

Gadamer on Friendship and Solidarity: A Hermeneutical Appropriation of the Greek Notion of *φιλία*

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Although Gadamer is primarily renowned for his contribution to the hermeneutic tradition, he also consistently expressed a strong interest in practical philosophy throughout his long career. From his youth, Gadamer was convinced that practical philosophy and hermeneutics were deeply interrelated: his professorial thesis (*Habilitation*), entitled *Platos dialektische Ethik*, attempts to elucidate dialogue's ethical dimension and its relation with the characteristic finitude of human beings.¹ Gadamer's writings concerning practical philosophy are heavily focused on Greek philosophy, especially that of Plato and Aristotle. Among the various ideas he borrows from these thinkers, Gadamer devotes particular attention to two: 1) *φρόνησις* (often translated as “wisdom,” “prudence,” or “sagacity”), which is an ethical concept corresponding to practical wisdom;² and 2) *φιλία* (highly difficult to translate into a single English term), which broadly corresponds to notions of friendship or esteem. While most commentators on the ethical facets of Gadamer's philosophy focus almost exclusively on the notion of *φρόνησις*, very few studies have been specifically dedicated to the

¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Die Lektion des Jahrhunderts* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2002), 31–33.

² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 1139a–1141b. All citations of this work are guided by the following translations: Arisote, *Éthique à Nicomaque*, trans. Richard Bodéüs (Paris: Flammarion, 2004); Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2014).

notion of *φιλία*.³ This is rather astonishing considering *φιλία* is a recurrent topic—or, rather, a major through line—in Gadamer’s mature writings (from the 1960s onwards). It is therefore essential that more studies specifically address this crucial yet often neglected notion.

Before diving into our analysis of Gadamer’s appropriation of *φιλία*, we should review the main hermeneutical elements in light of which his conception of *φιλία* must be understood: namely, the notions of “genuine experience” and “proper dialogue” (or “true conversation”). According to Gadamer, a “genuine experience” (*eigentliche Erfahrung*) is always negative, an experience of nullity in which we realize that a reality is not what we believed it to be.⁴ In other words, in a “genuine experience,” the expectations of meaning (*Sinnerwartungen*) that shape our interpretation of a phenomenon turn out to be inadequate to the reality of the thing, the object of our understanding. Our fore-conceptions, which Gadamer equates to prejudices (*Vorurteile*), are then replaced by a more convincing interpretation. This new interpretation is nevertheless liable to revision and substitution if, when measured against the thing-itself, it also proves to be inadequate to reality. In light of this, it is clear why Gadamer asserts that an “experienced person” (*der Erfahrene*) is someone who is constantly open to new experiences, someone with the humility to acknowledge that her understanding of reality may be inadequate to reality itself—and who therefore is willing to allow unexpected expressions of reality to alter her interpretations of it. This means that the “experienced person” is always aware of her finitude, of the impossibility of knowing everything, and of possessing absolutely exhaustive interpretations of phenomena.⁵ According to Gadamer, human beings never cease to

³ Among the most rigorous studies on the role of *φιλία* in Gadamer’s thought, David Vessey’s are especially noteworthy: “Dialogue, Goodwill, and Community,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Hermeneutics*, ed. Niall Keane and Chris Lawn (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 312–19; “Gadamer’s Account of Friendship as an Alternative to an Account of Intersubjectivity,” *Philosophy Today* 49 Supplement, no. 7 (2005): 61–67. See also Carla Danani, *L’amicizia degli antichi: Gadamer in dialogo con Platone e Aristotele* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2003); Alexandra Makurova, “Gadamer on Friendship and Solidarity: The Increase of Being in Communal Human Life,” *Russian Sociological Review* 15, no. 4 (2016): 146–61; James Risser, “Hearing the Other: Communication as Shared Life,” *Journal of Applied Hermeneutics* (2019): 1–17; “Shared Life,” *Symposium. Gadamer’s Philosophical Legacy* 6, no. 2 (2002): 167–80; Luis Eduardo Gama, “Amitié et solidarité. La politique de Hans-Georg Gadamer,” *Archives de Philosophie* 2, no. 83 (2020): 177–94. This list is not exhaustive.

⁴ Unless explicitly stated, all citations of Gadamer’s works can be found in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke (GW)*, 10 tomes (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1985–1995). Subsequent references will use the following formula: *Title of the Book or Article, GW* volume (original publication date), pp. In this case, Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode, GW* 1 (1960), 358–60.

