On solitude and loneliness
in hermeneutical philosophy

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Abstract

Although it might seem to elicit only a marginal interest for philosophical inquiry, in 20th century continental philosophy the experience of solitude and loneliness were shown to have unexpected importance and gravity. For philosophers such as M. Heidegger, H. Arendt, H.-G. Gadamer or P. Sloterdijk, solitude and loneliness are to be seen, on the one hand, as an ontological determination of our Being and, on the other, as a cause for some of the most worrisome problems of our times such, as the birth of totalitarianism or the phenomenon of self-alienation wide-spread in the Western bureaucratic societies. But none of the philosophers dealing with these matters offers us a clear positive understanding of what solitude and loneliness actually are nor what the task of philosophy should be with regard to these experiences even though they give us to understand that philosophy has one. The present paper tarries upon this question, approaching it from the other end though an investigation of the status of alterity in Heidegger and Gadamer's philosophy.

Keywords: solitude, loneliness, understanding, Being-in-dialogue, ontological and ontical autism, ontological cannibalism

1. Introduction

Only now, after almost a century since its appearance on the philosophical scene we are starting to realize the magnitude of Heidegger's impact on the development of continental

philosophy. The rediscovery of immanence and the interest in the here and now, the subjection of philosophical inquiry to the exigency of finitude, the endeavor to overcome metaphysics, the turn away pure theory and detached reflection – all these defining aspects of continental philosophy from Sartre through Levinas and Merleau-Ponty to Derrida, Deleuze, Lyotard and Nancy, from Karl Jaspers through Hannah Arendt, Hans-Georg Gadamer to Jürgen Habermas and Peter Sloterdijk can easily be traced back to Heidegger's project of a hermeneutics of facticity from the 20s. With the publication of more and more of Heidegger's courses and papers though it becomes apparent that not only his major theses, but also his secondary ideas noted in passing at the bottom of one page or another are making history.

In the present paper we would like to focus our attention on one of these secondary ideas – the idea of solitude (*Einsamkeit*) (and that of loneliness (*Vereinsamung*) deriving from it) –, first of all, with the aim of retracing its development and becoming from the texts of Heidegger to those of Gadamer and Arendt. And, secondly, in order to take is as a means for checking Heidegger and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics against one of its fundamental tenets: that of going beyond "idle talk" and the empty metaphysical speculation about man and world and everything in between characteristic of Western philosophy since Plato and actually telling us something meaningful in a concrete manner about the question of being, about what it means to be in a here and now. For, as we recall, this is Heidegger's fundamental goal, announced already in the preamble to *Being and Time*:

> Do we in our time have an answer to the question of what we really mean by the word 'being'? Not at all. So it is fitting that we should raise anew *the question of the meaning of Being*. But are we nowadays even perplexed at our inability to understand the expression 'Being'? Not at all. So first of all we must reawaken an understanding for the meaning of this question. (Heidegger 1962, 1/[1])

And, in his turn, when asked to define his hermeneutics Gadamer replies:

> Hermeneutical reflection … brings before me something that otherwise happens *behind my back*. (Gadamer 1977, 38)

We believe that solitude and loneliness offer us a privileged means to weigh philosophical hermeneutics' claim to illuminate our concrete existence for it confronts philosophy with an absolutely concrete question: not just how to live in solitude and avoid feeling lonely, but also how not to be alone, how to actually be with others. This latter matter is the true test for philosophical hermeneutics can stay true to its claim only insomuch as it has something to teach us in this regard. In order to establish whether this is the case or not the second part of our paper will be dedicated to a close examination Heidegger and Gadamer's treatment of alterity.

2. Solitude and loneliness: a distinction

2.1. Solitude as fundamental experience of human life

At least at some point in our lives every one of us has felt or will be feeling lonely. Perhaps some are feeling lonely right now. Loneliness is, as Hannah Arendt points out, "one of the fundamental experiences of every human life" (Arendt 1962, 475). Such a statement might seem arbitrary at first but, on close scrutiny, is not. For, in fact, solitude is one of the fundamental determinations of our Being.

