They consider the fusion as submitting to the authority of the Other, or as projecting one’s own claims of truth onto that of the Other. To avoid this misinterpretation of the process of understanding, I will interpret Gadamer’s notion of understanding as a fusion of horizons based on his concept of “play” (*Spiel*), which he uses especially in the context of artwork. By doing that, I aim to show that Gadamer’s notion of the fusion of horizons has a dynamic process and that this process requires an “openness” of participants to each other, which leads their encounter toward a genuine *ethical* dialogue. Additionally, as we will see later, in the back-and-forth movement of the play process of the I-Thou relation of genuine ethical dialogue, the different points of view are not eliminated by the domination of one’s own claims of truth onto that of the other, but superseded by a larger truth that belongs to neither one nor the other.

From all the introductory explanations above, one easily concludes that the dynamic process of the fusion of horizons leads us not to the traditional conceptions of ethics. Thus, before analysing

2 Betti distinguishes the original meaning from its significances (that is, its modernised meanings). In other words, after correctly understanding the original meaning of a text or a speech, we can apply it to our context. According to Gadamer, this separation is not possible because in the process of understanding a text or a speech, we are not able to bracket our current perspective or horizon. Therefore, in the process of understanding, there are no isolated two steps such as the original meaning and its application, that is, significance. Application is already intrinsic to the process of understanding.

the ethical/moral<sup>3</sup> aspect of Gadamer's notion of the "fusion of horizons" and, through that, the possibility of genuine ethical dialogue, I want to generally explain his position concerning the traditional ethical/moral conception. After that, to grasp the ethical dimension of the notion of the "fusion of horizons", I will decipher Gadamer's conception of "dialogue" and "play/game". These two notions will enable us to see the ethical dimension of a fusion of horizons clearly.

### Gadamer's conception of dialogue and play concepts

What ought to be noted is, first of all, that not even a single volume of Gadamer's *Gesammelte Werke* (Collected Works) is devoted to the topic of ethics. Moreover, he writes in the foreword to the second edition of *Truth and Method*: "My real concern was and is philosophic: not what we do, or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing" (2006, xxv–xxvi). Even though Gadamer asserts that his real concern is not "what we ought to do", why would one dare suggest that his notion of "fusion of horizons" leads us to a genuine *ethical* dialogue?

As is well known, as a branch of philosophy, ethics can be traditionally divided into "the search for general meanings and universal standards of the 'good' on the one hand" and "the development of practical guidelines for well-being, right conduct, and social justice on the other hand" (Carr 2000, 470). Nevertheless, Gadamer's range of interests deals with neither well-being nor a search for universal standards of the "good". The Gadamerian conception of ethics is apparently non-traditional. It also obviously seems that the ethical implication of "fusion of horizons" cannot be traditional because the Gadamerian ethics is of necessity an ethics without dogmas or absolutes. This idea can be deduced from Gadamer's discussion of the different types of I-Thou relationships. Later on, I will go into the different types of I-Thou relationships in greater depth. For the time being, I want to point out that Gadamer considers any relationship that does not preserve the Other's otherness to be *unethical* (Gadamer 1999; 2006).

The form of ethics in the Gadamerian notion of fusion of horizons manifests itself as a mode of "understanding" and, through that, "self-understanding" in relation to otherness through open dialogue with the "other". Fusion is here consistently portrayed as a dialogical encounter between two independent horizons. The task of fusion is fundamentally the task of concretising the otherness to allow the hearing of "the voice of the Other". For this reason, the dialogue partners achieve an "agreement" in the fusion of horizons, not by the creation of a single perspective, but by agreeing on the idea that no one perspective has a priority over others. Gadamer emphasises the need to remain open to the "truth" of the Other. By doing that, we open ourselves to the truth the others defend, and then we reach a "larger truth" together. It clearly seems that Gadamerian ethics insists on the idea that the dialogue partners should be open to each other, and that each of them should make room for listening to the voice of the Other. As Davey (2006, 5) said, "acknowledging difference in the other permits me to become different to myself". That fosters a more profound self-understanding, and the partners can thus understand each other in a more holistic way.

Understanding is, first of all, a matter of reaching an agreement with the other. Gadamer (2006, 180) claims that "[u]nderstanding is, primarily, agreement (*Verständnis ist zunächst Einverständnis*). Thus, people usually understand (*verstehen*) each other immediately, or they make themselves understood (*verständigen sich*) with a view toward reaching agreement (*Einverständnis*)". And on another page of *Truth and Method*, he writes that "[t]o reach an understanding in dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were" (Gadamer 2006, 371).

