

**ON POIETIC REMEMBERING AND
FORGETTING: HERMENEUTIC
RECOLLECTION, "IMMORTALITY," AND
DIOTIMA'S HISTORICO-HERMENEUTIC
LEANINGS**

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Like human existence itself, our enduring legacies—whether poetic, ethical, political, or philosophical—continually unfold and require recurrent communal engagement and (re)enactment. In other words, an ongoing performance of significant works must occur, and this task requires the collective human activity of remembering or gathering-together-again. In Plato's Symposium, Diotima provides an account of human pursuits of immortality through the creation of artifacts—including laws, poems, and philosophical discourses—that resonates with Gadamer's account of our engagement with artworks and texts. This essay explores commonalities between Gadamer and Plato through the complex character of Diotima, whose teachings on the processive character of human existence and her understanding of knowledge as dynamic have largely been ignored.

Comme l'existence humaine, notre héritage—qu'il soit poétique, éthique, politique ou philosophique—se développe continuellement et requiert un engagement commun et une remise en question permanente. Autrement dit, une représentation continue d'œuvres significatives doit se produire, exigeant l'activité humaine collective de re-mémoration et de ré-assemblément. Dans Le Banquet de Platon, Diotime explore les poursuites humaines de l'immortalité par l'invention d'artéfacts—incluant des lois, des poèmes et des discours philosophiques qui font écho à l'explication de Gadamer sur nos relations avec les œuvres d'art et les textes. Cet essai s'interroge sur les points communs entre Platon et Gadamer à travers la complexité de Diotime dont l'enseignement sur le caractère 'processif' de l'existence humaine et sa compréhension du savoir tel un processus dynamique sont largement ignorés.

"Mnemosyne rules everything: to keep in memory means to be human."
—Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Verse and the Whole"

"Only by forgetting does the mind have the possibility of total renewal, the capacity to see everything with fresh eyes, so that what is long familiar fuses with the new into a many leveled unity."
—Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*

Introduction

Gadamer's claim that "to keep in memory means to be human"¹ not only resonates with, but likewise substantiates Diotima's account of distinctively human pursuits of immortality. Such pursuits do not result in the generation of static, unchanging objects or knowledge. Rather, like human existence itself, our enduring legacies—whether poetic, ethical, political, or philosophical—continually unfold and require recurrent communal engagement and (re)enactment in order to remain vibrant and thrive. In other words, an ongoing performance of significant works must occur, and this performing-interpreting-enacting requires the human activity of re-membering or gathering-together-again. Not only does an individual interpreter of an artwork, poem, constitution, or philosophical treatise employ memory in her hermeneutical task, but also—and more to the point—a communal remembering (and simultaneous forgetting) is required so that the works' significance and influence can live on. Yet, because hermeneutical activity is also productive and not merely reproductive, forgetting is likewise required and is constitutive of our historical being.

Gadamer's account of our engagement with art and texts is not explicitly framed as the human pursuit of immortality, and he is certainly not concerned with arguments for the soul's immortality. Even so, his explanation of art's dynamic ontology and ongoing communal creation, as well as his emphasis on human finitude and historicity, shares important structural resonances with Diotima's account of the continued existence or "immortality" of social artifacts. This essay explores those commonalities and thus reunites Gadamer with one of his familiar dialogue partners: Plato (or more

¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Verse and the Whole," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, (tr.) L. Schmidt and M. Reuss, (ed.) D. Misgeld and G. Nicholson (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 89.

precisely, Plato's personae); however, it does so through the complex character of Diotima, the philosopher-priestess whose speech on love provides a corrective to the younger Socrates's mistaken view. Diotima's teachings on the processive character of human existence as well as her dynamic view of knowledge that requires the work of re-remembering—or as Gadamer would say, gathering-together-again—have largely been ignored or set in tension with interpretations of key Platonic themes (*i.e.*, the Forms) that de-emphasize (and at times degrade) history, movement, and change. Given Gadamer's historically oriented philosophical hermeneutics, not to mention his creative and critical engagement with Platonic *topoi* such as beauty, recollection, and the status of art, Diotima makes for an especially fruitful dialogue partner.

I.

Although Gadamer has written extensively on Plato, his comments on Plato's *Symposium* consist mostly of passing remarks or footnote references. In fact, the present essay began in part from reading footnote 15 in Gadamer's essay "Dialectic and Sophism in Plato's Seventh Letter," where Gadamer highlights Plato's understanding of the limitations of philosophy.² Unlike mathematical proofs, whose demonstrations can compel assent to their truth, philosophy does not possess such compulsive power. More specifically, philosophical arguments will not bring a person into an understanding of a subject matter that is final, definitive, forever settled and secure from all future uncertainties. In his essay, Gadamer articulates Plato's four ways of clarifying our meanings to others: (1) a word or name (*onoma*); (2) an explanation or conceptual determination (*logos*); (3) an example or illustrative image (*eidōlon*); and (4) knowledge, insight, true opinion (DS, 100). The first three bring about the fourth, which occurs "neither in sounds uttered nor in the bodily and tangible but in the soul" (*ibid.*, 102). However, neither knowledge nor insight nor true opinion is the thing itself, but something distinct. Plato's example is the circle. Clearly, neither the name nor word "circle," nor an image of a circle, nor a definition of a circle *are* the circle itself. But it is also the case that "even my insight into that which a circle is, is not

² Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Dialectic and Sophism in Plato's *Seventh Letter*," in *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, (tr.) P. C. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 103 n.15. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as DS.

the circle itself" (*ibid.*, 105). The circle itself is a unity and is identical with itself. Insights and true beliefs, however, are multiple and belong to the realm of becoming (*genesis*). "They are part of our intellect's stream of life. They emerge and recede. Our opinions change" (*ibid.*, 103). Gadamer goes on to claim that even one's grasp of a mathematical theorem, as is the case with any human thought, "takes part in coming-into-being and passing away and in being other than itself. Unlike the thing itself, science [*episteme*] in the soul is not timeless" (*ibid.*).

Having made this last claim, Gadamer directs the reader to a passage in Plato's *Symposium* (DS, 103 n. 15). There, Diotima asserts that not only is the body continually changing—coming-into-being and passing away—but so are those things associated with one's soul such as character, desire, opinion, and even knowledge (*epistēmai*).³ Diotima provides a helpful elaboration on this seemingly un-Platonic statement about the processive or unfolding character of human knowledge, as well as how this ongoing process mirrors human existence, what is common to a mortal pursuit of immortality, and (a few paragraphs later) what is distinctive of a human pursuit of immortality. In the course of her exchange with Socrates, Diotima says the following:

And what is far stranger still is that in the case of our sciences too not only are some coming to be while others are perishing (and we are never the same in terms of the sciences either); but also each single one of the sciences is affected in the same way. For studying, as it is called, is done on the grounds that the science is passing from us; for forgetfulness is the exiting of science; and studying, by instilling a fresh memory again to replace the departing one, preserves the science, so that it may be thought to be the same. For in this way every mortal thing is preserved; not by being absolutely the same forever, as the divine is, but by the fact that that which is departing and growing old leaves behind another young thing that is as it was. (S, 38–39, §208a–b)

Just as various fields of study (biology, physics, etc.) and the body of knowledge each contains change over time as new discoveries are made and former theories refuted, our knowledge is likewise open to revision and modification. In addition, whatever knowledge we possess at a particular time must be constantly renewed "with a