As human beings we live in a world and our existence unfolds as a going about dealings with the entities encountered therein. We constantly worry about one thing or another, we have to do this or that. This worrying and the care we take of ourselves is one of the absolute marks of our finitude. But, as Heidegger shows:

> Finitude only is in becoming finite. In becoming finite, however, there ultimately occurs an *individuation* of man with respect to his Dasein. Individuation – this does not mean that man clings to his frail little ego that puffs itself up against something or other which it takes to the world. This individuation is rather the solitariness in which human being first of all enters into nearness to what is essential in all things, a nearness to world. [Individuation] is this solitude, where each human being will be as though unique. (Heidegger 1995, 6)

This fundamental solitude situating us for the first time into nearness to world is the condition of possibility of any philosophy and any philosophizing whatsoever. For if thinking unfolds – as we are taught by all great philosophers from Plato to Gadamer - as the soul's dialogue with itself then, Heidegger observes, "it will always take place in the solitary inquiry" (Arendt and Heidegger 2004, 8).

Such fundamental solitude is what each of us is looking for when going through difficult times in our lives. We all know it, what we need the most when we see ourselves at a crossroad in our lives is to be left by ourselves.

2.2. Loneliness as experience of loss

But even though this solitude is something to be sought from time to time, it shouldn't always be found. Any step taken toward being alone is also a step toward our loneliness. At first, this might seem like a tautology. But although Heidegger uses *solitude* and *loneliness* as synonymous[1], there is nevertheless a radical difference between them, a difference we have taken into account when we were making solitude the ground of loneliness.

Following a long tradition opened by Epictetus,[2] in two texts that seem written by one and the same hand, Hannah Arendt and Hans-Georg Gadamer highlight this difference clearly:

> In solitude […] I am "by myself," together with my self, and therefore two-in-one, whereas in loneliness I am actually one, deserted by all others. (Arendt 1962, 476)
> Loneliness is an experience of loss and solitude is an experience of renunciation. Loneliness is suffered – in solitude something is being sought for. (Gadamer 1988, 104)[3]
> What is lost in [loneliness] is nearness to others. (Gadamer 1988, 101)
> To stand in a common sphere and to be supported by something communal – this is what we decry when something disappears or is lost in the sadness of loneliness. (Gadamer 1988, 102)[4]

Thus, paradoxically, "loneliness shows itself most sharply in company with others" (Arendt 1962, 476). This is

something Heidegger himself understood even though he does not distinguish between solitude and loneliness. In his own parlance, in *Being and Time* he writes:

> Being-alone is a deficient mode of Being-with. […] [F]actual Being-alone is not obviated by the occurrence of a second example of a human being 'beside' me, or by ten such examples. Even if these and more are present-at-hand, Dasein can still be alone. (Heidegger 1962, [120]/157)[5]

But despite their fundamental difference, loneliness is solitude. Solitude is a necessary condition for loneliness just as loneliness is the sign of solitude. "In the experience of loneliness there seems to be suffering along with solitude" (Gadamer 1988, 101-102) – says Gadamer. And, in her turn, Hannah Arendt notes:

> Solitude can become loneliness; this happens when all by myself I am deserted by my own self. (Arendt 1962, 476)

> The problem of solitude is that this two-in-one needs the others in order to become one again: one unchangeable individual whose identity can never be mistaken for that of any other. (Arendt 1962, 476)

This rapport of implication between loneliness and solitude is the fundamental reason why, even though solitude is something to be sought it shouldn't always be found.

2.3. The dangers of loneliness

Hannah Arendt actually goes even further and takes this rapport of implication between solitude and loneliness straightforwardly as a problem, not one among others but one directly related to what she calls the "crisis of the 20th century" (Arendt 1962, 460). Beyond the meticulous historical analyses undertaken in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* the strong philosophical thesis defended by the book is that the birth of totalitarianism in the 20th century was possible only through the isolation of people. In this sense for Hannah Arendt loneliness is truly "the essence of totalitarian government" (Arendt 1962, 475).