When the dialogue partners understand each other, they cannot keep their initial subjective ideas about the subject matter in question because in the dynamic process of the dialogue they reach an "agreement" that is neither one's nor the Other's. To properly comprehend the transformation, and, through that, the Gadamerian ethics, I will focus on his notion of "dialogue". Additionally, to

3 In this article, I interchangeably use the specific terms *moral* and *ethical*, and the associated notions of *morals* and *ethics*. "Moral" comes from the Latin word *mores* and "ethical" from the Greek *ethos* (Pojman and Fieser 2012).

entirely grasp what he means by understanding as a fusion of horizons in a dialogue, I will later focus on the play process of a dialogue based on the notion of “play/games”.

If the dialogue partners can understand each other in the dialogue, what is the structure of a dialogue that allows its partners to understand each other? Gadamer (2006, 360) states that “[t]o conduct a dialogue requires, first of all, that the partners do not talk at cross purposes. Hence, it necessarily has the structure of question and answer”.

In the mutual to-and-fro of dialogue lies a dialectic of question and answer. That is, the structure of dialogue has a dialectic of question and answer. If the dialogue proceeds by way of question and answer, we should determine the role of question and answer in a dialogue. Gadamer (2006, 357) writes that

[t]o ask a question means to bring into the open. The openness of what is in question consists in the fact that the answer is not settled. It must still be undetermined, awaiting a decisive answer...The sense of every question is realized in passing through this state of indeterminacy, in which it becomes an open question. Every true question requires this openness. Without it, it is basically no more than an apparent question.

However, the openness of a question is limited by the horizon of the question. That is, the openness of a question is not boundless. For this reason, posing a question implies not only openness, but also limitation. A text or a speech is an answer to the main question and to the questions related to it. Understanding a text or a speech requires understanding the question of the text or that of the speech. As Gadamer (2006, 363) said, “a person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said... We understand the sense of the text only by acquiring the horizon of the question – a horizon that, as such, necessarily includes other possible answers”. Thus, for Gadamer (2006, 368), “to understand meaning is to understand it as the answer to a question”.

In a dialogue proceeding by way of question and answer, the partners do not try to find out the weakness of the Other’s argument, but to bring out its real strength. Therefore, what emerges in the truth of dialogue is neither one’s nor the Other’s. It transcends the interlocutors’ subjective opinions. Even the partners leading the conversation cannot foresee the end of this conversation because it is indeed led by the subject matter itself. Gadamer (2006, 360–361) claims that

[t]o conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are oriented. It requires that one does not try to argue the other person down, but that one really considers the weight of the other’s opinion.

In a dialogue in which conversation occurs, the partners try not to discover the weakness of the other’s argument, but to strengthen it because not the partners of the dialogue, but the subject matter itself leads the conversation. For Gadamer, as a dialogue allows itself to be led by the subject matter (*die Sache*), rather than an a priori interest, it displays a unique freedom from predeterminism.

To properly comprehend the fusion of horizons that emerges in a dialogue, and that enables the dialogue partners to understand each other, we should consider the phrase “fusion of horizons” in terms of the larger play process because, according to Gadamer, understanding is a part of the play process. In the play process, individual players are absorbed into the back-and-forth movement of the game. Different players with different horizons are always included in this back-and-forth movement of the play process. In this process, the notion of understanding is understood in terms of the dynamic, ongoing “sharing” of a common game in which we find an *interplay* (*Ineinanderspiel*) of the horizon of tradition and the horizon of the interpreter (Gadamer 1999; 2006). If we regard Gadamer’s understanding (the fusion of horizons) as a part of the play process, this will serve us in avoiding misinterpretations of it as a kind of unifying force that destroys all difference and movement. Therefore, we can keep the notion of fusion in its proper context and conceive of it as a dynamic, interactive, ongoing activity. After the brief explanation of the relation of the notion of fusion of horizons to the notion of play,<sup>4</sup> we can now try to closely see what he means by the notion of “play” and how it enables us to properly understand the notion of fusion of horizons.