³ Plato, *Symposium*, (tr.) S. Benardete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 38, §§207e–208a. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as S.

fresh memory" in order that "it may be thought to be the same." Diotima thus claims that the present preservation of our knowledge consists in an ongoing process of non-identical repetition. (Gadamer, of course, has much to say about non-identical repetition and its role in hermeneutic experience—a topic to which I will return later in the essay.) Much of what she says here sounds strangely out of tune with the traditional claims about knowledge and the soul in other Platonic dialogues such as the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*. For example, in the *Phaedrus* the soul is the source of its own motion, has no beginning, and cannot be destroyed.⁴ Moreover, in the *Phaedrus*'s account, prior to the soul's "fall" into a body, the soul is depicted as having wings enabling it to soar above the heavens in order to catch sight of reality itself, *i.e.*, the Forms or Ideas. Once it loses its wings and becomes embodied, it must be reminded of the Ideas (such as Beauty itself) through encounters with faint, earthly images of them. Recollection, then, is mythologically portrayed as the soul's fall from its previous noetic union with the Ideas and its subsequent quest to remember what it once knew but has now forgotten; it is Plato's answer to the question of how the soul has come to possess certain knowledge claims underivable from the world of genesis.

Whereas recollection (*anamnesis*) is a dominant theme in the *Phaedrus*, it is not thematized in the *Symposium*; yet, one could argue, neither is it entirely absent. Its presence appears, as it were, through its opposite, forgetting (*lethe*), which Diotima emphasizes in her account of knowledge as mutable, transient, departing, and continually replaced by new memories.

In Stanley Rosen's translation of a relevant passage from the *Symposium* (208a4–5), he characterizes memory as something made or produced. For example, his translation reads, "[S]tudy saves the knowledge by *making* a new memory [*kainēn empoiousa...mnēmēn*]."⁵ The newly produced memory replaces the previously made memory in an ongoing process of non-identical repetition, which nonetheless preserves (historical) identity in many cases (PS, 254). Rosen describes the discontinuity of memory as consisting in a series of ever-new "copy" instances, and likewise draws attention to memory as a *poiesis*, even referring to memory as a "poem" or generated individual" (*ibid.*, 255). As something made, memory is likened to an artifact—or perhaps better, given the poetic reference, to

⁴ Plato, *Phaedrus*, in *Complete Works*, (ed.) J. M. Cooper, (tr.) A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 524, §245d–e.

⁵ Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Symposium* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 1999), 254; my emphasis. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as PS.

a work of art. That is, just as a portrait resembles an original that precedes it, so too “each new memory is but an imitation of a preceding instance” (*ibid.*). According to Socrates’s critical account of art in the *Republic*, art is that which imitates and falls short of a prior and ontologically superior original. However, in the *Symposium* Diotima does not present the particular and imitative character of human memory as something that must be or even could be overcome—lest we cease being human—but rather as part of an accurate description of human knowledge and human being as historically constituted. Human knowledge and existence are contrasted with the knowledge and being of the gods; however, one need not—as Diotima often does—read this difference as merely pointing to the poverty of human beings as the beings-who-are-not-gods, but rather as acknowledging human finitude and drawing attention to human creativity and human being as a site of open possibilities.

Of course, human finitude is a major theme in Gadamer’s hermeneutics. Not only are we historical beings whose understanding is never complete, but we are also continually negotiating the effects of the past on our present existence and frameworks of interpretation. As I shall argue when I turn more directly to Gadamer, he not only acknowledges human finitude and our historical being but embraces both. Likewise, Gadamer’s understanding of art as a communicative event with cognitive import aligns better with Diotima’s more positive view of the role of physical beauty, sensible bodies, and works of art in the *Symposium* than with Socrates’s negative assessment of images, art, and poetry in the *Republic*.⁶ Since Diotima never accounts for a fall and accords a favorable role to beauty and individual bodies as essential to the process of acquiring truth, knowledge, and greater understanding of oneself and others, it is fruitful to read Diotima not only against, but also alongside Gadamer.

At an earlier point in the dialogue, Diotima presents a diminished view of a human pursuit of immortality, having grouped humans with all mortal nature and seemingly reduced human immortality to a “contrivance” (*mechane*) of perpetual generation fueled by a needy and cunning Eros.⁷ However, Diotima is accommodating a young Socrates’s fascination with physics (PS, 256). As the dialogue develops, she begins to differentiate various mortal ways of pursuing

⁶ There are, of course, other ways of reading the *Republic* that highlight the ambiguity of Socrates’s position on art, as well as his own employment of images to clarify his more “straightforward” philosophical claims.

⁷ See S, 39, §208b2. The same word is used earlier in the dialogue to describe Eros, who taking after his father, was “always weaving devices” (S, 34, §203d5).

immortality and thus transitions from *physis* and bodily generation to procreation in virtue. In other words, we move to a *human* pursuit of immortality that takes us beyond the level of physiology and requires the intentional development of what Plato (and Aristotle) claim are distinctively human capacities. For instance, Diotima describes a non-physical procreation in which those who are "pregnant in terms of the soul" produce what is fitting for the soul, *viz.*, virtue (S, 39, §209a). Among those mentioned who procreate in virtue are poets such as Homer and Hesiod and statesmen such as Lycurgus and Solon (S, 40, §207d).

As is the case in many Platonic dialogues, the poets occupy an ambivalent, agonistic, yet always important role. The symposium itself takes place in the home of Agathon, who had recently been publicly recognized for his victory in a competition among tragic poets. The symposium was, of course, a drinking party; consequently, wine is pervasive throughout the narrative—from Aristophanes's hiccups to Alcibiades's splashing entry. Literarily, the role of wine signals Dionysus's presence in the dialogue and certain interlocutors are readily associated with Dionysus.⁸ As a tragic poet, Agathon is clearly a Dionysian character, as is Alcibiades. Socrates, who is arguably the only dialogue partner able to balance his Dionysian and Apollonian elements, takes Agathon to task—in fine Apollonian form—for his overemphasis on poetic style to the neglect of content or concern for the truth. Lastly, Diotima lists the poets among those who procreate in soul and produce virtuous works and deeds; however, she indicates that the poets occupy a lesser place in the city than the statesmen, due in part to the latter's superior development and use of prudence (see, for example, S, 39, §209a3–8). Just as in the *Republic*, in the *Symposium* the status of the poets is ambiguous, but elevated.⁹

According to Diotima, Eros inspires humans toward multiple and (compared to other animals) superior ways of achieving immortality. Humans, for example, desire to establish a lasting name for themselves. Consequently, they pursue honor and reputation, which signals a movement beyond *physis* and the private realm of sexual

⁸ For a study of the Dionysian elements at play in the *Symposium*, see David Sider, "Plato's 'Symposium' as Dionysian Festival," *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica*, New Series, vol. 4 (1980): 41–56. See also Daniel E. Anderson, *The Masks of Dionysos: A Commentary on Plato's Symposium* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993).