It is true, at least in Europe totalitarianism is a thing of the past but this does not necessarily mean that solitude and loneliness too ceased to be a problem. For even though we are living, to use Gianni Vattimo expression, in a "transparent society"[6] of generalized communication, and despite the fact that, because of this, for us "Being – in an ontological sense – means Being-in-relation" our world is more and more a world of singles. According to a statistics quoted by Peter Sloterdijk 50 to 60% of the population of the big cities lives alone (Sloterdijk 2001, 33-34).

But solitude and the loneliness it involves are a problem in our society also in another sense. As Gadamer argues in the text we are discussing, loneliness is in fact a symptom of self-alienation of the feeling that we do not really belong to ourselves anymore and that we have no place on the face of the earth, a generalized phenomenon in our times. Insofar as the "loneliness' tendency […] is that a person can no longer extricate oneself from it" (Gadamer 1988, 105) because being alone is like drowning (Gadamer 1988, 105), these days we get more and more the feeling of being deprived of liberty. In our hyper-rationalized societies this feeling is strengthened by the objective conditions to which we are subjected by the complexities of the social system of production. For, Gadamer argues, the division of labor blocks any individual initiative and makes work look as if it served a foreign purpose which eventually leads us to the realization of the incomprehensibility of the world.

Despite that each in its own way both Hannah Arendt and Gadamer acknowledge solitude and loneliness as problems though, the texts of neither of them makes it clear what would the philosopher or philosophy's task in this regard, especially the hermeneutical philosophy's they practice. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Hannah Arendt remains completely silent on this matter.

In his turn, Gadamer approaches it in the text we are discussing in a section on the "friendship with others and with oneself" in which, in a first step he undertakes a brief delimitation of the concept of "friendship with others" by opposing it to that of solidarity in order to rehabilitate in a

second step the Greek concept of "friendship with oneself" as a privileged form of participating to a common sphere and a fundamental means of feeling at home in the world. As Gadamer notes: "Only someone who is friends with himself can fit into what is common" (Gadamer 1988, 112).

Due to this progression from the "friendship with others" to the "friendship with oneself" (as if the latter were the important thing) it remains undecided whether philosophy's task is to teach us how to remain solitary in a philosophical manner without ever becoming lonely or to actually deliver us from both solitude and loneliness. Otherwise put, it remains undecided whether philosophical hermeneutics wants to *teach us how to become philosophers or how to be with one another in a concrete manner.*

But perhaps that is not really a bad thing. The fact that we are not told explicitly what philosophy ought to do about solitude and loneliness invites us to interrogate what it can effectively do beyond what it proposes itself to do or would like to do. This might very well be one of the few possibilities of seeing whether hermeneutical philosophy is of any help for each of us in our everyday lives.

2.4. What is loneliness?

But how are we to approach this problem in order to put philosophy to the test and see whether it can serve us. The fact of the matter is that there are not that many strategies at our disposal. Which does not mean that there is none. We might find some help in this sense if we turned back for a while to the problem we posed at the beginning and shed some light on solitude itself. For this too remains obscure in both Hannah Arendt and Gadamer just as in Heidegger's thought.

As we have seen, Hannah Arendt and Gadamer approach loneliness in two manners: on the one hand, negatively, opposing it to solitude ("Loneliness is not solitude." (Arendt 1962, 476) "Solitude, then, is something quite different from loneliness" (Gadamer 1988, 104) and, on the other, from the point of view of their effects and implications. But insomuch as loneliness is "one of the fundamental experiences of every

human life" (Arendt 1962, 475) what is truly important is, obviously, the way it is experienced by those who feel lonely and the circumstances, the conditions in which or whereby this experience becomes possible. I believe that precisely because they did not take these into account Hannah Arendt and Gadamer failed to explain why the unity of the two-in-one is directly dependent on the others insomuch as loneliness too "shows itself most sharply in company with others." (Arendt 1962, 476) And this is also the reason why neither of them is able to explain how and why solitude changes into loneliness even though for both the "problem of solitude" is inexorable.