4 In his reflections on art, Gadamer identifies the notion of play as integral to art’s dynamic ontology and deploys the notion as a critique

As is well-known, play is observed in our practices, including ritual, cultic and artistic practices, as well as in children's games and even in the interactions among animals (Nielsen 2021). According to Gadamer (1986), play is a fundamental aspect of human experience and the main characteristic of play is to involve reciprocal, repeated movement. The movement of the game is determined from within and shapes the particular space or field in which the game is played. That is, its movement and activity are determined from within rather than ordered to an external utility. Play also involves players, rules and reciprocal movement. Players are necessary for the play's movement to appear. Nevertheless, Gadamer downplays the player's subjectivity. In other words, the focal point of play is not the subjectivity of the players. "The players are", writes Gadamer (2006, 103), "not the subjects of play; instead, play merely reaches presentation through the players" (*Das Subjekt des Spieles sind nicht die Spieler, sondern das Spiel kommt durch die Spielenden lediglich zur Darstellung*). Therefore, the play movement constitutes a game that comes to the presentation through the players.

Gadamer employed the notion of play to de-emphasise the subjectivity of the players in a game. However, his position does not entail a complete negation of the subject. The players agree to submit to the rules, customs and practices of the game. Nevertheless, the game requires players for the play to emerge. For instance, dance comes to be only through the dancers. Even the players can create new practices that alter and even advance the game. Therefore, the being of the game is co-constituted by the players' activities as well as the practices, rules, customs, and equipment of the game. Gadamer (2006, 106) states that "[t]he real subject of the game... is not the player but instead the game itself [*das Spiel selbst*]. What holds the player in its spell, draws him into play, and keeps him there is the game itself".

The player is thus not a subject standing over against the object, the game. The game properly exists only when it is played. It means that the game itself is the playing of it. However, according to Gadamer (2006, 106), "the game itself is a risk for the player" because "the attraction of a game... consists precisely in the fact that the game masters the players". The game has its own dynamics and goals. It has a self-defining movement that we as players enter into. From the subjectivist point of view, a game is an activity of a subject, a free activity into which one wills to enter and which is used for his own pleasure. The players can choose the game that they will give themselves to. However, as soon as they decide which game to play, they enter a "closed" world in which the game comes to take place in and through them. The game has a "closed" world because play is a structure (*Gebilde*). That is, play is an ideality, which constitutes a repeatable, meaningful whole that can be understood. On the other hand, the structure is a play because it attains its "full being" only in its various enactments (Gadamer 1999; 2006).

The use of the concept of play or game to explain the fusion of horizons may lead to a mistake. To stress the determining of the subject matter in dialogue, Gadamer claimed that once the players decide which game to play, they enter a "closed" world where they are bound by its rules. Even if this analogic account of the dialogical process between the dialogue partners is valid, it indicates a misunderstanding of the dialogue because of the concept of the "closed" world. I stated earlier that the players can create new practices that alter and even advance the game. We might claim that, like the relationship between players and game, the world of dialogue is not strictly closed since its partners' horizons are not closed. Gadamer (2006, 303) claims that

the closed horizon that is supposed to enclose a culture is an abstraction. The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather,

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of the overemphasis of modern aesthetics on the subjectivity of the artist, performers and engaged participants. That is, to understand the artwork, one does not focus on the intention or subjective feelings of the artist, nor on the "inner" subjective experiences of the performers or spectators. Gadamer (2006, 103) writes that "the 'subject' of the experience of art, that which remains and endures, is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it but the work itself. This is the point at which the mode of being of play becomes significant". He uses the analogy of a game to properly comprehend the experience of encountering a work of art. He rejects a subjectivist perspective and instead begins with the play movement of the game itself. Therefore, we can stop viewing works of art as objects and see them as a world that can change our point of view. In experiencing a work of art, the horizons of our own world and self-understanding are broadened. Through this experience, we can see the world "in a new light". A work of art can thus be viewed not as a static but a dynamic thing.

something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving.

As I previously stated, the dialogue's progress is determined by the subject matter when the partners enter the dialogue. However, this does not indicate that they are moving in a closed world because the partners' horizons are continually changing. As a result, the dialogue's bounds shift as well.