⁵ Jean Grondin, “Gadamer’s Basic Understanding of Understanding,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. Robert J. Dostal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 44.

learn and change, and therefore there is no such thing as a fixed human essence; if there *is* a human nature, it corresponds to our finitude, and “the only way not to succumb to [it] is to open ourselves to the other, to listen to the ‘thou’ who stands before us.”⁶

This idea—this openness to others that should save us from our characteristic finitude—is closely related to the second hermeneutic element essential to analyzing Gadamer’s understanding of *φιλία*: namely, the notion of “true dialogue” (*das wahre Gespräch*). Gadamer suggests that the purpose of true or proper dialogue is “agreement” (*Verständigung*) in the sense that, through the dialogue that unites them, interlocutors reach a certain agreement regarding the thing that needs/wants to be understood.⁷ “True dialogue” requires that each participant put himself in the other’s place, which does not mean that each must efface or forget himself,⁸ but rather necessarily entails that the interpreter introduce himself in the act of interpretation: that is, the interpreter must always mobilize his prejudices—his anticipations of meaning—whenever he wishes/needs to understand something.⁹ These prejudices (pre-judgments) that inform the interpreter’s understanding of reality constitute his horizon, “the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from [his] particular vantage point.”¹⁰ This horizon of expectations (of meaning) is perpetually mobile, for it is always challenged by things-themselves and by other interpreters’ horizons—their perspectives on the same reality. The encounter between horizons of different interpreters is exactly what takes place in “true dialogue”; it does not entail an “overhasty assimilation” of otherness to our own meaning anticipations nor our own self-effacement or self-extinction (*Selbstausslöschung*) in favor of our interlocutor’s otherness (*Andersheit*),¹¹ but rather what Gadamer calls a “fusion of horizons” (*Horizontverschmelzung*). This fusion affords each of the interlocutors a “superior breadth of vision” than they previously had,¹² allowing each to reach an elevation “to

⁶ Gadamer, *Die Lektion des Jahrhunderts*, 31–33. My citations are partially based on, if not directly extracted from, Rod Coltman and Sigrid Koepe’s translation of Hans-Georg Gadamer, *A Century of Philosophy* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

⁷ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, *GW* 1, 308. The passive voice is significant here because, in Gadamer’s conception of interpretation, the thing being understood does not play a passive role (as the modern scientific method implies); rather, the observers are captivated by the thing whose reality speaks to them. Gadamer introduces this idea in the first part of *Wahrheit und Methode*, through the analysis of the truth that emerges in the experience of art.

⁸ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, *GW* 1, 274, 308–10.

⁹ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, *GW* 1, 310.

¹⁰ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, *GW* 1, 307.

¹¹ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, *GW* 1, 310.

¹² Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, *GW* 1, 310.

a higher universality (*Erhebung zu einer höheren Allgemeinheit*) that overcomes not only [his] own particularity but also that of the other.”¹³ This elevation to generality (or, more commonly, “universality”) allies the purpose of “true dialogue” with Gadamer’s understanding of the “guiding concepts of humanism,” which similarly aspire to the elevation to generality toward which *Bildung* (formation) orients us.¹⁴ Along with “genuine experience,” this notion of “true dialogue”—and the access to a wider generality that it affords each of the participants in a conversation—is one of the keys to a proper understanding of Gadamer’s appropriation of *φιλία*.

Let us now move on to the true object of this article: the Greek notion of *φιλία*, generally translated as esteem, friendship, or solidarity—although none of these terms adequately encompasses the complex meaning of *φιλία*. Among modern scholars, Spanish philosopher Emilio Lledó provides a thorough historical examination of the term: *φιλία* originally denoted the link uniting family members, often associated to consanguinity, but quickly acquired the sense of a correspondence between persons who, in spite of lacking a consanguineous relation, were nonetheless united by “affective ‘reasons’ making up for the innate tendencies that sustain and protect the familial clan.”¹⁵ Lledó consequently asserts that *φιλία* emerges from “the necessity of filling deficiencies, of overcoming each individual’s solitude in the company of a fellow being.”¹⁶ This relation is not motivated by a will to possess the other; on the contrary, it is defined by a generosity in which “the subject-object relation is broken. . . in order to give rise to a new perspective, where the object of the friend objectifies us as well, and, in doing so, makes us recognize ourselves as objects in the reflection that the target of our affection is to us, [in the mirror that the other represents]. Thus, the subject surrenders to the object and, in his acquiescence, his own individuality is enhanced by the otherness to which the he has surrendered.”¹⁷ This image of the mirror of friendship has an Aristotelian origin and, as we will see, plays an important role in Gadamer’s practical philosophy. Cognizant of the semantic and historical richness of the term “*φιλία*,” Gadamer deliberately avoids reducing its significance to

¹³ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, *GW* 1, 310. Although most commentators tend to privilege the term “universality” as a translation of “*Allgemeinheit*,” I prefer the term “generality,” or even “community,” which makes it possible to underscore the difference between the usage of “*Allgemeinheit*” and “*Universalität*” in Gadamer’s writings.