If we turn our attention to the way loneliness is experienced we understand that it is essentially a reflexive phenomenon. What is in fact felt when I feel lonely is actually my self. In saying "I feel lonely" we actually say "I feel (myself) lonely." Here the romance languages are more specific. In French we say "Je me sens seul," and in Spanish "Yo me siento solo." This explains why my rapport with the others and their relation to me is inessential for loneliness. And, on the other hand, it explains why loneliness is a "fundamental experience" of human life. Loneliness is not fundamental because it would be primordial (the ontological sense of "fundamental"). As we have seen, loneliness actually derives from solitude insomuch as it is grounded in it. If loneliness is fundamental this is rather because of its immediate nature, because it is immediately given to each and every one of us. Precisely in this sense all the other fundamental human experiences (tiredness, boredom, insomnia, etc.) are fundamental.

But – and one should pay close attention to this – from the fact that loneliness is an experience of the self of every ego and that the rapport to the other is inessential, we should not hastily conclude that alterity is indifferent in loneliness. In fact, the other plays a determinant role not just in loneliness but in almost all self-experiences of the ego. For in order for the reflexivity presupposed by such an experience to occur, in order for this turning upon itself of the ego to be possible, there has to appear a rupture introducing a gap within itself. But such a gap that dislocates the ego from itself and thus leads to an ego *and* a self (Hannah Arendt's two-in-one) appears only when we

encounter and are confronted by an other. That is why, in truth, solitude and loneliness ought to be defined as a *rapport to oneself through an other*. Such a rapport becomes solitude when the other encountered is a radical alterity displacing the ego from the self and subjecting it to a complete transformation. (This also explains why solitude is sought after and always takes the form of a re-collection.) And it takes the form of loneliness when the other encountered by the ego is just an other like the self, an other which leaves the ego completely unchanged even though it introduces a gap within itself. In solitude one becomes two-in-one through a third while in loneliness one encounters a same and is multiplied three times. According to this logic being neither alone, nor lonely means arriving through a third person not to a two-in-one or a multiple of one but straightforwardly to a two. Being neither alone, nor lonely means arriving to a two through a third.

From now on the possibility of deciding whether hermeneutical philosophy can merely teach us how to become philosophers or how to actually be with one another is wide open. For the question of multiplicity in its heterological form is not foreign to it.

3. The question of alterity between Heidegger and Gadamer

3.1. Heidegger and the problem of ontological autism

A quick look at how Heidegger approaches the question of alterity shows us that, with regard to the problem of solitude and loneliness, the task of hermeneutics does not involve an exclusive disjunction. What Heidegger seems to want to teach us is not either *how to become philosophers* or *how to be with one another in a concrete manner* but, rather, *how to remain in dialogue with ourselves while being with others or how to become philosophers in the company of others*. In *Being and Time* there are two things indicative of this:

(i) Heidegger states from the very beginning that "Being-in is Being-with Others" (Heidegger 1962, [118]/155). Being-with defines Dasein in its own Being. In Being-in-the-world

Dasein is always Being-with. And the ineluctable solitude of our Being is actually not an impediment but, rather, an argument for this. I can be with others in the world just because *I have a relation to that world* and, in turn, this is possible only on the ground on our individuation, which also accounts for my fundamental solitude.

(ii) But because Being-in-the-world is Being-with Others, in its everydayness, Dasein is predisposed to project its existence and understand itself through these others given in the impersonal form of the "one." Thus Dasein comes to say and do some things just because that is what one says and does; it comes to project what it itself ought to be and how its existence is supposed to unfold in terms of what everyone else wants to become. In this way the "who" of Dasein becomes itself a neutral, impersonal "who." "Everyone is the other and no one is himself" (Heidegger 1962, [128]/165), says Heidegger. In order to counteract this leveling of Dasein Heidegger launches the call to authenticity, to a self-understanding taking the form of a projection of possibilities anchored in Dasein's own hermeneutical situation and its mood and attunement to the world.

