

The conception of experience, tradition and human being in hermeneutics of H. –G. Gadamer and C. G. Jung

As far as the problem of experience, tradition and human being is concerned, we can find similar conceptions by Hans-Georg Gadamer and the founder of the analytic psychology and the theory of archetypes, Carl Gustav Jung.

On the basis of a structural investigation of inner opposites and contradictions, C. G. Jung articulated, with the help of verifiable empirical procedures, the theory of the substantial function of collective unconsciousness in creating mythological thought. This theory is also very inspiring for an unspeculative philosophical anthropology, which operates with mythical-narrative and deep-founded structures. In such a conception of a hermeneutically oriented philosophical anthropology, the term *collective unconsciousness* becomes the parallel category to the notion of *collective consciousness*.

In Jung's view, there is a substantial binding link among the notions of tradition, myth, collective consciousness and collective unconsciousness. Collective consciousness is from the point of Jungian depth psychology comprehended as the "aggregate of the *traditions*, conventions, customs, prejudices, rules, and norms of human collectivity which give the consciousness

of the group as a whole its direction, and by which the individuals of this group consciously but quite unreflectingly live".¹² In this context, Jung is very close to Gadamer's hermeneutics with its emphasis on the great importance of tradition for the social and cultural continuity of the humankind. In Jung's view tradition can compensate the inevitable one-sidedness and extravagances of modern progress. "The retarding ideal is always more primitive, more natural (in the good sense as in the bad), and more "moral" in that it keeps faith with law and tradition. The progressive ideal is always more abstract, more unnatural, and less "moral" in that it demands disloyalty to tradition."¹³ If we take into account the problem of relation of philosophical hermeneutics and the depth hermeneutics, we can also argue that hermeneutical conceptions of Heidegger, Gadamer and Jung have as their common feature the dialectical conception of experience. In the epistemological tradition of depth psychology and psychoanalytical literary science (C. G. Jung, G. Condrau, J. Hillman, P. von Matt, B. Urban, F. Gessing), modern philosophical hermeneutics (M. Heidegger, H.-G. Gadamer), and American neopragmatism (R. Rorty, S. Cavell, H. Bloom), there is an emphasis on the deep, imaginative and projecting character of human experience which helps to overcome the theoretical foundation of experience on the processes of mere seeing, mirroring the world.¹⁴

Gadamer's basic conception of experience is, due to Heidegger's influence, dialectical and existential; he emphasizes those forms of experience which

cannot be verified by means of exact sciences.¹⁵ According to Gadamer, the main paradigm of experience is drawn from philosophy, history, art, and religion. In this context, Gadamer is interested in the deep philosophical reflection of the religious experience, and examines the wide range of human experience and its spiritual dimensions. Gadamer's analysis of religious and life experience helps him to overcome a limited scientific conception of knowledge and truth.¹⁶ A typical feature of experience is also its openness and connection with the finitude of the human being, which means the experience of our "painful failure".¹⁷ The subject of the hermeneutical process could only be someone who has learned from the dialectical character of experience to such an extent that he is prepared for the new experiences. The dialectical character of experience can therefore only be realized through the openness ("Offenheit") for new experiences. This kind of openness "has the structure of question," and is freely loosened up by means of the experience itself.¹⁸

Here Gadamer draws from Hegel's conception of experience (in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*) as a dialectical process. Our experience leads to the recognition that there is a contradiction between our consciousness and the object itself. The fact that our consciousness does not accord with its object must lead to a change in our consciousness. Gadamer calls this process a "reversal in consciousness" and therefore, from his point of view, the essence of hermeneutical experience gains the character of *dialectical movement*.¹⁹

Hermeneutical experience, as Georgia Warnke argues, is in fact learning experience, an experience that in a sense cannot be repeated and serves to "negate the error or partiality of our previous views".²⁰

We can find a very similar conception of the dialectical character of our experience and knowledge by C. G. Jung. He claims that "the transition from morning to afternoon means re-valuation of the earlier values. There comes the urgent need to appreciate the value of the opposite of our former ideals, to perceive the error of our former convictions."²¹