¹⁴ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, *GW* 1, 15–47. See also Jean Grondin, *Sources of Hermeneutics* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1995), 118–22.

¹⁵ Emilio Lledó, *El surco del tiempo* (Madrid: Austral, 2015), 166. All the included passages from this work are my own translations.

¹⁶ Lledó, *El surco del tiempo*, 166.

¹⁷ Lledó, *El surco del tiempo*, 169.

a single modern notion and instead claims that it manifests in two fundamental dimensions of human life: friendship (*Freundschaft*) and solidarity (*Solidarität*).

Gadamer's interest in *φιλία* is particularly visible in his middle and later writings, especially those after *Truth and Method*. However, Gadamer's inaugural lecture at the University of Marburg in 1928, entitled “*Die Rolle der Freundschaft in der griechischen Ethik*” (*The Role of Friendship in Greek Ethics*), attests to the fact that the younger Gadamer already acknowledged the significance of *φιλία* in Greek thought. In 1985, fifty-seven years after the aforementioned lecture, Gadamer published a revised version titled “*Freundschaft und Selbsterkenntnis: Zur Rolle der Freundschaft in der griechischen Ethik*” (*Friendship and Self-Knowledge: The Role of Friendship in Greek Ethics*).¹⁸ In this text, Gadamer explicitly states being interested not in the typologies of friendship proposed by Plato and Aristotle, but rather in the notion of “complete” or “accomplished” friendship (*die vollkommene Freundschaft*) as conceived by Aristotle.¹⁹ The other types of friendship that Aristotle identifies, friendship based on pleasure (*Annehmlichkeit*) and friendship based on utility or profit (*Nützlichkeit*), are incomplete versions of “true friendship,” and relate to it only in analogical terms.²⁰ Gadamer's analysis of the accomplished kind of friendship, the only “true” kind, identifies three necessary conditions for its existence: 1) reciprocity between friends, 2) each friend's self-esteem, and 3) their life together.²¹

1) Reciprocity (*Gegenseitigkeit*) in friendship involves the goodwill of each of the participants: they must concern themselves with each other's wellbeing (*Einander-Gutsein*). This benevolence must be overtly expressed and recognized by both participants because it is precisely such an openness that distinguishes friendship from plain friendliness.²² Gadamer's idea of an overt reciprocity among true friends corresponds exactly to what Aristotle names *ἀντιφίλησις* (reciprocated goodwill).²³ According to Gadamer, the reciprocity of overt benevolence consists in

¹⁸ Gadamer, “Freundschaft und Selbsterkenntnis. Zur Rolle der Freundschaft in der griechischen Ethik,” *GW* 7 (1985), 396–406. All the included passages from this work are my own translations, although an English translation of this text already exists: Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Friendship and Self-Knowledge: Reflections on the Role of Friendship in Greek Ethics,” in *Hermeneutics, Ethics, and Religion*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 128–41.

¹⁹ Gadamer, “Freundschaft und Selbsterkenntnis,” *GW* 7, 400.

²⁰ Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, VII, 1235b–1238b. All citations of this work are guided by the following translations: Arisote, *Éthique à Eudème*, trans. Vianney Décarie (Paris: J. Vrin, 1987); Aristotle, *The Eudemian Ethics*, trans. Peter L. P. Simpson (London: Routledge, 2013).

²¹ Gadamer, “Freundschaft und Selbsterkenntnis,” *GW* 7, 400–402.

²² Gadamer, “Freundschaft und Selbsterkenntnis,” *GW* 7, 401.

²³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII, 1155b26–1156a4.

“acknowledging that I must integrate inside me something that opposes me”²⁴; “it requires that one not try to argue the other person down but that one really consider the actual weight of the other’s opinion.”²⁵ In brief, friendship’s reciprocal openness entails a willingness to recognize that one could be wrong while the other person could be right.²⁶ This is exactly what Gadamer means when he exhorts us to acknowledge the “truth claim” in the words of others—their *Anspruch an Wahrheit*.²⁷