This two points indicative of the fact that the task of hermeneutics is not just to teach us how to live in solitude without falling into the trap of loneliness but also how not to be alone are arguments also for the fact that it can really do this. In fact, if loneliness appears when the ego turns upon itself through an other *as* itself, in order not to be alone (i) there must exist an other, (ii) this other must be recognized as such and (iii) it must be an other than myself. By circumscribing Being-in as Being-with Others though, Heidegger establishes a priori the possibility of alterity thus circumventing a possible charge of ontological solipsism. And through the call to authenticity he escapes the danger of falling prey to what Sloterdijk calls "ontological autism" (Sloterdijk 2001, 36). For the call to a self-understanding of Dasein based on its own ontological possibilities and not on the other's (and thus a possibly other *as* itself) actually calls for and opens the possibility of encountering an other *than* myself.

However, even though it puts us on the path towards not-Being-alone Heidegger's thought does not accompany as to its end. In fact, through the same gesture whereby Heidegger saves us from ontological autism he pushes us to an *ontical* one. This becomes manifest in the fact that, even though it brings along a radical modification of Dasein's Being-in-the-world, the passing from inauthentic to authentic existence nevertheless leaves its "who" and the "who" of alterity unchanged. As Heidegger argues, in inauthentic existence

> In one's concern with what one has taken hold of, whether with, for, or against, the Others, there is a constant care as to the way one differs from them, whether that difference is merely one that is to be evened out, whether one's own Dasein has lagged behind the Others and wants to catch up in relationship to them, or whether one's Dasein already has some priority over them and sets out to keep them suppressed. The care about this distance between them is disturbing to Being-with-one-another, though this disturbance is one that is hidden from it. (Heidegger 1962, [126]/164-165)

Otherwise put, in its inauthentic existence Dasein encounters itself only through the others, but these others take the form of the neutral, impersonal one. Precisely because of this Dasein comes to understand itself through them, thus becoming itself an impersonal Dasein like all the others.

In its authentic existence though, when Dasein comes to understand itself in terms of its own hermeneutical situation and mood, there appears a radical change of perspective and the "characterizing [of] the encountering of Others [is] oriented by that Dasein which is in each case one's *own*" (Heidegger 1962, [118]/154).

> But even in this characterization – asks Heidegger – does one not start by making out and isolating the 'I' so that one must then seek some way of getting over to the Others from the isolated subject? To avoid this misunderstanding – Heidegger proceeds to answer - we must notice in what sense we are talking about 'the Others'. By 'Others' we do not mean everyone else but me – those over against whom the 'I' stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself – those among whom one is too. (Heidegger 1962, [118]/154)

Thus, insomuch as inauthentic existence transforms us in a *Dasein like all the others,* authentic existence is destined to always confront us with *an other like our own Dasein*. But if the other presupposed by Being-with as an existentiale of Dasein is such an other like our own Dasein, if, due to this, Dasein is fated to encounter the concrete other like an other from whom "it does not distinguish itself," then why would Dasein want to actually be with an other? Why would Dasein desire an other insomuch as the others are others like Dasein itself? As it is well known, desire is, by definition, desire of an other than myself. So, what could still be the meaning of love which, in the footsteps of Augustine, Heidegger defines *as volo, ut sis(Arendt and Heidegger 2004)(Arendt and Heidegger 2004)* – "I want you to be what you are" (Arendt and Heidegger 2004, 21)?

As one can see, the fact that he does not distinguish between solitude and loneliness although he recognizes their specificity – the positive character of solitude situating us for the first time in nearness to the world and the negative character of loneliness as a loss, a "deficient" mode of Being-with as Being-in-the-world – is not pure coincidence.