⁹ For a masterful account of the tension-ridden relationship between philosophy and poetry from Plato to Derrida, see Gerald Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); see especially 229–46.

reproduction and into the public realm of the political. Moreover, in striving after honor and a lasting name, they again demonstrate their creative potential through their procreative variations. Whether through the courage of a warrior, the skill of a poet, or the prudence of a statesman or king, an “immortal remembering of their virtue” can be secured (S, 39, §208d5). However, this remembering always involves a simultaneous forgetting, and thus the identity involved is historical. The human ability to reflect upon memories and thus constructively unite—as Gadamer would say, “gather-together-again”—not only individually but also and especially collectively, gives birth to social artifacts that outlive both our offspring and us and have the potential for social good. This collective creation (and re-creation) of mortal—and specifically *human*—pursuits of immortality is functionally equivalent to Gadamer’s account of the dynamic ontology of artworks and texts, about which I shall have more to say in Part II. Such collective human artifacts can even be brought back from the dead or, more accurately, from a seeming death—hence their immortality, which is, so to speak, our (human) immortality. As Rosen observes, the non-bodily character of reputation or fame “may be preserved continuously, and even resuscitated after a lapse of time” (PS, 258). Lastly, in order to create such enduring, “revivable” offspring, friendship is required—in particular, a friendship that involves dialogical engagement. Thus, as we ascend to the political as a public and communal realm, an emphasis on speech, dialogue, and *philia* as opposed to private, self-centered *eros* takes center stage.

However, Diotima intimates that the political is not the highest procreative realm. In fact, she suggests that the movement from the physiological to the political serves a preparatory function for one’s initiation into the “perfect revelations” (S, 40, §210a1). This brings me to Diotima’s famous speech (S, 40–42, §§210a1–212a8) regarding the ascent from one particular beautiful body to the “vast open sea of the beautiful” (S, 41, §210d3) and then the sudden revelation of “the beautiful itself” (S, 42, §211d1 and cf. S, 41, §210e4).¹⁰ Diotima opens the section with religious language and refers to “the perfect revelations” and of the need to be properly “initiated” into the “rites of love” (S, 40, §210a1–3). Earlier in the text, when Socrates first mentions Diotima to Agathon, he describes her as not only wise, but also as divinely inspired or possessing prophetic abilities (see, for example, S, 31, §201d1–5). In other words, Diotima plays

¹⁰ This is a notoriously difficult section of the text, and I will not be able to address it in its entirety. Accordingly, I will focus only on those passages that are relevant to my present purposes.

the difficult role of a philosopher-priestess, not only aware of her own ignorance but—having been granted revelation from the gods—also called to share what she has received through prophetic discourse and rites of initiation (*i.e.*, religious practices).¹¹

The first seven steps of the ascent that she describes are fairly straightforward. The initiate (beloved) attaches himself to his virtuous lover and the two “generate beautiful speeches” (S, 40, §210a6–7). Then the beloved is brought to see that the beauty of “all bodies is one the same” (S, 40, §210b3). Having become a lover of all beautiful bodies, he comes to realize that the beauty of the soul is “more honorable” than the beauty of the body, which will motivate him to generate virtuous speeches to better his partner (and presumably himself) (S, 41, §210b6–c2). As the two continue to engage in dialogue, they come to see the beauty of laws and customs, which provide stability for the city and are themselves dependent (at least in part) upon the virtue and prudential deliberations of the lawmakers and city leaders. From the beauty of laws and customs—which, like the previous stages, are necessary for the ascent but are also limited and, to a degree, “slavish”—the focus moves to the beauty of the sciences or knowledge. Then in the penultimate step, they turn “to the vast open sea of the beautiful, behold it and give birth—in ungrudging philosophy—to many and magnificent speeches and thoughts” (S, 41, §210c3–d6). Having generated philosophical offspring and having been invigorated from their intellectual intercourse and discourse, the beloved and the lover prepare for the final revelation.

As Rosen comments, philosophy is characterized “as the process of generating speeches, and so as a locus of genesis simply” (PS, 268). In addition, the sciences and the discourses that animate them are likewise multiple. Thus far the vision of the beautiful presented is not one of a final unity; it is rather “a kind of intermediate manifold (reminiscent of Kant’s schematism), comparable to a vast or bounteous sea,” which is both identifiable as a sea and yet constantly in motion (*ibid.*). The image of the fluidity of water and the ever-generating and changing waves recalls the fluidity, multiplicity, and particularity of speech and consequently points to the problem of how to account for an ultimate unity of the particulars, if such a unity exists. As Rosen explains,

¹¹ Diotima is an instance of the in-between that will be discussed toward the end of part I.

We need to make the final ascent from beautiful particulars of the highest kind to beauty simply or in itself as the unity of those particulars. Unfortunately, such an ascent takes us from speech to silence. Every speech is a particular and generated individual, a wave of the sea rather than the sea itself; it is itself a unified manifold, but one which cannot speak its own unity. The visibility of the beautiful particular rests upon the prior intuition of beauty in itself; but every attempt to speak of beauty in itself merely generates another particular. (*Ibid.*)

Given the impossibility of the task, it is clear why Diotima urges Socrates to pay attention as best as he can. After her call to attentiveness, Diotima remarks, "Whoever has been educated up to this point in erotics, beholding successively and correctly the beautiful things, in now going to the perfect end of erotics shall suddenly glimpse something wonderfully beautiful in its nature" (S, 41, §210e2-5). Diotima must revert to a more poetic mode of discourse, which includes the use of visual imagery, as she attempts to "explain" the inexplicable, *viz.*, the movement from discursive reasoning to intuitive insight. In keeping with the difficulty of her task, Diotima's subsequent description of the beautiful itself is primarily an account of what the beautiful is *not* rather than an account of what the beautiful *is*; and this reliance upon an apophatic account further highlights her inability to give a *logos* for that which is beyond speech. Similar to the *Phaedrus*, in which a poetic myth about recollection is told as a way to provide a unified account of knowledge and to make sense of our human condition and limitations, here too in the *Symposium* poetic-prophetic revelatory vision is employed to make genesis intelligible and give unity and "grounding" to multiplicity. In addition, one of the reasons for depicting Diotima as both a philosopher and a *priestess* becomes clear: her prophetic vision is the necessary supplement to the earlier discursive account and thus functions as the "bridge" connecting discursive reason and intuitive insight. "It 'opens the horizon' within which an ascent from particulars to the 'instantaneous' vision of unity may occur" (PS, 269).

Like the fluidity of the ever-changing waves of the sea, Eros too manifests many faces. For example, he is presented as divine, as an impersonal generative force, and as a co-worker to the budding philosopher. In the end it seems that both the philosopher and Eros fall short of the divine, since both are unable to fulfill their desires and are acutely aware of their lack. Stated otherwise, both Eros and the philosopher (*i.e.*, the erotic philosopher) dwell in the in-between, not measuring up to the gods but surpassing the "vulgar and low" (S, 33, §203a6-7). In Socrates's response to Agathon, for example, one

gains insight concerning the in-between character of Eros and the philosopher, both of which share structural similarities with Gadamer's descriptions of hermeneutic experience and understanding. In what follows, I highlight a few (of the many) instances of the theme of the in-between and how it is depicted in the *Symposium*. Likewise I shall draw out connections with Gadamer's thought.