2) The second necessary condition of friendship identified by Gadamer is each participant’s self-esteem, their *φιλαυτία*. Both Plato and Aristotle suggest that *φιλαυτία*, self-esteem, often translated as “self-love,” is vital to friendship with others. For the Greeks, a *φιλαυτός* is a person who is in perfect harmony with himself, possessing perfect coherence among the different parts of his soul²⁸: all the parts of the *φιλαυτός*’ soul are oriented toward his own good, which consists of a desire to “live and be preserved” as well as to “remain himself” (rather than become someone else). The *φιλαυτός*, states Aristotle, “wishes to have everything provided that he remains what he is.”²⁹ This idea seems quite obscure at first sight, but it may be elucidated through an analysis of Aristotle’s conception of the “good life” toward which the *φιλαυτός* orients his actions, a life referred to as *εὐδαιμονία*.³⁰ According to Aristotle, the happiness or fulfillment of a human being is only possible insofar as she is self-sufficient or *autarkic*³¹: “self-sufficiency means having a supply of everything and lacking nothing.”³² However, Aristotle repeatedly insists in his three works on ethics that “the self-sufficient man still has one need: friendship.”³³ This assertion illuminates the central

²⁴ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, *GW* 1, 367.

²⁵ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, *GW* 1, 373.

²⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Die Vielfalt Europas—Erbe und Zukunft,” in *Das Erbe Europas* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1990), 30. All citations of this work are guided by the following translations: Hans-Georg Gadamer, “La diversité de l’Europe—Héritage et avenir,” in *L’héritage de l’Europe*, trans. Philippe Ivernel (Paris: Éditions Payot et Rivages, 2003), 137–56; Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Diversity of Europe,” in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History*, trans. Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 221–36.

²⁷ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, *GW* 1, 367.

²⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IX, 1166a13.

²⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IX, 1166a22.

³⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IX, 1908a13–18.

³¹ Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, VII, 1244b7.

³² Aristotle, *Politics*, VII, 1326b29–30. My citations of this work are guided by the following translations: Arisote, *Politiques*, trans. Pierre Pellegrin (Paris: Flammarion, 2015); Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackman (London: William Heinemann, 1959).

³³ Aristotle, *Magna Moralia*, XV, 1212b33–34; *Eudemian Ethics*, VII, 1244b20; *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII, 1155a 4–6. All citations of *Magna Moralia* are guided by the following translations: Arisote, *La grande morale*, trans. Catherine Dalimer (Paris: Arléa, 1992); Aristotle, *Magna Moralia*, trans. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915).

importance of *φιλία* in each of Aristotle’s three ethical works.³⁴ Gadamer too ascribes friendship a fundamental role in human life, and adheres to Aristotle’s justification for this: a person who has esteem for herself, and therefore actively seeks fulfillment (wishes to live a *eudemonic* life), must be cognizant of the fact that she cannot live a fulfilling life without the company of genuine friends. According to both Aristotle and Gadamer, human beings must actively want to know themselves as well as possible, so as to become the best version of themselves—or, in Greek terms, to attain their *ἀρετή*, which Gadamer translates as “*Bestheit*” (literally “bestness” or, in proper English, “excellence”)—in order to be happy. Aristotle believes all human beings must be aware of the limited access that they have to their own being:

Since then it is both a most difficult thing, as some of the sages have said, to attain a knowledge of oneself, and also a most pleasant (for to know oneself is pleasant)—now we are not able to see what we are from ourselves (and that we cannot do so is plain from the way in which we blame others without being aware that we do the same things ourselves; and this is the effect of favour or passion, and there are many of us who are blinded by these things so that we judge not aright); as then when we wish to see our own face, we do so by looking into the mirror, in the same way when we wish to know ourselves we can obtain that knowledge by looking at our friend. For the friend is, as we assert, a second I. If, then, it is pleasant to know oneself, and it is not possible to know this without having someone else for a friend, the self-sufficing man will require friendship in order to know himself.³⁵

Gadamer appreciates and utilizes this Aristotelian image of the mirror of the other: it is echoed in the Gadamerian notion that whoever has esteem for herself must recognize her own finitude and the fact that “the only way not to succumb to [it] is to open [herself] to the other, to listen to the ‘thou’ who stands before [her].”³⁶ For Gadamer as well as Aristotle, *it is easier to understand a friend than it is to understand ourselves*³⁷—as evidenced by the fact that we often scold others for actions that we unknowingly perform ourselves.³⁸ In this context, however, it must be noted that what

³⁴ Aristotle devotes considerable portions of his ethical writings to the topic of *φιλία* (*Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII and IX; *Eudemian Ethics*, VII; and *Magna Moralia*, II, 11–17), which Gadamer explicitly acknowledges in “Wertethik un praktische Philosophie,” *GW* 4 (1982), 203–15: “Dem Problem der Freundschaft ist ein gutes Viertel der aristotelischen Ethik gewidmet. . .”

³⁵ Aristotle, *Magna Moralia*, XV, 1213a13–27.

³⁶ Gadamer, *Die Lektion des Jahrhunderts*, 33.