It is obvious that Jung's account of experience, like Gadamer's, is dialectical, emphasizing its negativity. However, Jung's conception of experience is directly influenced not by Hegel, but above all by Heraclitus. It was Heraclitus who discovered the very important principle of depth hermeneutics, namely the regulative function of opposites. He called it *enantiodromia*, by which he meant that everything must ultimately flow into its opposite. Jung follows this Heraclitan principle and also formulates his hermeneutically oriented dialectical conception of the world and human being: "Everything human is relative, because everything rests on the inner polarity; for everything is a phenomenon of energy. Energy necessarily depends on a pre-existing polarity, without which there could be no energy. There must always be high and low, hot and cold, etc. so that the equilibrating process -- which is energy -- can take place."²² We can find a certain analogy between Jung's

view on the energetic character of the world reality and Gadamer's conception of energetic, dialectical character of *sprachliches Geschehen* as the medium of hermeneutical ontology.

Much like philosophical hermeneutics, the domain of Jung's depth psychology is in the borderland between cognition and experience. In this borderland, which by its very nature must confront the conceptual and metaphorical language, Jung strives, with all his power of creative expression, to draw the necessary and legitimate semantic distinctions adequate to the realm of the **life-experience** ("Lebenserfahrung"). Heidegger's and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics on the one hand and Jung's hermeneutically oriented depth psychology on the other hand, investigate the problems of the destiny of man, the sense of human life that cannot be resolved by exact sciences, but can only be experienced.²³

The hermeneutical theories of Heidegger, Gadamer and Jung, concerning the problems of the dialectical character of experience, are closely connected with the analogous conceptions of the temporality and finitude of the human being. In a certain extent Gadamer accepts the basic features of Heidegger's philosophical theory of time, connected with Heidegger's characteristics of the temporality of *Dasein* as striving to the future, which is, however, characterized as *Vorlaufen - zum - Tode*. In Gadamer's view, „Heidegger derives the circular structure of understanding from the temporality of *Dasein*.“

(Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. Edn, Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (trans.) New York: Crossroad, 1991, p. 266)

In accordance with Heidegger (but also Aristotle and Augustine) Gadamer proclaims the thesis that "a sense for time is primarily a sense for what is future, not for what is present." ²⁴ As Gadamer points out, "Heidegger rather showed how 'knowledge' of death lies at the base of our experience of time and of our reckoning with time." ²⁵

However, in his study "Concerning Empty and Full-filled Time," Gadamer strives to overcome the tragic dimension of Heidegger's *Sein-zum-Tode* by means of a cyclical conception of temporality, which means that time is presented as "a process which is rhythmically repeated" in a circle.²⁶ But it is remarkable that the form of a circle is typical for so-called mandalas or "magic circles" which, according to C.G. Jung, represent a primordial image of psychic totality, while their inner purpose is to transform chaos into cosmos. Mandalas express the view of the cyclical character of natural life and they are, from the therapeutical point of view, helpful to the self-reconstruction and regeneration of psychic life.

Against the tragic dimension of Heidegger's conception of temporality and human being's finitude, Gadamer applies the neo-Platonic notion of *Aion*, which he interprets as the lifetime of the world's organism; the superior, unlimited duration of the world enlivened by its "soul." He seeks the resolution of this

tragic experience of human finitude in a conception of organic time which might overcome the 'thrownness' of the human into her subjectivity, reconciling her with her finitude, but simultaneously incorporating her in the "history of being." As mentioned above, in his theory of organic time Gadamer seeks its basic sources in the neo-Platonic tradition, in its notion of *Aion* as "the temporal structure of that which endures as one and the same in every alteration and articulation of life's phases, namely *liveliness* ("Lebendigkeit").²⁷

Gadamer's conception of organic time is based on the cyclical process of life, perpetual renewal of balance and a rhythmically recurrent return to the beginning, regeneration and rebirth. The process of individualization of human being, although it leads to the gain of one's own temporality, has as its consequence the loss of identity with the life cycle and so it excludes the possibility of return to the original state. In Gadamer's view the problem of human finitude was profoundly grasped by the following statement of the Greek doctor Alkmaion: "Human beings therefore have to die because they have not learned to connect the end with the beginning."²⁸ From the point of view of Gadamer's hermeneutically oriented philosophical anthropology, the human being is a fateful creature whose certainty of his own of life consciously includes the certainty of death.