In his dialogue with Agathon, Socrates recounts how Diotima helped him to see the error of his former view of Eros, a view that was similar to Agathon's own position, which held "that Eros was a great god, and was the love of beautiful things" (S, 31, §201e). However, after Socrates's dialogical encounter with Diotima, he came to see that Eros is neither beautiful nor good, but something in-between (see S, 31, §201e and S, 32, §202b4). Even more to the point, Diotima taught Socrates that Eros is neither mortal nor immortal (as the gods), but "a great daemon...for everything daemonic is between god and mortal" (S, 32, §202e1-2). As *daemon*, Eros's task is to interpret and carry messages back and forth between gods and humans (S, 32, §202e4-5). Having described what sounds more akin to priestly or prophetic mediatory activity, Diotima then adds that "he who is wise in things like this is a daemonic man" (S, 33, §203a5).¹² If one compares Socrates's earlier claim that he has "expert knowledge of nothing but erotics [*ta erōtika*]" (S, 7, §177e1) with what Socrates says here through Diotima, one may surmise that Socrates understands himself as a "daemonic man." Perhaps one could say that Socrates's depiction of Diotima as a philosopher-priestess and his use of her as his "mouthpiece" indicates his own self-understanding as a prophetic philosopher—or at least a philosopher open to revelation, the divine, and that which exceeds speech.

Jean Grondin has charted a helpful prehistory of hermeneutics that emphasizes its in-between or mediating function. Grondin begins by tracing important etymological insights in relation to the term *hermeneuein*. One of the senses of the term is "to interpret," where one attempts to "penetrate an uttered expression to see the spirit contained within it."¹³ Another sense of *hermeneuein* is "to express." Here the idea is to make "what is contained within knowable from without." So early on in the history of hermeneutics there is a clear inner/outer distinction which Gadamer, following

¹² See *Symposium* §§202e4-203a8 for a full description of the daemonic, priestly activity.

¹³ Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, (tr.) J. Weinsheimer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 21. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as IPH.

Heidegger's phenomenological impetus, works to deconstruct. Nonetheless, such a distinction was present in hermeneutics's prehistory and is part of its development.

Continuing his account of the different senses of *hermeneuein*, Grondin writes, "Interpretation inquires into the tacit, inner sense behind the explicit; speaking expresses the inner" (IPH, 20, 21). In Stoicism, for example, the Greek notion of discourse is at "its apex in the Stoic distinction between the *logos prophorikos* and the *logos endiathetos* (between uttered and inward *logos*). The first concerns only the expression (*hermeneia*), whereas the second concerns the inner, the thought (*dianoia*)" (*ibid.*, 21). Here the activity of interpreting involves mediating meaning "from the outside to the inside of meaning" (*ibid.*). Grondin also adds that the word "*hermeneutica*," which came into common discourse around 1619, has nonetheless much older roots; it is the Latinized version of *hermeneutike* and appears "in the Platonic corpus (*Politikos* 260 d 11, *Epinomis* 975 c 6, and *Definitiones* 414 d 4)," where it has religious associations, as well as links to soothsaying (*mantike*) (*ibid.*). Grondin further appeals to a passage from the *Timaeus* (71a–72b) and concludes that Plato's suggestion therein is that soothsaying can bring one to neither wisdom (*sophia*) nor truth because it contains madness (*mania*). In other words, Grondin's claim seems to be that the one who is gripped by madness, given his lack of "self-possession," is unable to evaluate the truth of his visions and utterances.¹⁴ In contrast, the prophet is able to translate and interpret the soothsayer's messages so that the truths therein are made intelligible. As to whether *hermeneutike* is more like soothsaying or the activity of the prophet, Plato's texts do not provide a clear answer. Even so, Grondin's point still holds; *viz.*, both the soothsayer and the prophet have mediating roles wherein they deliver (and at times explain) messages from the gods to humans (IPH, 22). Lastly, Grondin cites the *Ion*, where poets are referred to "as the *hermenes tôn theôn* (*Ion* 435e)," and "the rhapsodes who perform the poets' works are described as interpreters of interpreters (*hermeneon hermenes*, *Ion* 535a)" (*ibid.*). Of course, Gadamer develops these Platonic themes in his emphasis on the interpreter (of texts, artworks, etc.) as a "mediator of something mediated...a function that can go on indefinitely, since it always leaves more to say than can be precisely captured in words" (*ibid.*).

¹⁴ If this is correct, then Grondin's reading does not rule out the possibility of others being led to truth and perhaps even wisdom through the utterances of a mad soothsayer.

Before transitioning to Part II, let me briefly mention two additional instances of the in-between, followed again by connections with key themes in Gadamer's work. First, in Diotima's mythical account of Eros's birth—itsself an odd encounter between Resource and Poverty—she states that Eros is “philosophizing through all his life,” that is to say “a lover of wisdom” (S, 34, §203d7). Just as the *daemon* lives and moves in the in-between, so too it seems does the philosopher or “daemoniac individual,” whose ongoing, erotic quest for greater understanding, knowledge, and wisdom is never satisfied. Second, Diotima describes *Eros's* in-between status as that which is “in between wisdom and lack of understanding” (S, 34, §203e6). Gods, she says, are wise; accordingly, they have no need to philosophize. Those lacking in understanding have neither desire to become wise nor to take part in philosophy. They, in other words, are ignorant of their lack and remain content in their present condition. Toward the end of this particular exchange, Socrates questions Diotima directly: who, then, if neither gods—the wise—nor the ignorant, engages in philosophy? (S, 34, §204a9–10). Diotima replies, “[T]hey are those between them both, of whom Eros would be one. For wisdom is one of the most beautiful things, and Eros is love in regard to the beautiful; and so Eros is—necessarily—a philosopher; and as a philosopher he is between being wise and being without understanding” (S, 34, §204b1–5). So here Eros and the philosopher become one and Socrates serves as the erotic philosopher *par excellence*.

II.

One could construe Gadamer's notions of hermeneutic experience and understanding, like Eros, as being constituted by a lack or a fundamental negativity. However, the negativity characteristic of hermeneutic experience and understanding proves fruitful; or, to put it in terms more consonant with Diotima's speech, both are generative and continually birth (or have the potential to birth) new experience and understanding. For Gadamer, experience (*Erfahrung*) and understanding are intimately connected and both share an event-like character. That is, understanding is quite often something that happens to us rather than something we control. Likewise, experience always involves an element of surprise, of being pulled up short, and genuinely taken aback by a new insight into a subject matter. Stated from a related but slightly different angle, Gadamerian experience is akin to the experience we obtain through the sufferings of life, where something unexpected is learned or grasped in a way

previously unavailable due to our prejudices, biases, and a host of other possible reasons.

Like Diotima's account of human existence and the creation and (re)creation of social artifacts, Gadamer's understanding of hermeneutic experience is historical, dynamic, and processive (ongoing). This dynamic, unfolding characterization of experience points to what Gadamer has in mind when he describes experience, following a Hegelian insight, as essentially negative. In other words, when experience "happens," we are genuinely surprised, and perhaps even shocked; we now see otherwise what we formerly and even unwaveringly took to be the case. Gadamer draws attention to some of the key points of hermeneutical experience in the following passage:

If a new experience of an object occurs to us, this means that hitherto we have not seen the thing correctly and now know it better. Thus the negativity of experience has a curiously productive meaning. It is not simply that we see through a deception and hence make a correction, but we acquire an [expansive; *weitgreifendes*] knowledge. We cannot, therefore, have a new experience of any object at random, but it must be of such a nature that we gain better knowledge through it, not only of itself, but of what we thought we knew before.¹⁵

So again there is an emphasis on experience as productive, rather than *re*-productive and hence simply confirming what we already believed or assumed to know. When we undergo a genuine hermeneutical experience, our horizons are changed. Sometimes our horizons are only slightly altered; however, at other times, such as when our most cherished beliefs are shown to be misguided, our horizons are radically altered and so too our way of seeing ourselves, the world, and others. This kind of radical change suggests that genuine hermeneutic experience can be extremely painful. Like the prisoners in Plato's cave or the painful longing for one's other half so wonder-

¹⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed., (tr. and rev.) J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004), 353. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as TM. I have slightly modified the English translation of this passage, indicated by the word in brackets, in consultation with the original German: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke, Band I: Hermeneutik I: Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, 4th Auflage (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1975), 359. Since Gadamer rejects Hegel's notion of comprehensive knowledge, translating the term *weitgreifendes* as "expansive" rather than Weinsheimer's and Marshall's choice of "comprehensive" seems more compatible with Gadamer's thought.

fully depicted in Aristophanes's myth, the event of experience can open new worlds and ways of seeing and being (or longing to be) and simultaneously produce considerable suffering and pain.