³⁷ Gadamer, “Freundschaft und Selbsterkenntnis,” *GW* 7, 402–403.

³⁸ The same idea is expressed in Luke 6:41 and Matthew 7:3: “Why do you see the speck in your

distinguishes our friends from any other person whose activities we condemn is the avowed benevolence we hold towards the former, which is reciprocated by them. In essence, Gadamer, following Aristotle, maintains that our true friends help us to become aware of our most hidden determining qualities, the prejudices that, were it not for our true friends, we would be incapable of recognizing on our own.³⁹ In that sense, we seek to establish “true friendships” because we know we are finite beings; and, according to Gadamer, the awareness of our own limitations that our friends allow us to acquire consequently provides us with “an increase of being, self-feeling, and richness of life” (*ein Zuwachs an Sein, Selbstgefühl und Lebensreichtum*).⁴⁰ It is along his path to the other that a human being becomes increasingly self-aware, and is thereby capable of approaching the best version of himself (his *ἀρετή*, his *Bestheit*).

3) All this leads us to the third precondition for a “true friendship”: life together (*das Zusammenleben*). Following ideas articulated in Plato’s *Lysis*,⁴¹ Gadamer maintains that “true friendship” emerges from the sentiment of *οἰκεῖον*: the character of what is familiar, “house-like/domestic” or “home-like/native.”⁴² This means that “true friendship” is characterised by that *je ne sais quoi* that makes us feel at home (*das Zuhause, das, wovon man nicht sagen kann, was es ist*),⁴³ and, to Gadamer, this secret ingredient of the accomplished kind of friendship cannot emerge except within *das Zusammenleben* (literally, “the living-together”). In order to adequately understand what Gadamer means by *das Zusammenleben*, it is useful to momentarily adopt a Spanish-language worldview. In Spanish, *das Zusammenleben*—the act of living together—is expressed by the notion of *convivencia*, a term composed by the words *con* (with, *mit*) and *vivencia* (lived experience, *Erfahrung*). The union of these two terms, *con* and *vivencia*, hence signifies something like a “co-lived-experience” in English. And retranslating the Spanish expression of *convivencia* back into German illustrates more precisely what Gadamer expresses with *das Zusammenleben*: rather than a shared life under the same roof, *das Zusammenleben* corresponds to *la con-vivencia*, “the co-experience of life” or, in German, *die Zusammen-Lebenserfahrung* or *die Miterfahrung-des-Lebens*.

neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?”

³⁹ Gadamer, “Freundschaft und Selbsterkenntnis,” *GW* 7, 403.

⁴⁰ Gadamer, “Freundschaft und Selbsterkenntnis,” *GW* 7, 403.

⁴¹ Plato, *Lysis*, 222b.

⁴² David Vessey’s periphrastic translation of the *οἰκεῖον* as that which is home-like/domestic/native is as close to the Greek meaning as translations get. Jean Grondin translates the *οἰκεῖον* as that which is “domestic or familiar.” See Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Friendship and Solidarity,” trans. David Vessey, *Research in Phenomenology* 39, no. 1 (2009): 3–12; Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Amitié et Solidarité,” in *Esquisses herménéutiques*, trans. Jean Grondin (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2004), 79–89.

⁴³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Freundschaft und Solidarität,” in *Hermeneutische Entwürfe* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 60.

This “life-together” with our friends refers to the frequent interactions that allow us to perceive our friends’ habits, interests, vulnerabilities, etc., of which they are not completely aware. This life-together does not require our friends’ beliefs, interests, and overall tendencies to completely coincide with ours: rather, life-together is realized through a deep mutual understanding between us and our friends, in which we “allow one another our difference in such a way that we are almost lead to say. . . ‘So must you be, for so I love you.’”⁴⁴ The sensation of familiarity (the *οἰκείον*) that predominates in a “true friendship” permits more honest engagement with one’s own self; in our “true” friend’s presence, “we feel at home, and are liberated from the disguises we wear in other social spheres. Before our friend, we can appear as we truly are.”⁴⁵