3.2. Gadamer and the problem of ontological cannibalism

If Heidegger puts us on the path toward not-Being-alone but does not take us there, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics gives us a second chance. Gadamer continues the Heideggerian project of a hermeneutics of facticity constituting the basis of the fundamental ontology of *Being and Time* but he noticed from the very beginning[7] the problematical character of the situation of alterity in Heidegger's ontology. In the margins of *Being and Time*, in, perhaps, one of the most lucid and engaging philosophical conversations published in the last decade he comments:

> *Mit-sein*, for Heidegger, was a concession that he had to make, but one that he never really got behind. Indeed, even as he was developing the idea, he wasn't really talking about the other at all. *Mit-sein* is, as it were, an assertion about *Dasein*, which must naturally take *Mit-sein* for granted. [...] ... *Mit-sein* is, in truth, a very weak idea of the other, more a 'letting the other be' than an authentic 'being-interested in him'. (Gadamer 2006, 23)

Because of this the task Gadamer assumes with regard to Heidegger's project of a hermeneutics of facticity or, more correctly, the personal manner in which he understands to continue that project heads not toward a philosophy of *Mit-sein* (*Being-with*), but to one of *Miteinander* (*with-one-another*).

The first step Gadamer takes in the direction of such a philosophy of with-one-another is a step taken along Heidegger and resides in the recognition of our finitude resulting from that individuation Heidegger himself made responsible for our fundamental solitude and for the fact that for us Being means ontologically Being-in-the-world and ontically Being-in-history. As Gadamer puts it in *Truth and Method*: "the prejudices of the individual – *which means to say: the objectivation of the spirit of the past history carries along* (our note) -, far more than his judgments constitute the historical reality of his being" (Gadamer 2004, 278).

In Gadamer though, this step along with Heidegger quickly becomes a step against him. For, as Gadamer shows, insomuch as through individuation our finitude takes the form of solitude, it also manifests itself as "being conditioned by the other." Gadamer writes:

> What I had already tried to show Heidegger in Marburg and later developed further in the Lisbon lecture and in other essays was, as I have already said, that the genuine meaning of our finitude or of our 'thrownness' consists in the fact that we become aware, not only of our being historically conditioned, but especially of our being conditioned by the other. (Gadamer 2006, 29)

What we are dealing with here is, obviously, a mere change of perspective – from "because I am finite I am individuated and solitary and have an absolutely peculiar relation to the world" to "because I am finite and have a peculiar relation to the world there are others by which I am fundamentally conditioned" – but a change with significant consequences for ontology and the problem we are discussing. First off, because it guards us against the charge of solipsism by grounding in another way the affirmation that "Being-in is Being-with others" and, second of all, because it saves us from both ontical and ontological autism. Recognizing that individuation/solitude and being conditioned by the other are

the two faces of finitude gives us the possibility of an other *than* me and, at the same time, offers us a ground for Dasein's Being-with making clear why it would want to be with the other.

The condition that ought to be fulfilled in such case though – for the danger of autism in both its forms is still present – is to show that this possible other than me can actually be encountered as such. As we have seen, precisely this passing from the possibility of radical alterity to that of effectively encountering it was the problem Heidegger did not manage to overcome.

In order to fulfill this condition Gadamer takes another step along with Heidegger and shows that language, understanding and the interpretation whereby the latter is developed are not mere contingent possibilities of Dasein but, rather, *equiprimordial fundamental modes of Being-in-the-world*. For man language and understanding are existentials in Heidegger's sense.

> …language is the universal medium in which understanding occurs. Understanding occurs in interpreting. (Gadamer 2004, 390)

> [Interpretation though] doesn't occur as an activity in the course of human life, but is the form of human life. […] [W]e are interpreting by the very energy of our life. (Gadamer and Ricœur 1982, 302)

But just like the first step Gadamer takes *along* with Heidegger this too is also a step *beyond* him. For Heidegger understanding opens Dasein's access to the world by rendering thematic the structure of sending from entity to entity constituting its worldhood. Otherwise put, understanding is that which makes possible the world of Dasein by shedding light on the involvements of the equipment Dasein deals with. For Heidegger language appears afterwards and only insomuch the significance of the world is already rendered thematic for, as he shows, the significations of language are born out of this significance. "[I]n significance itself […] is founded the Being of words and of language" (Heidegger 1962, [87]/121).