By looking at the explanations based on the concept of "play", we can better understand what Gadamer means by the fusion of horizons that takes place in dialogue. Conducting a dialogue means entering a "closed" world in which the partners discuss the subject matter in question according to the rules of the dialogue (like the game of soccer is played according to its rules). However, not the partners but the subject matter in question dominates the dialogue. The subject matter of dialogue requires the dialogue partners to be discussed like the game requires players for the play to emerge. Like in the play process of a game, in the play process of understanding in a dialogue, the partners can reach a fusion of horizons through the dialectic of question and answer. For instance, in a speech, the speaker first asserts and then justifies his ideas about the subject matter. The listener initially quietly listens to the speaker's assertion and then evaluates the speaker's argument through some questions. If the listener can be persuaded by the argument, the dialogue reaches a fusion of horizons. If the listener cannot, their positions change, and then the listener becomes the speaker, and the speaker the listener. The same dialectical play movement happens again between them until they reach a fusion of horizons that enables them to understand each other about the subject matter in question. However, when their horizons fuse, their initial subjective opinions about the subject matter transform into a common horizon. This fusion is a kind of transformation in which their initial subjective opinions cannot continue to exist. In other words, dialoguing with the Other opens the possibility of a mutual transformation in which the partners revise their initial understanding by strengthening each other's opinions about the subject matter. Therefore, in the play process of understanding, "on the one hand, strengthening the integrity of the other preserves the reality of alternative possibilities that are not my own. On the other hand, developing my own understanding offers the other alternative possibilities that are not immediately hers" (Davey 2006, 10), meaning that, in this dialectical relation, understanding is not a purely individual achievement. In this regard, this relation can rightly be called *ethical* because the I (speaker) of the encounter undergoes a transformation of its own horizons of concern in the face of the Thou (listener). However, we should ask ourselves a key question: does every version of the relation between I and Thou or only a particular version of this relation lead us to this ethical relation?

### **Gadamerian ethics: A three-way relation between I and Thou**

We have already identified that a *dialogic* play emerges in the back-and-forth movement of the play process of understanding. Thus, the play process of understanding is recognised as constituting the fundamental form of dialogue. This dynamic event of play in which understanding occurs relies on a relation between I and Thou. In other words, the play process of understanding reveals itself to be a process of communication that occurs between I and Thou. If we analyse the relation to the Thou and the meaning of experience implicit in that relation, we can find a possibility of learning something about the ethical dimension of Gadamer's notion of fusion of horizons. "The experience of the Thou", writes Gadamer (2006, 352), "must be special because the Thou is not an object but is in relationship with us... Since here the object of experience is a person, this kind of experience is a moral phenomenon". However, it is not certain whether we can find the ethical/moral dimension in each kind of relation between I and Thou. What kind of interaction between I and Thou creates the kind of dialogue that enables us to develop a shared understanding in *ethical* conditions? For Gadamer (1999; 2006), we can classify the relations between I and Thou as a *scientific* approach to the Other, as a *psychological* approach to the Other, and as an "open" approach to the Other. Now we can analyse each of them to see which one opens a place for *ethical* encounters with the Other.

In the *scientific* approach to the Other, the Thou is approached as a natural object to be observed and examined. The examining "I" that approaches the Thou as a "thing" stands at a distance from the object so that it may objectively categorise its qualities. Gadamer (2006, 352–353) writes that

[t]here is a kind of experience of the Thou that tries to discover typical behaviour in one's fellowmen [sic] and can make predictions about others on the basis of experience. We call this a knowledge of human nature [*Menschenkenntnis*]. We understand the other person in the same way that we understand any other typical event in our experiential field – i.e. he [sic] is predictable. His [sic] behaviour is as much a means to our end as any other means... It is the method of the social sciences, following the methodological ideas of the eighteenth century...ideas that are a clichéd version of scientific method.

This manner of approaching another human being and trying to understand them is that of the natural scientist. In this kind of I-Thou relation (*Ich-Du-Verhältnis*), the relation is reduced to an I-It relation. In this case, we confront the Other, who speaks to us, either face to face or through tradition, as an object. For this reason, we ignore the voice of the Other. By turning our backs and closing our ears, we deny the kind of recognition that is involved in listening to their claim to truth. Because of that, there can be no “genuine” dialogue in which we might share an understanding with the Other. If we want to consider this kind of I-Thou relation in terms of its ethical aspect, we notice that, by referring to Kant's categorical imperative principle, Gadamer (2006, 352) argues that this relation is not ethical because,

from the moral point of view, this orientation toward the Thou is purely self-regarding and contradicts the moral definition of man [sic]. As we know, in interpreting the categorical imperative Kant said, inter alia, that the other should never be used as a means but always as an end in himself [sic].

For Gadamer, it is thus an *unethical* approach to see another person as a tool that can be absolutely known and used.

In the *psychological* approach to the Other, the Other is still treated as a kind of “thing”, but a “psychological thing” (Vilhauer 2010, 78). Unlike the scientific approach, in this I-Thou relation, one hears what the Other says as a meaningful statement. However, one takes the Other's statement to be the expression of their personal attitude, an expression of their life experience. Gadamer (2006, 353) states that “[a] second way in which the Thou is experienced and understood is that the Thou is acknowledged as a person, but despite this acknowledgment, the understanding of the Thou is still a form of self-relatedness”.