The necessity of preserving the particularities of each of the friends, as well as the reciprocal familiarity and openness that unite them, attest to the fact that a “true friendship” is one that facilitates the existence of “true dialogues.” The first part of this article defined “true dialogues” as those that give rise to genuine hermeneutical experiences: in “true dialogues,” which result in an agreement between the interlocutors, things are able to speak for themselves without fear that the rigid judgments of observers/speakers will ossify them. Just like true dialogue, “true friendship” does not allow one interlocutor to impose herself onto the other, for this would lead to the destruction of the true, egalitarian friendship—in which all participants acknowledge and respect each other’s alterity. Although friends must always respect one another in their difference, this does not imply they should efface themselves in favor of their friend’s otherness.⁴⁶ Respecting our friend in her difference involves accepting that she might be right while we could be mistaken: we must always uphold the truth claim in her words. And it is through this characteristic openness, this humility, of true friendship that our friend’s gaze gently reveals to us those aspects of our being that we would otherwise not perceive. Thus, Gadamer (inspired by Aristotle) demonstrates that *φιλία*, as it manifests in the sphere of friendship, is an essential element of the accomplished human life, *εὐδαιμονία*. Friendship makes it possible for us to know ourselves better than we would if we were individually self-sufficient; human beings are able to attain their *Bestheit*, the best version of themselves, on the condition that they have at least one true friend.

Having analyzed the role of *φιλία* understood as friendship, we may now examine the second crucial manifestation of *φιλία* in human life: *φιλία* as solidarity.

⁴⁴ Gadamer, “Freundschaft und Solidarität,” 62.

⁴⁵ Luis Eduardo Gama, “Amitié et solidarité. La politique de Hans-Georg Gadamer,” *Archives de Philosophie* 2, no. 83 (2020): 183.

⁴⁶ Gadamer, “Die Vielfalt Europas—Erbe und Zukunft,” 30.

Inspired by Giambattista Vico's and Lord Shaftesbury's conceptions of *sensus communis*,⁴⁷ Gadamer suggests that "everyone has enough 'common sense' (*gemeinen Sinn*)—i.e., judgment—that we may demand that they show a 'sense of the community' (*Gemeinsinn*), a genuine civic and moral solidarity, that is, judgment of right and wrong, and concern for the 'common good.'"⁴⁸ According to Gadamer, all human beings possess enough common sense to evaluate their own actions in light of what is good for their community and to orient their behavior toward the collective good.⁴⁹ But despite this optimistic understanding of common sense, Gadamer laments that modern societies are facing a critical lack of solidarity among their individual members.⁵⁰ Though he acknowledges that all states—the modern state as much as the ancient city-state—"are based on the same unchanging fundamental presupposition," which he calls "the presupposition of solidarity,"⁵¹ modern societies seem to lack that essential feature of all communities. The reason for this, he suggests, is twofold: on one hand, in our extremely bureaucratized and specialized modern societies, the "natural/authentic solidarity" (*die echte Solidarität*) upon which all communities are founded is concealed by an inauthentic kind of solidarity that he calls "avowed solidarity" (*erklärte Solidarität*)⁵²; on the other hand modern societies suffer from a dangerous misunderstanding of the role of experts, which has led to a generalized lack of decisional accountability from the individual toward her community.⁵³

Let us begin by examining the problem of "avowed solidarities" concealing "natural/authentic solidarities." According to Gadamer, natural or "authentic

⁴⁷ Giambattista Vico, *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione*, trad. Andrea Suggi (Firenze: Edizioni ETS, 2010); Lord Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (London: J. Purser, 1737–1738).

⁴⁸ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, *GW* 1, 37.

⁴⁹ This resonates significantly with John Dewey's understanding of common sense, the collectively shared habits that form the basis of any community. See John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, in *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899–1924*, vol. 14 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1922), 45–47.

⁵⁰ Gadamer, "Freundschaft und Solidarität," 63–64.

⁵¹ Gadamer, "Bürger zweier Welten," in *Das Erbe Europas* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1990), 123. My citations of this work are guided by the following translations: Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Citoyens de deux mondes," in *L'héritage de l'Europe*, trans. Philippe Ivernel (Paris: Éditions Payot et Rivages, 2003), 109–26; Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Citizens of Two Worlds," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History*, trans. Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 209–20.

⁵² Gadamer, "Bürger zweier Welten," 64.

⁵³ Gadamer, "Die Grenzen des Experten," in *Das Erbe Europas* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1990), 148–49. All citations of this work are guided by the following translations: Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Les limites de l'expert," in *L'héritage de l'Europe*, trans. Philippe Ivernel (Paris: Éditions Payot et Rivages, 2003), 137–56; Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Limitations of the Expert," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History*, trans. Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 181–92.