Gadamer turns against this distance Heidegger introduces between understanding and language by showing that if, as existentials, these possibilities are equiprimordial

then they must become actual at one the same time and through the same movement. So, our access to the world is not opened by a pre-lingual understanding that comes to be expressed in language afterwards, but by *understanding through language as such*.

> Not only is the world world only insofar as it comes into language, but language, too, has its real being only in the fact that the world is present in it. Thus, that language is originarily human means at the same time that man's being-in-the-world is primordially linguistic. (Gadamer 2004, 440)

> And that is because, Gadamer shows:
> To rise above the environment has from the outset a human – i.e., a verbal – significance. Animals can leave their environment and move over the whole earth without severing their environmental dependence. For man, however, rising above the environment means rising to "world" itself, to true environment. This does not mean that he leaves his habitat but that he has another posture toward it – a free, distanced orientation – that is always realized in language. (Gadamer 2004, 442)

Just like the first step taken by Gadamer along with and against Heidegger this second step too has some significant implications for ontology and the problem of not-Being-alone. First of all, *if the world has a lingual constitution then the entities within the world are given to us as sense*. With this, the condition to be fulfilled in order to avoid the dangers of ontical and ontological autism is completely satisfied. Insomuch as the entities within the world are given to us as sense, an other *than* me is not just possible and it is actually encountered as such *every time I am confronted with a foreign sense or with a different truth claim*. This is something quite common in everyday life, being precisely what brings about the task of understanding.

In the Foreword to the Second Edition of *Truth and Method*, in a passage directed against Heidegger for whom the entities within the world are first encountered pre-lingually and which looks as if it was written with *Being and Time* open on the desk Gadamer writes:

> The experience of the Thou also manifests the paradox that something standing over against me asserts its own rights and

> requires absolute recognition; and in that very process is "understood." But I believe that I have shown correctly that what is so understood is not the Thou but the truth of what the Thou says to us. I mean specifically the truth that becomes visible to me only through the Thou, and only by my letting myself be told something by it. (Gadamer 2004, xxxii)

Second of all, and related to what has been said, Gadamer's step *along* and *against* Heidegger leads us to a completely different view of Being-in-the-world. For insomuch as the world is given to us through language and insomuch as we are ceaselessly confronted by others than ourselves who impose their own claims to truth upon us, then we ought to understand that Being-in-the-world is actually *Being-in-dialogue*. Gadamer repeats it with every chance he has: "[W]e live constantly in dialogue – we could say that we are a living dialogue" (Gadamer 2006, 48).

Now we can see that through these two steps Gadamer really manages to fulfill the task of developing a philosophy of *Miteinander* and accompanies us much further than Heidegger on the path toward not-Being-alone. But if we pay close attention to the particular manner in which he describes the existentiale of understanding we will see that he still does not take us the our searched destination.

As it is well known, for Gadamer, this possibility constituting one of the fundamental ontological determinations of our Being takes the form of a "fusion of horizons:" of the horizon in which we find ourselves and which, as our own, presents itself to us as a horizon of familiarity and of the strange horizon out of which the truth claim of the other springs forth. Even though the term might suggest it, this fusion does not involve a melting of alterity into familiarity through the leveling of the differences between the two horizons, and does not lead to the dissolution of the I into the other and vice-versa. Gadamer makes it quite clear:

> When two people understand each other, this does not mean that one person "understands" the other. (Gadamer 2004, 355)

Otherwise put, the fusion of horizons does not lead from two to one. But it does not take us to two through a third (as

the fact of not-Being-alone requires) either. For even though the process of fusion involves in a first step the affirmation of alterity through its close differentiation from the horizon familiar to us this is done only so that it can be taken in our familiar horizon in a second. For Gadamer the other is to be discovered as it is in the process of understanding only so it can be absorbed within the I. This too is made quite clear:

> Openness to the other, then, involves recognizing that I myself must take in me some things that are against myself, even though no one else forces me to do so. (Gadamer 2004, 355)[8]

We arrive thus again at a two-in-one but a completely different and also a far more dangerous one than the two-in-one of solitude. For this new form of two in one appears through the ingestion of the other, by devouring it. What we are dealing here with is, actually, a sort of "ontological cannibalism."