Where is the solution to this tragic situation of the human being, suffering the consciousness of his finitude, the senselessness and aimlessness of his life? Where is the escape from the universal neurosis of our time, in which a

complete spiritual, social and cultural disorientation has taken hold of mankind? It is interesting that Gadamer's solution (as well as Jung's theory of individuation) is prospective, stressing the most profound forms of temporal experience and therefore influenced by depth psychology. "Only he who can leave what lies behind him or what is removed from him beyond his reach, who does not cling fast to what is past as something which he cannot relinquish, is at the heart of neuroses in modern depth psychology, which teaches us that when a person is bound to something, is not free from it, he is prohibited from becoming free for his own possibilities." 29

In Gadamer's view we can find the way to the reconciliation with the tragic fact of man's finitude in an analogy to the so-called *epoch experience*. In experiencing an epoch, wherever it takes place, we also experience the necessity of leaving it aside, in the same way as we must conceal in the process of our own maturation and aging, for instance with the necessity of a transition from one half to the second half of our life. At the same time we can find individual-psychological, personal correspondence to this epoch experience -- as Gadamer argues -- in the Christian hope which only becomes significant when we do not insist upon what is old and subsiding. More over, the ability to bid farewell, just as much as the openness for the new, has the character of transition and *transformation*.

This hermeneutical conception of transition and transformation has its analogy in Jung's theory of individuation, in which the very concept of personal transformation occupies a fundamental place. We can say first that C.G. Jung is convinced (as is Gadamer) that transition and transformation are strained positions between departure from the old and openness toward the new. Both in Jung's theory of individuation and in Heidegger's and Gadamer's conception of temporality, the problem of man's finitude is solved in a transcendental, mythical and religious dimension. However, if we closely compare Jung's theory of individuation with the conception of man's finitude in Gadamer's philosophy, we can characterize Jung's theory as more elaborate, based upon his deep psychological experience and erudite knowledge of human character.

In a certain analogy with the conception of hermeneutical understanding as "the dialogue of the soul with itself" C. G. Jung strives to understand the crisis of modern man by activation of the profoundest depths of his soul that means to counter his life disorientation by "activating the creative forces of his unconscious and by consciously integrating them into the whole of the psyche". By raising these forces to consciousness, which results in a "new creation" in our human experience and in a deeper self-knowledge, the individual "achieves an inward and outward bond with the world and cosmic order".³⁰ In this context we can find the obvious theoretical analogy with this Jung's conception in Gadamer's interpretation of *Aion* as the complete identity of life with itself, namely *liveliness* ("Lebendigkeit").³¹ The identity of man with himself is also

the aim of the process of individuation in which "the work on the psyche paves the way for a spiritual-ethical-religious order" and this process "must be chosen consciously and freely by the individual".³²

What is the contribution of Jung's depth psychology and the theory of archetypes for the methodology of human sciences? It is obvious that archetypes have their specific place especially in humanities: philosophy, history, religious studies, depth psychology, literary science, where is used the hermeneutical methodology of understanding. From that point we ought to differentiate between the function of archetypes and the function of the so-called motifs in social sciences. These motifs do not enable to understand deeply the behavior and basic features of a certain subject or personality. In fact they only "conform socially established opinion about a certain type of people".³³

Therefore archetypes cannot be identified with the motifs of human action, because they represent something deeper, which is bounded not only with social dimension and which cannot be comprehended by the scientific category of explanation: "Not for a moment dare we succumb to the illusion that an archetype can be finally explained and disposed of. Even the best attempts at explanation are only more or less successful translations into another metaphorical language."³⁴ The archetypes are universally human manifestations of life, which represent or personify "certain instinctive data of the dark, primitive psyche, the real but invisible roots of consciousness".³⁵ The

paradox of archetype is that it is both universal (collective), and yet only accessible through individual experience. Taking an example from the *Old Testament*, for instance the personage of Job can be understood as the archetype of suffering, better to say the archetype of relation to suffering.