solidarity” is characterized by an element as mysterious and defining as the *ἀρετή* of true friendship. Natural solidarities can be neither deliberately created nor forcefully imposed upon the masses: they do not depend on the declared preferences or interests of the public. Rather, an authentically solidary sentiment emerges when, in spite of “the differences in the interests and the life situations [that] may tempt us to go our own way and to set back the wellbeing of the Other,” a deep “solid and reliable inseparability” motivates us to orient our action toward the common good.⁵⁴ Gadamer illustrates this natural development of solidarity by referencing how, in extreme situations like bombings, “our neighbours, those who remain strangers in normal urban circumstances, [are] suddenly awoken to life,” and gain a new significance to us. This, Gadamer says, “is how distress works, and particularly distress that concerns us all, contributing to the emergence of unimagined possibilities of solidary feeling and solidary action.”⁵⁵ That such naturally developed solidarities perpetually unite us—regardless of whether or not we perceive or acknowledge them—is evidenced by the present global situation. The current pandemic has precipitated new and unforeseen manifestations of natural solidarity among individuals despite the increased physical distance among us and despite the fact that, at certain moments, we have had to remain literally isolated from one another.⁵⁶ Though it is the pandemic that has made these expressions of “natural solidarity” more visible, individual human beings consistently show a clear concern for the wellbeing of their communities. However, the “authentic solidarities” that underlie all communities are often obscured by “avowed solidarities”—citizenship, political partisanship, racialization, gender, socioeconomic categorizations, etc.—because the latter are more explicitly and deliberately articulated. While the mechanisms of “authentic solidarities” often go unspoken—are presumed rather than clearly stated—, “avowed solidarities” are reified by verbal declarations (of categorization, identity, and even loyalty) and overt recognition. These declared or

⁵⁴ Gadamer, “Freundschaft und Solidarität,” 63.

⁵⁵ Gadamer, “Freundschaft und Solidarität,” 63.

⁵⁶ Although electronic exchanges often seem deficient compared to in-person communication, countless strong virtual communities have been created since the beginning of the pandemic, making us all more aware of the various elements that naturally unite us with human beings from all over the world. Similarly, despite sporadic manifestations of selfishness, strong expressions of natural solidarity can be perceived in the generalized use of masks, increased activism, generous blood donations, etc. See, for example: Marina Sitrin and Colectiva Sembrar, eds., *Pandemic Solidarity: Mutual Aid during the Covid-19 Crisis* (London: Pluto Press, 2020); Margaret Weir, “The Pandemic and the Production of Solidarity,” *Items: Insights from the Social Sciences*, 28 May 2020, <https://items.ssrc.org/covid-19-and-the-social-sciences/democracy-and-pandemics/the-pandemic-and-the-production-of-solidarity/>; “Solidarity in the Time of COVID-19: Civil Society Responses to the Pandemic,” CIVICUS, 5 November 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/solidarity-time-covid-19-civil-society-responses-pandemic>.

avowed solidarities tend to overemphasize differences among human beings; consequently, Gadamer says, in putting “too much emphasis upon the different and disputed, upon that which is contested or in doubt[,] what we truly have in common and what unites us remains, so to speak, without a voice.”⁵⁷ Gadamer traces this problem back to a “long training in the perception of differences,” which instills in the individual an ability to identify what makes others different from him rather than encouraging him to recognize elements shared by all human beings—those common traits that unite him with the rest of humanity.⁵⁸

The second major issue that Gadamer identifies at the root of the lack of genuine solidarity in modern societies is the misunderstanding of the role that experts play in civilization. Gadamer laments that modern societies are plagued by a generalized belief that experts should have the last word in all decision-making. Modernity’s characteristic idealization of science overestimates the role of experts in decision-making: by idealizing experts, individual human beings refuse to acknowledge that all human action ultimately depends on individual decisions that cannot be foisted onto others, regardless of whether they are experts or ordinary people.⁵⁹ Gadamer explains that “the more an institutionalized form of competence is constructed, which proffers the expert, the specialist, as an escape from our own not knowing, the more one covers up the limitations of such information and the necessity of one’s own decisions.”⁶⁰ In criticizing the overestimation of the role of experts, Gadamer does not deny the importance of experts in our societies; rather, he explicitly asserts that “it is a duty for human beings to incorporate as much knowledge as is possible in any of their decisions,” which means that each human being must seriously consider the information made available by experts in order to make enlightened individual decisions.⁶¹ Therefore, the problem is not that there *are* experts; the problem is that individuals believe they are allowed to relinquish their obligation to make collective decisions by pretending that these decisions always ultimately depend on the knowledge of specialists. For this reason, while Gadamer encourages people to attentively consider the specialized knowledge that experts can provide them, and to mobilize this knowledge when making their decisions, he ultimately insists that decision-making—whether personal or collective—unavoidably depends on individual choices: *praxis*, human action, requires that “everyone share in the

⁵⁷ Gadamer, “Freundschaft und Solidarität,” 156–57.

⁵⁸ Gadamer, “Freundschaft und Solidarität,” 156–57.

⁵⁹ Gadamer, “Freundschaft und Solidarität,” 122.