In this scenario, the “I” understands what the Thou expresses in strictly psychological terms. Even though we find a step of improvement in this second scenario of the I-Thou relation, there is still a problem with the way that the “I” listens to what the Other has to say. “This relation is not immediate but reflective” (Gadamer 2006, 353). In this case, the “I” does not listen to what the Other has to say as a “claim to truth”, but as a reflection of the Other's “self”. The Thou is not recognised by the I as a being that has something meaningful to say about the world or the way things are, but the “Thou” is recognised only as a being that is capable of expressing the way they see things as a result of their personal experience (Vilhauer 2010).

This I-Thou relation is more moral than the one that treats the Other as a natural object because, in this second scenario of the I-Thou relation, the Other is taken to be another human being who is capable of interpreting their personal experiences and talking about them. Unlike the scientific I-Thou relation, this psychological I-Thou relation can involve a kind of reciprocity where both I and Thou try to understand each other. However, this is done in a way where one of the partners claims to know the Other better than the Other knows themselves, which is “the point of the complete domination of one person by the other” (Gadamer 2006, 353). It is still, then, a relationship in which mastery, control and dominance are attempted over the Other and the Other is thus devalued and disrespected. We are familiar with this from the teacher-pupil relationship, the doctor-patient relationship and the psychoanalyst-patient relationship. In the latter, for instance, the psychoanalyst corrects the distorted understanding in the patient. Habermas used the psychoanalyst-patient relationship to show the critique function of the power of reflection against tradition (Gadamer 2008). By taking an observing stance during communication with the patient, a psychoanalyst detects destructive beliefs caused by traumatic experiences of the patient. Similarly, Habermas

argues that “a depth hermeneutic”<sup>5</sup> can be developed to filter out destructive cultural attitudes stemming from tradition. According to Gadamer, Habermas is wrong to suggest the psychoanalysis method as “a guardian of truth”. In the use of psychoanalysis as a model for understanding, we do not see an equal relation between the partners because the model of relationship dogmatically determines who will be the doctor with superior knowledge. That is, in the suggested psychoanalytic scenario, the patient submits to the expertise of their doctor. As seen in the psychoanalyst-patient relation, the Other is treated not as one who understands something about the world that can profoundly affect our own thinking, but is, rather, treated as someone who simply has personal attitudes and a viewpoint built up out of private life experience.

Like the scientific approach to the Other, “which merely seeks to calculate how the other person will behave” (Gadamer 2006, 353), the psychological approach to the Other is characterised by a kind of distance. Thus, the “I” remains removed from a real engagement with the Thou because the “I” is not willing to recognise the truth that the Thou claims about the world or the way that things are. Therefore, the “I” does not permit itself to be transformed or educated by the Thou in the dialogue. And this approach does not allow a kind of mutually transforming dialogue or a common horizon about the subject matter in question to occur. In these first two I-Thou relations, Gadamer (2006, 354) finds a failure to achieve a genuine dialogue because “a person who reflects himself out of the mutuality of such a relation changes this relationship and destroys its moral bond”. In the scientific and psychological approaches, we see an attempt to “master” the Other. These approaches to the Other are called *inauthentic* by Gadamer. Additionally, as the two relations do not allow the partners to reveal themselves as they are, these approaches can be called *unethical*.

The third and highest type of the I-Thou relationship, which is authentic according to Gadamer (2006, 355), is characterised by the comportment of “openness to the Other”. If the comportment of “openness” to the Other leads the I in its encounter with the Other, then the “I” is ready to hear something different, which is also meaningful, from what they already know. So, the comportment of openness to the Other teaches the dialogue partners something new about their world and themselves by affecting their points of view. Unlike the first two scenarios of the I-Thou relation, the “I” here is willing to allow the Other to challenge their prejudgments. In this third I-Thou relation, we have, finally, the kind of recognition of the Other. Gadamer states that

[i]n human relations, the important thing is to experience the Thou truly as a Thou – i.e. not to overlook his [sic] claim but to let him [sic] really say something to us. Here is where openness belongs. But, ultimately, this openness does not exist only for the person who speaks; rather, anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without such openness to one another, there is no genuine human bond (Gadamer 2006, 355).