Similarly, the ongoing process of challenging our biases and expanding our hermeneutical horizons is demanding, as it requires us to risk not only our beliefs and assumptions but also our very selves—who we understand ourselves to be and how we *are* in-the-world-with-others. Acquiring hermeneutical experience and understanding, like Diotima's account of the ladder and the need for an other in order to grow in self-knowledge and virtue, requires *dialogical* engagement. In other words, growth in self-understanding for Gadamer cannot occur without genuine listening to and learning from others. So true education (*Bildung*) for both Gadamer and Plato (or at least for Socrates and, so it seems, Diotima) is ongoing and often involves pain and the "happening" of experience. For example, in the *Republic* the prisoner's first glimpse at the fire that produces the shadows on the cave wall results in a painful disorientation, as does his attempt to look at the sun outside the cave. But one should also not fail to notice that the prisoner requires others to release him from his bonds and that he is brought into a community of philosophers who will help encourage him to continue on his new path. Consequently, in both Plato and Gadamer the role of others is essential to a proper educative formation.

Gadamer's stress on human finitude and our historical character in his elaboration of both experience and education sounds another resonance with Diotima's emphasis on the historicity of the human condition. That is, for Diotima and Gadamer, educative experience brings about genuine insight, where both the experience and the insight are intimately tied to our historical nature. As Gadamer explains,

[T]he historical nature of man essentially implies a fundamental negativity that emerges in the relation between experience and insight. Insight is more than the knowledge of this or that situation. It always involves an escape from something that has deceived us and held us captive. Thus insight always involves an element of self-knowledge and constitutes a necessary side of what we called experience in the proper sense. Insight is something that we come to. It too is ultimately part of the vocation of man—i.e., to be discerning and insightful. (TM, 356)

In other words, the insight that we gain as a result of (often painful) experience is liberating; it frees us, like the chained prisoner in Plato's cave, from a narrow and distorted way of seeing and being-in-

the-world-with-others. Furthermore, Gadamer claims that the process of gaining insight is part of our human vocation or calling: we are called to be discerning and insightful. Diotima would no doubt agree. So what exactly does Gadamer mean by discerning and insightful? Given what he goes on to discuss in the passages that immediately follow, this calling is an ongoing challenge for us to accept our finitude, historicity, and the contingency of our existence. Although we seem to have the ability to test the gods—as Aristophanes’s myth portrays—ultimately we are not gods; yet this insight into, as Gadamer puts it, “what is” is a lesson that seems to require suffering (*ibid.*, 357). As Gadamer makes clear in his discussion of Aeschylus, the import of Aeschylus’s wisdom is that he explains *why* humans must learn through suffering: because such learning yields “insight into the limitations of humanity, into the absoluteness of the barrier that separates man from the divine. It is ultimately a religious insight—the kind of insight that gave birth to Greek tragedy” (*ibid.*, 356–57).

Aeschylus, in other words, confronts us with our human finitude and the hard truth that we are not masters of our destiny, that we cannot halt the forward movement of time, that no matter how hard we try, pray, or hope, time and life itself are not in our hands. For Gadamer, the “truly experienced person is one who has taken this to heart,” one who “knows that all foresight is limited and plans uncertain” (*ibid.*, 366). So the experienced person has come (through suffering) to accept human finitude, an acceptance which is itself an ongoing process and thus comes in degrees. For Gadamer—and also, as one might surmise, Diotima—the experienced person is forever becoming, in process; the experienced person is not one who knows more than others, but rather is one who has acquired a capacity for openness to new experiences. The insightful person has learned that she does not have time, but that time, although a gift, has her. Although lengthy, the following passage sums up well many of the central themes just discussed:

Real experience is that whereby man becomes aware of his finiteness. In it are discovered the limits of the power and the self-knowledge of his planning reason. The idea that everything can be reversed, that there is always time for everything and that everything somehow returns, proves to be an illusion. Rather, the person who is situated and acts in history continually experiences the fact that nothing returns. To acknowledge what is does not just mean to recognize what is at this moment, but to have insight into the limited degree to which the future is still open to expectation and planning or, even more fundamentally, to have the in-

sight that all the expectation and planning of finite beings is finite and limited. Genuine experience is experience of one's own historicity. (*Ibid.*, 357)

Indeed, as T. S. Eliot wrote in "Burnt Norton" of his *Four Quartets*, "all time is unredeemable."¹⁶

To highlight yet another dimension of the in-between, Gadamer sees philosophical hermeneutics as having its home in what one might call the *Unheimlichkeit* of the in-between. In *Truth and Method* Gadamer writes that "[t]he true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between" (TM, 295). In the immediate context, the in-between of which he speaks is "the play between a text's strangeness and familiarity to us, between a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition" (*ibid.*). Yet there are numerous other in-betweens that characterize hermeneutics. For example, it operates in the space between theory and practice, between past and present meanings and future possibilities, and between reflexive understanding and application, embodying aspects of each differential pair while resisting defining itself as at home in one over against the other. In what follows, I draw attention to convergences and divergences among key Gadamerian and Platonic *topoi*, devoting special attention to themes in the *Symposium*.

Gadamer's hermeneutical aesthetics, while sounding Platonic overtones, is in no way a mere repetition of Plato's views on art or the beautiful. In fact, Gadamer's understanding of art as a dynamic, presentational, and disclosive event subverts Plato's account at crucial points—especially his critical characterization of art in the *Republic*.¹⁷ A key component of Gadamer's account is his critique of Plato's (Socrates's) view of art as an ontologically inferior copy of a more real or more true original. In contrast to the *Republic's* metaphysical critique of art as two steps removed from the truth, Gadamer returns to a more ordinary notion of *mimesis*, which draws from the transitory arts such as music, dance, poetry, and theater, where presentation of the subject matter via performance is readily evident.¹⁸ In Gadamer's view, when a musical piece or theatrical play is performed, the subject matter itself is presented. In other words, the

¹⁶ T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1971), 19.

¹⁷ Recall Rosen's claim that memory is something made—a *poiēsis* which, as a human artifact, shares certain similarities with works of art.