⁶⁰ Gadamer, “Freundschaft und Solidarität,” 149.

⁶¹ Gadamer, “Freundschaft und Solidarität,” 150.

responsibility for his society, for his nation and ultimately for humanity.”⁶² This resonates with the idea that Gadamer borrows from Vico and Shaftesbury: namely, that we can and must demand that every human being constantly display solidarity in her behavior by orienting her actions toward the collective good. In other words, despite the extreme specialization and bureaucratization of our modern societies, the individual human being must constantly remind herself that “the knowledge of another will never discharge [her from her decision-making]. That exactly defines the concept of responsibility and, in a certain sense, also the concept of [moral] conscience.”⁶³

Gadamer does propose preliminary solutions to these problems underlying the lack of solidarity in our societies; he expresses being “convinced that even in a highly bureaucratized, thoroughly organized and thoroughly specialized society, it is possible to strengthen existing [natural] solidarities.”⁶⁴ In order to do this, he proposes an ethics of *φιλία*—an ethics of *con-vivencia* through which, in our constant interactions with others (our *Zusammenleben*), we become increasingly aware of the elements that unite us despite our overemphasized differences. An ethics of *φιλία* should help us identify the “avowed solidarities” that constantly conceal our more fundamental “authentic solidarities” and make the latter easier to perceive and cultivate. On the one hand, Gadamer’s ethics exhorts politicians to “not always present us with the drama of their conflicts with one another and of their expected success in the next elections, but rather to present those common elements which unite us in being responsible for our own future and the future of our children and that of our children’s children.”⁶⁵ On the other hand, Gadamer’s ethics also encourages individuals to listen carefully to the “ancient sonorities of a lived and practiced community, which reverberate in the family, the home, the market, the life of the village and the city, the commune, the church and the native land.”⁶⁶ In other words, Gadamer motivates us to “con-vivir,” to share our lives as much as possible, to co-experience the world by occupying and sharing public spaces, and, thus, to appreciate the subtle elements that unite us to one another and to all in our common finite human destination.⁶⁷ However, it is important

⁶² Gadamer, “Die Vielfalt Europas—Erbe und Zukunft,” 26.

⁶³ Gadamer, “Die Grenzen des Experten,” 151.

⁶⁴ Gadamer, “Die Grenzen des Experten,” 156.

⁶⁵ Gadamer, “Die Grenzen des Experten,” 157.

⁶⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Die Anthropologischen Grundlagen der Freiheit des Menschen,” in *Das Erbe Europas* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1990), 134. Here, again, and in what follows, the similarities between Gadamer and Dewey are remarkable. See John Dewey, *Ethics*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925–1953*, vol. 7 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1932), 348–49.

⁶⁷ Gadamer, “Die Anthropologischen Grundlagen der Freiheit des Menschen,” 135.

that—as in “authentic dialogue” and “true friendship”—we do not resort to self-effacement in favor of otherness in our collective life together. Gadamer’s ethics does not involve “abandoning and extinguishing the self for the sake of universal acceptance, but rather mobilizing one’s own being for the understanding and recognition of the other,” and affirms that the “authentic task of the human future, which has truly gained global significance, lies in the area of human coexistence [*convivencia*] on this planet.”⁶⁸ More specifically, Gadamer suggests that “the best and highest objective that we could strive for and accomplish is to participate with the other and to be a part of the other. . . [experiencing] the other and the others, as the others of our self, in order that each of us participate with and in one another.”⁶⁹ In such a solidary coexistence with the rest of humanity, each individual is able to incorporate and practice one of Aristotle’s greatest lessons: that the common good toward which *paideia*/*Bildung* orients us is not only to the benefit of our communities, but also—as the welfare of our community has direct positive implications for our own wellbeing—to our individual benefit.⁷⁰ The common good is also, ultimately, the individual good. And the essence of this Aristotelian lesson corresponds precisely to the *Erhebung zu einer höheren Allgemeinheit* (the elevation to a higher generality) that Gadamer’s “true dialogue,” “accomplished friendship,” and “authentic solidarity” aspire to and make possible.

⁶⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Die Zukunft der Europäischen Geisteswissenschaften,” in *Das Erbe Europas* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1990), 60. My citations of this work are guided by the following translation: Hans-Georg Gadamer, “L’avenir Récès ‘sciences de l’esprit’ européennes,” in *L’héritage de l’Europe*, trans. Philippe Ivernel (Paris: Éditions Payot et Rivages, 2003), 43–68.

⁶⁹ Gadamer, “Die Vielfalt Europas—Erbe und Zukunft,” 34.

⁷⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, VII, 1324a5–35.