Commenting on that, we can say that the comportment of openness is an essential condition for the possibility of back-and-forth movement in the process of understanding. In it, we rest and revise our prejudices and we enrich our conception of the world. This is a human game of understanding because human willingness is essential to these kinds of games. Our willingness to engage the truth of the Other is a crucial condition of understanding. When two people understand each other, this does not mean that one person dominates the Other. Understanding the Other in a dialogue means being open to the Other. This comportment involves recognising that “I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so” (Gadamer 2006, 355).

Our willingness to listen to the voice of the Other always involves risking our own prejudices so that they can be revised. This task of risking our own prejudices creates an openness toward the Other in dialogue whether through an artwork, text, or face to face. This openness permits the partners to have a real recognition of the Other’s own reality. Because of this willingness to put oneself at risk, the I-Thou relation as an “openness to the Other” is different from the other I-Thou relations. The “I” of the first two I-Thou relations is not always interested in the Other’s world

5 Habermas (1971) coined the term “depth hermeneutics” to describe the self-reflective technique of Freudian psychoanalysis that has been adapted for use in the social sciences. Depth hermeneutics is a sort of hermeneutical reflection aimed at uncovering ideology rather than a general type of hermeneutical reflection.

and remains “closed” to the truth of the Other. In our dialogue, openness towards the Other means treating the Other with respect. This allows us to move in the back-and-forth dialogic play with other human beings. Therefore, a fusion of horizons is possible. That is, our horizons overlap with the horizons of individuals that have different situations from our own. The stance of openness to the Other fundamentally creates new experiences and enriches our understanding. Approaching the Other with “openness” finally reveals a horizon in which a crucial *ethical* condition for genuine dialogue and understanding is possible.

## Conclusion

At this point, we must return to our discussion of Gadamer’s critics and their worries regarding his notion of understanding as a fusion of horizons. Especially from the explanations around the third I-Thou relation, we notice that “fusion” means assessing the world or truth of the Thou in reference to the I’s own world/truth. However, the fusion not involves only adapting to the truth of the Other, but also evaluating it in reference to the I’s own truth. For this reason, fusion of horizons does not require us to leave our own horizon and accept the horizon of the Other as it is. In this regard, Gadamer shares Habermas’ worry about the submission of our current horizon to the horizon of the Other or that of the past. As for Betti’s criticism, we should emphasise that Gadamer does not defend the idea of projecting our own preconceptions onto the text (the horizon of the Other), which implies a subjective interpretation. It means that Gadamer shares Betti’s worry. The projection of the interpreter’s approach onto the text (on the Other’s approach) cannot provide a true understanding. In the play process of understanding as a fusion of horizons, the horizons of the past (the Other) and the present (the I), convey each other towards a larger horizon. That is why in the notion of a “fusion of horizons” lies the play of the ongoing revision of the partner’s preconceptions.

Even though one understands his notion of understanding as a fusion of horizons in the light of the third I-Thou relation, Gadamer is still charged with suppressing the otherness of the Other. This charge, which comes from Derrida’s critique, argues that understanding as a fusion of horizons ignores the otherness of the Other by homogenising the different points of view. Suppressing the otherness of the Other cannot thus be ethical. In other words, according to Derrida, this project is not ethical because it fundamentally denies any genuine recognition of the otherness of the Other by suppressing its diversity. It might be true that we can never entirely understand the world or the truth of the Other. However, it does not mean that we should abandon the Gadamerian model. These warnings allow us to notice that understanding as a fusion of horizons includes a risk of suppressing the difference between the views. Nonetheless, these kinds of warnings should not cause us to withdraw from the dialogue with the Other. This can be the most dangerous thing that eliminates the possibility of a genuine ethical dialogue in which the dialogue partners can understand each other.

Even though Gadamer’s model of understanding contains the risk, which is shown by Derrida, I still argue that treating the Other as a “play partner” like in the Gadamerian model does not entail suppressing difference. By contrast, treating the Other as a “play partner” demands the partners respect and preserve the diversity between them. According to Gadamer, the ongoing play process of understanding never ceases, and so common understanding continues to be improved. For this reason, the partner will not reach the final state of absolute knowledge where they agree about everything once and for all. Every agreement causes new disagreements in the ongoing play process of dialogue. Therefore, one can say that the comportment of “openness to the Other”, which is defended by Gadamer regarding the relationship between the horizon of text/tradition/Other and the horizon of the reader/present/I, constitutes an ethical condition for the possibility of genuine dialogue that enables the dialogue partners to understand each other about the topics in question.

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