¹⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the Truth of the Word," in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, (ed.) R. E. Palmer (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 142.

performance is not a mere copy of a more superior original. After all, the central aim of a copy is to reduplicate with the utmost precision the object or subject matter it copies. Given this aim, a copy is essentially marked with self-erasure. The goal of a copy is neither to draw attention to itself, nor to present anything new or different from the original; rather, its goal is to function as a self-cancelling means pointing to some other end. As Gadamer explains in *Truth and Method*, “its nature is to lose its own independent existence and serve entirely to mediate what is copied” (TM, 138). Stated otherwise, a copy is a sign. In contrast, a musical or theatrical performance—and Gadamer would also argue, a painting—is not a mere sign, directing attention to some alleged superior object or subject matter beyond itself. Each time a work is performed or enacted, the subject matter is presented, revealing new and unforeseen aspects as it articulates the subject matter’s unfolding. For these reasons, Gadamer speaks of the enactment of art as an “increase in being” [*Zuwachs an Sein*] (TM, 140; emphasis in the original).¹⁹ As this description indicates, in our experience of a work of art, the artwork is not a static object that stands over against a detached subject. Rather, art’s ontology is dynamic, ever unfolding, and requires an actively engaged spectator or auditor. For these reasons, Gadamer understands our experience of art both as a communal and a communicative event with the potential to transform how we see and engage our selves and our world.

In Gadamer’s explanation of the unfolding of works of art through performance and (communal) participatory engagement over time, the work “increases in being” as new possibilities are brought forth. Here the idea points to a communal, ongoing creation—a work whose final note is yet to be written—as opposed to a single, finished work by a sole creator. The dynamic ontology of the work of art, like Diotima’s account of the human pursuit of immortality through the creation of social artifacts and a virtuous life, is processive—always in motion and yet retaining an identity. For example, Max Richter’s *Recomposed: Vivaldi, The Four Seasons* reveals new harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic possibilities of the work; even so it is recognized as an instance or creative variation of Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons*.²⁰

¹⁹ For the original German, see Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 133.

²⁰ Max Richter, *Recomposed: Vivaldi, The Four Seasons*, (perf.) M. Richter, D. Hope, K. K. Berlin, and A. de Ridder (DG, 2014), CD audio. Richter’s composition is a creative variation and elaboration of the “original” composition by Antonio Vivaldi, *The Four Seasons*, (perf.) The Academy of Ancient Music and C. Hogwood (L’oiseau Lyre, 1983), CD audio. To refer to Vivaldi as the “original” composer of

In addition, Diotima's and Gadamer's views emphasize the communal dimension necessary for the continual creation of social artifacts and re-remembering (and hence re-narrating) stories of individuals of import to a particular culture. With respect to both the communal elements and the claim of multiple co-creators of a work, Gadamer provides more explicit commentary. To illustrate, I will return to Richter's *Recomposed*. Although the contributions of Vivaldi are not denied, the emphasis moves away from a single individual as sole creator and broadens the focus to include Richter and multiple other composers, arrangers, conductors, performers, and even audience members. Each of these individuals plays a crucial role in keeping the piece alive and in that sense becomes a genuine co-creator in the unfolding life of the work—a life that must be continually nurtured. In fact, on Gadamer's account the work itself is foregrounded, as it takes on a life of its own that continues to unfold in and through its various historical enactments. So the work is neither a representation of a single artist's life, nor are its possibilities confined to the artist's original intentions. The work's life is informed by a multiplicity of voices—voices that simultaneously respond to its address while opening up new possibilities that go beyond the original intentions of the first composer or artist. Memory, of course, plays a role here as well. Musical and theatrical performers must dwell with the work, memorizing each line until it becomes second nature. However, to make the music sound or the play come alive in one's own historical period, a performer must enact the piece anew, which always involves *productive*, and not merely re-productive, elements. Here again I return to Diotima's characterization of knowledge as processive and communal, both of which accurately describe activity of re-creating or re-remembering social artifacts over time. In other words, just as knowledge, on Diotima's account, must be continually renewed through active memory-making, so too must works such as Homer's *Iliad* or Sophocles's *Antigone* be re-remembered, and gathered-together-anew through communal interpretative activity. And such activity always involves a productive dimension.

As I mentioned earlier, the process that Diotima describes in the famous ladder of ascent can be interpreted as a process of education, whereby the self, through dialogical engagement with another in pursuit of the truth, gradually moves from a narrow, self-centered horizon to an appreciation for and recognition of the importance of a

Four Seasons speaks against the very point that I am making; however, citation requirements are not always capable of accommodating one's argument.

thriving communal life. Diotima's reflections on one's growth in self-understanding and Gadamer's view of the ongoing tasks of self-understanding and horizon-expanding again evince notable similarities. For example, both accounts stress the necessity of dialogue for genuine growth and learning to occur. Where Diotima's references to the lovers' generation of beautiful speeches underscores the need for dialogical engagement, Gadamer's analysis explains why engagement with others is necessary for growth in self-understanding. Importantly, Gadamer also focuses attention on our historical, communal, and tradition-laden existence. That is, we are born into and shaped by traditions, institutions, and practices that precede us. One consequence of our social conditioning is that we approach the world and others with certain pre-judgments and biases, some of which are helpful, yet others hinder our growth. Through our willingness to enter into dialogue with others, we allow our assumptions and biases to be challenged. In short, we put our selves, our beliefs, and our ways-of-being-in-the-world at risk, which creates the possibility for expanding and enriching our horizons and gaining increased self- and world understanding. Without such dialogical interaction, we stagnate and fall prey to our own self-deceptions.

This type of dialogical interplay requires not only openness to the other's perspective but an ability to listen to the other with the expectation that the other genuinely has something valuable to say.²¹ In order for the self to move beyond itself and its own narrow confines and limited horizons, it requires an other who will engage it meaningfully in a reciprocal exchange that brings about a new way of seeing. Without constructive—as well as critical—dialogue with others, we remain stuck at the lowest rung of Diotima's ladder,

²¹ Of course, for Gadamer the other is not confined to human others, but can also include a text, work of art, or non-human animal. See, for example, Cynthia R. Nielsen, "Gadamer and Scholz on Solidarity: Disclosing, Avowing, and Performing Solidaristic Ties with Human and Natural Others," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, vol. 48, no. 3 (2017): 240–56. On the topic of openness, see also Whitney Mannies, "Elements of Style: Openness and Dispositions," in *Inheriting Gadamer: New Directions in Philosophical Hermeneutics*, (ed.) G. Warnke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016): 81–101. Mannies develops an expanded account of Gadamer's explanation of openness, highlighting how various dispositions—social, emotional, and reflective—play a role in one's reception of the other. For a critical assessment of Gadamer, which in effect claims that Gadamer's emphasis on openness to the other is a sham that allows for "no genuine reciprocity," see Marie Fleming, "Gadamer's Conversation: Does the Other Have a Say?" in *Feminist Interpretations of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, (ed.) L. Code (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003): 109–32, here 111.

unable to see beyond our narrowly self-centered interests and desires and unable to challenge or test the veracity of our beliefs, practices, and present understanding.