4. Conclusion

In conclusion we can see that Heidegger and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics does not really manage to stay true to its professed vocation to go beyond "idle talk" and illuminate our existence in a concrete manner. At least as far as the question of solitude and loneliness is concerned.

As we have seen, both Heidegger and Gadamer acknowledged indirectly the challenge of solitude and loneliness and the problems they pose. Heidegger encountered loneliness in the guise of the problem of inauthentic existence bringing along the leveling of Dasein. However, in the light of how the call to authenticity is formulated, in light of the way Heidegger describes authentic existence, it became clear that it is no solution to the problem of loneliness. For if inauthentic existence confronted us with a *Dasein like all the others*, the authentic one confronts us with *an other like our own Dasein.* Thus Heidegger falls prey to a sort of "ontological autism." He presents us with a world in which the other bears no interest to us and so in which we are doomed to feel lonely.

As we have shown though, despite that Gadamer recognizes from the very beginning Heidegger's failure to

account for the concrete other and makes it one of his main tasks to correct it, he nevertheless does not go further than his master when it comes to teaching us in a concrete manner how not to be alone. In fact, he falls prey to an even greater danger than that threatening Heidegger, a gander we called "ontological cannibalism." For the understanding he institutes as ground of his philosophy of *Miteinander* present itself in the end as a "taking in" of the other to be understood by the I who understands. As a "fusion of horizon" it involves the comprising of the other in the self.

But in between and through these failed attempts to show how to actually be with another a glimpse of the solution seems to reveal itself. If Gadamer was right, if Being is Being-in-dialogue and Being-in-dialogue develops as understanding then, in order to be with an other in a concrete manner, shouldn't the other actually be misunderstood? Insomuch as understanding is an existentiale of Dasein we don't have at our disposal the possibility to not understand at all the other with whom we want to be so as to get to not-Being-alone. But the possibility of what Schleiermacher called "positive misunderstanding" (Schleiermacher 1998, 23) (*positiver Mißverstehen*) occurring as an "isolated moment" (Schleiermacher 1998, 23) only because of our "hastiness" (Schleiermacher 1998, 23) is still open, being inscribed in the existential nature of understanding as its deficient mode. Paradoxically though, of this misunderstanding hermeneutical philosophy seems to know nothing at all.

NOTES

[1] Why Heidegger treats solitude and isolation in an indistinct manner, why the difference between these two terms *cannot* become thematic in his thought will become manifest shortly.

[2] See Book 3, Ch. XIII. What solitude is and what kind of person a solitary man is of Epictetus' *Discourses* (Epictetus n.a., 255-258).

[3] It is not clear why the English translation of Gadamer's text doesn't render "Vereinsamung" through "loneliness" which is its exact equivalent, but through "isolation." The latter term itself actually has a German counterpart in "Isolierung." In order to maintain a semantic uniformity with Hannah

Arendt's terminology all passages quoted from Gadamer's text will be modified accordingly.

[4] Translation modified.

[5] As customary, the page numbers indicated between brackets refer to the eight German edition.

[6] See "The postmodern: A transparent society" in (Vattimo 1992, 1-12).

[7] As early as 1925 according to Gadamer himself (Gadamer 2006, 23).

[8] Translation modified. The German original reads: "Offenheit für den anderen schließt also die Anerkennung em, daß ich in mir etwas gegen mich gelten lassen muß, auch wenn es keinen anderen gäbe, der es gegen mich geltend machte" (Gadamer 1990, 367).

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