It is also necessary to emphasize that in contradiction to the ordinary views which comprehend archetypes as mere images and content entities that C. G. Jung claims the *formal, structural* and *collective* character of archetypes. In his view the structure of archetype "might perhaps be compared to the axial system of a crystal, which, as it were, preforms the crystalline structure in the mother liquid, although it has no material existence of his own". [...] "The axial system determines only the stereometric structure but not the concrete form of the individual crystal". Analogically "the archetype [...] has an invariable nucleus of meaning - but only in principle, never as regards its concrete manifestation".³⁶ Archetypes, as well as the symbols from the unconscious, "correspond to certain *collective* (and not personal) structural elements of human psyche in general, and, like the morphological elements of the human body, are *inherited*".³⁷ From the epistemological point view Jung's conception of the relation between human being and object of knowledge is very inspiring for contemporary hermeneutics. It is obvious more and more that the epistemological process cannot be apprehended only from the view of affecting of the outer world to the subject of knowledge, but also as "remembering from within", in such a way that the world reveals and interprets itself from the archetypal core, and with the

creative participation of man.³⁸ On the basis of Jung's theory concerning the importance of archetypal structures for life orientation of human being, the depth hermeneutics stresses these methodological procedures which are based on investigating resemblances, differences, participations of the object of our knowledge to appropriate archetype. Therefore it is often possible to infer from the meaning of an archetype the meaning of an object of knowledge.³⁹

Notes

¹² Jolande Jacobi, *The Psychology of C. G. Jung* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1973), p. 29-30.

¹³ C. G. Jung and C. Kerényi, *Essays on a Science of Mythology. The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis*. Translated by R.F.C. Hull. (Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1971), p.82.

¹⁴ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Oxford (UK) - Cambridge (USA): B. Blackwell 1994, p. 144.

¹⁵ H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 2nd edition (J.C.B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1965), p. 496. XXVI, XXVII.

¹⁶ H.-G. Gadamer, "Gadamer on Gadamer", in: *Gadamer and Hermeneutics*, ed. with an introduction by Hugh J. Silverman. Routledge: New York and London 1991, p. 15.

17 H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*. 2nd edition (J.C.B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1965), p. 496.

18 Ebenda, p. 344.

19 Ebenda, p. 103.

20 Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer. Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason*. (Stanford university Press, Stanford, California, 1987) p. 26.

21 Carl Gustav Jung, "The Psychology of the Unconscious" in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Volume 7. Two Essays on Analytical Philosophy. (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1953), p. 60.

22 Ebenda, p. 74.

23 Compare Jolande Jacobi, *The Psychology of C. G. Jung* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1973), p. 65.

24 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Concerning Empty and Ful-filled Time", in Martin Heidegger: In Europe and America. Ed E. G. Ballard, C. E. Scott (The Hague, 1973) p. 83.

25 Ebenda, p. 80.

26 Ebenda, p. 83.

27 Ebenda, p. 85.

28 Quoted according Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Concerning Empty and Fulfilled Time", in *Martin Heidegger: In Europe and America*. Ed E. G. Ballard, C. E. Scott (The Hague, 1973) p. 83.

29 Ebenda, p. 88.

30 Jolande Jacobi, *The Psychology of C. G. Jung* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1973) p. 133, 109.

31 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Concerning Empty and Fulfilled Time", in *Martin Heidegger: In Europe and America*. Ed E. G. Ballard, C. E. Scott (The Hague, 1973), p. 85.

32 Jolande Jacobi, *The Psychology of C. G. Jung* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1973), p. 142.

33 Gerlinda Šmausová, "Rozumění a morální hodnocení ve fenomenologické sociologii" [Understanding and moral evaluation in phenomenological sociology], in V. Gluchman, *Reflexie o humánnosti a etice*. [Reflections on humanity and ethics] (Prešov University Press, Prešov, 1999), p. 131.

34 C.G. Jung, C. Kerényi, *Essays on a Science of Mythology*. Translated by R. F. C. Hull. (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1971), p. 79.

35 Ebenda, p. 79.

36 C. G. Jung, "Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype" in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*. Volume 9. The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious. (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1959), pp.79-80.

37 C. G. Jung, C. Kerényi, *Essays on a Science of Mythology*. Translated by R. F. C. Hull. (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1971), p. 74.

38 Rudolf Starý, *Filmová hermeneutika* [Hermeneutics of Film Art].
(Saggiarius, Praha, 1999), p.11.

39 Ebenda, p. 44.