In addition, both Gadamer and Diotima speak of a mystical, spiritual, or in some sense enigmatic aspect to such dialogically acquired disclosures. Recall that Diotima's description of the various stages in her ladder of ascent breaks off as she calls Socrates to prepare himself for the final revelation. In Gadamer's account of our hermeneutical experience of art, he focuses on the need to linger or tarry (*verweilen*) with the work so that its various aspects and meanings can emerge and make a claim upon us. For example, in his essay "The Artwork in Word and Image," he draws upon the Greek understanding of *theoria*. As he observes, *theoria* in ancient Greek philosophy refers to the

way of living of the gods, who find their complete fulfillment in such looking, which they call *theoria*. Here the original sense of the Greek term *theoria* is important. The word means to participate in a festive act and to be with it. Thus, it is not merely being a spectator. Rather, it means "to be fully there," which is a highest form of activity and reality.²²

This dwelling or lingering with the work is an activity of the highest sort. One is not a passive spectator, but an engaged participant listening and responding to the work's address. To be there fully with the work (or text or human dialogue partner) also brings about an *ecstasis* or movement outside oneself and toward the other. As we linger with the work and allow it to "speak" to us, we open ourselves to the possibility of a transformative experience. Yet, for Gadamer, with every disclosure and new insight some other aspect of the work remains hidden. In other words, Gadamer advocates an *alethic*, rather than a reductive propositional view of truth. Each dwelling has the potential to reveal a new depth or unanticipated insight, and no single engagement or interpretation is capable of exhausting the work's meaning. For Gadamer, the work's ontology is dynamic; we experience it as a communicative and disclosive event that eludes full capture. As Gadamer puts it,

²² Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Artwork in Word and Image," in *The Gadamer Reader*, 213.

The work of art is precisely not the product that is finished when the artist's work on it is done. Also, the artwork is not at all an object that one can approach with a measuring tape in one's hand. A real artwork does not allow itself to be grasped by processes of measurement, or through the number of its computer bits.²³

The work of art requires enactment, performance, and communal engagement. It is not a static object that floats above history, but an event that calls out to us, inviting us to linger in anticipation of its disclosive possibilities.

Here I will return briefly to Gadamer's notion of recognition, which, although not equivalent to Platonic recollection, is appropriated by Gadamer in a non-metaphysical manner. For Gadamer, recognition is not properly understood if one conceives it as merely knowing again something that one already knows or re-cognizing the familiar: "The joy of recognition is rather the joy of knowing *more* than is already familiar. In recognition what we know emerges, as if illuminated, from all the contingent and variable circumstances that condition it; it is grasped in its essence. It is known as something" (TM, 114). When Gadamer says that what is known is "grasped in its essence," he does not have in mind a fixed, ahistorical essence, but rather that which, when it comes forth or is presented, is identified as the thing or subject matter in view. For example, when a competent jazz quartet plays a particular jazz standard such as "All the Things You Are," each performance is different. New harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic ideas emerge; yet the piece is still recognized by competent listeners as "All the Things You Are." Contingent aspects of the performance might be, for example, whether the piece is played by a quartet or a trio, or whether the group has a pianist or a guitarist as the group accompanist. Just as the enactment or performance of a musical piece or a theatrical play is not a mere repetition or copy of an original but brings forth something new, hermeneutic recognition and recollection are creative and productive acts. As James Risser aptly states, "hermeneutic recollection is never a mere making-present-again of a past actuality, but a making-present-again as a gathering-together-anew. Hermeneutic recollection is not the recovering of something lost (prior presence) but discovery."²⁴ In short, *hermeneutic* recollection is a creative act that re-members or re-gathers past elements and discloses new, unforeseen possibilities.

²³ *Ibid.*, 214.

²⁴ James Risser, *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other: Re-reading Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), 100.

Recollection, like interpretation, is productive, clearing the space for new paths, new insights, and new ways of being and understanding.

On the one hand, Gadamer's hermeneutics does not involve a myth about the soul's recollection as a way to explain inaugural acts of human knowing. On the other hand, hermeneutic experience, along with the knowing and understanding that it promotes, does involve an active re-collecting of what is already known—not from some prior existence of the soul but as a result of our thrownness and facticity. In other words, in ways that recall aspects of Diotima's description, Gadamer conceives of understanding as a dynamic, communal process to which we find ourselves already given over and taken up. As historical and social beings, we are situated in prior and already established interpretative horizons that condition the way we see the world, how we act in the world, and how things in the world appear to us. Hermeneutic experience, as Risser observes, is "nothing less than a re-cognizing as a gathering-together-again. The knowing appropriate to hermeneutic experience can thus be said to be a form of recollection. ...hermeneutic experience, like Socratic knowing caught between knowing and not knowing, endures in an element of memory."²⁵

So how does Gadamer conceive of memory, and what role does it play in human being and understanding? In a section devoted to his account of hermeneutic experience in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer provides a brief glimpse of his view of memory. First, he states that the nature of memory is not properly understood as a capacity, talent, or psychological faculty. Rather, "[k]eeping in mind, forgetting, and recalling belong to the historical constitution of man and are themselves part of his history and *Bildung*" (TM, 15). Thus, memory or remembering, as well as forgetting and recollecting are constitutive elements of our historical being. For Gadamer, as for Plato, forgetting is intimately tied to remembering and keeping in mind, especially to the idea of a collective or communal memory. In the same passage Gadamer appeals to Nietzsche's remarks on forgetting in *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, the second essay of his *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*, where he describes forgetting not as mere absence but as an active, willful forgetting that is necessary for a fluid, lively historical life—a life all too easily petrified when past discourses, remembrances, and ways of being become rigidly fixed. As Nietzsche puts it, "without forgetting it is quite impossible to *live* at all. Or, to say it more simply yet: *there is a degree of insomnia, of rumination, of historical sense which injures*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 95–96.

every living thing and finally destroys it, be it a man, a people or a culture."²⁶ In other words, in the activity of forgetting we actively clear a space for new possibilities by re-configuring the past for the present.²⁷ Thus, forgetting, rather than mere absence, is more akin to an act of concealing what was formerly kept in mind or held present and can give way to new, creatively re-membered possibilities.

Consider, for example, the experience of a jazz musician. Her ability to improvise melodic lines is made possible by years of practicing scales and scale patterns. The habit of practicing scales is, by its very nature, a routine birthed through an originary event now long concealed (*i.e.*, forgotten). However, as Risser remarks, habit is a "complex phenomenon" that helps one to grasp more clearly Gadamer's "dynamic sense of forgetting."²⁸ To return to the jazz example, through the non-creative habit of practicing scales, the experienced musician is able to improvise creative and innovative melodic lines. Here forgetting is understood, on the one hand, as the habit that conceals novelty (as in practicing scales), and on the other hand, as intimately tied to re-membering and gathering-together-anew, which gives birth to creative possibilities (such as the newly improvised melodic lines). What was done in the practice room is simultaneously forgotten and remembered anew in a live performance.

Before concluding our imaginary Diotima/Gadamer dialogue, I should return to the *Symposium* and hear from one final and rather memorable character, *viz.*, Alcibiades. Although my focus has been on creating a dialogue primarily with Diotima and Gadamer, these explorations would be amiss if they failed to follow the dialogical interplay and framing of Plato's text. That is, Diotima's speech concludes with the unforgettable entry of an attractive and extremely inebriated Alcibiades, whose speech and commentary about Socrates supports and provides existential validation for Diotima's claims.

²⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, (tr.) P. Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), 10; emphasis in the original.

²⁷ Of course, forgetting can be used by political regimes as a way to fail to acknowledge and attempt to rectify past injustices. As many have convincingly argued, the current racial tensions in the United States continue because the nation has not properly dealt with its "original sin" of racism. See, for example, Georgia Warnke, "Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Politics of Memory," in *Inheriting Gadamer: New Directions in Philosophical Hermeneutics*, (ed.) G. Warnke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016). See also Nicole Loraux, *The Divided City: Forgetting in the Memory of Athens*, (tr.) C. Pache and J. Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

²⁸ Risser, *Hermeneutics and the Voice*, 96.

Recall the *Symposium* passage (207e–208a) which Gadamer referenced in footnote 15 of *DS*, where Diotima claims that it is not only the body that changes continually, but also desire, opinion, knowledge, and one's character. Perhaps Diotima's comment can help to make sense of Alcibiades. In other words, what makes Alcibiades's failure to live well so tragic is not only that he had potential for greatness, but also that he had presumably made progress toward, as Aristotle might put it, a stable, well-formed character.²⁹ Yet in the end, as his self-description suggests, he was at best an incontinent person whose misdirected *eros* led (at least in part) to his personal failures. His desire, or rather *eros*—the *eros* that Socrates had awakened in him to pursue what is truly beautiful—changed course; and as a result, his growth in self-care and virtue was arrested.

Although Alcibiades enters drunk, he nonetheless emphatically and repeatedly states that he is “telling the truth” (S, 43, §213a; see also S, 43, §214e3). He even implores Socrates to interrupt and call him out if at any time he wanders from the truth and utters something false (S, 45, §215a); yet Socrates does not interrupt his speech and thus seems to approve of Alcibiades's claims. As he develops his encomium of Socrates, Alcibiades compares him to Marsyas the satyr whose flute-playing was said to be divine and enchanting.³⁰ In place of beautiful melodies, Socrates enchants, seduces, and possesses with words and speeches, which Alcibiades likewise describes as divine. Commenting on the impact of Socrates's speeches, Alcibiades states, “whenever I listen, my heart jumps far more than the Corybants’, and tears pour out under the power of his speeches” (S, 46, §215e). He goes on to say that even a speaker as grand as Pericles could not, as Socrates could, cause his “soul to grow troubled and become distressed at my [Alcibiades's] slavish condition. But I had so often been put in this state by this Marsyas you see before you that I came to the opinion that it was not worth living in the way I am” (S, 46, §215e3–4). Alcibiades, as Socrates's potential beloved, had no doubt spent significant time with Socrates, listening to and considering with the utmost seriousness the latter's teachings. Alcibiades

²⁹ On the tragic failure of Alcibiades, see also Yancy Hughes Dominick, “Images for the Sake of Truth in Plato's *Symposium*,” *Classical Quarterly*, vol. 63, no. 2 (2013): 558–66. On Alcibiades's recklessness as the “recklessness of a certain sort of lover,” see Martha Nussbaum, “The Speech of Alcibiades: A Reading of Plato's *Symposium*,” *Philosophy and Literature*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1979): 131–72, here 138.

³⁰ Although Alcibiades breaks with the pattern of praising Love, his speech nonetheless is about (misdirected) *eros*.

even admits having been “bitten and struck by [Socrates’s] philosophical speeches, which grip in a way more savage than the viper, whenever they get hold on a young soul that is not ill-favored by nature” (S, 48, §218a3). However, it seems that Alcibiades’s *eros* for political honor overcame his *eros* for the self-care (virtue) to which Socrates’s speeches beckoned him (see S, 47, §216b3). By his own admission, his failure to follow Socrates’s call induced shame whenever he was in the philosopher’s presence. Moreover, Alcibiades repeatedly praises Socrates’s virtue—his moderation and inner beauty, that is, the beauty of his character and intellectual virtues (S, 47, §216d4; see also S, 50, §219d3). This inner beauty attracted Alcibiades, but instead of pursuing the path of virtue and self-care that Socrates both taught and lived, Alcibiades plotted to seduce Socrates. Possession of the other, rather than self-dispossession in order to be-there-with-the-other, was Alcibiades’s short-cut “solution.”

Of course, Alcibiades’s attempt at seducing Socrates fails miserably. Socrates, in fact, rebukes him for his desire to exchange the bronze of the seemingly beautiful for the gold of what is truly beautiful (S, 49, §219a). Socrates’s speeches, which were meant not as ends in themselves but to give birth to what is truly beautiful (*viz.*, virtue) failed to generate the hoped-for offspring. Here I return to Diotima’s point that desires change, as does character, knowledge, and our very selves. In other words, Alcibiades chose to follow a different path—the love of honor received from the many (S, 47, §216b4). Even though our lives are shaped by social, political, religious, and other discourses and practices, we must still choose which path to take and those choices have existential and ethical consequences. To put this in more Gadamerian terms, though the self or subject is not master of her destiny, neither is she a non-subject, one without agency or responsibility to and for the other *and* for herself. The self is de-centered, socially conditioned but still an ethical self, an agent who acts for herself and for others.

Not only does Alcibiades reveal much about his character through his eulogy for Socrates, but likewise he provides an existential validation of Diotima’s claims regarding love and what is truly beautiful. As Alcibiades himself testifies, Socrates was a rare individual whose life and speeches were harmonious (S, 52, §221d). Socrates’s speeches and the model of his virtuous life not only inspired and challenged his companions during his own lifetime but continue to inspire and challenge readers through a dialogical interplay of *poietic* re-remembering and forgetting. Socrates not only began the process of birthing virtue, but, unlike Alcibiades, he also nurtured the nascent

virtue through practice (S, 42, §212a6). The ongoing task of virtue-nurturing shares structural similarities with the ongoing task of, as Gadamer puts it, “increasing the being” of the work of art. Both tasks require engaged participants, an interested and informed community; and both are *productive* reproductions, generating new “life” from the old and yet retaining a connection or a “family resemblance” with what was. Gadamer’s name for this process is hermeneutic identity. In brief, hermeneutic identity maintains that the artwork’s or text’s identity necessarily involves difference. That is, the ontology of the work or text is open and dynamic, not static and closed; the work is a site of future possibilities and allows for multiple presentations or enactments over time, yet it retains an identity.³¹

By way of final remarks, reading Gadamer with Diotima reveals that the open space inaugurated by forgetting and its close companion, memory-making, harkens back to the movement of *aletheia*—a movement which exemplifies our historical being. If, as Gadamer says, memory is selectively formed, the same seems to be true of forgetting. That is, both are activities not merely of individuals but are also—and importantly so—a collective *poiesis*, a bringing-forth which is ever-in-motion, revealing and concealing differently as needed over the course of time. So rather than banishing the poets so that the city might thrive, we must learn to banish at the appropriate time those collective memories that, as Nietzsche says, no longer serve life. Or as Gadamer puts it, “Memory must be formed, for memory is not memory for anything and everything. One has a memory for some things and not for others; one wants to preserve one thing in memory and banish another” (TM, 16). Given the *alethic* movement involved in this process, the activities of re-creation and re-narration never cease. Let us hope that our present day poets are up to the task. Because after all, if our finitude has taught us anything, it has taught us that

As we grow older
The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated
Of dead and living. Not the intense moment
Isolated, with no before and after,
But a lifetime burning in every moment

³¹ For a more detailed discussion of hermeneutic identity, see Cynthia R. Nielsen, “Gadamer on the Event of Art, the Other, and a Gesture Toward a Gadamerian Approach to Free Jazz,” *Journal of Applied Hermeneutics* (2016), [<http://jah.journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/jah/index.php/jah/article/view/113>].

And not the lifetime of one man only
But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.³²

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³² Eliot, *Four Quartets*, 31.